

Discover Your Attributes & Get More Out of Yourself – Rich Diviney – #937

Dave Asprey:

You're listening to The Human Upgrade with Dave Asprey. Today, we're going to talk about human performance. And I made a commitment to you this year that I was going to tell you ahead of time why you want to listen to an episode so you can decide that this episode is definitely worth your time. And well, I wouldn't put it out there if I didn't think it met the bar but this is going to be really cool because our expert just wrote a book on things that make you perform better, 25 Hidden Drivers of Performance. And we're going to talk about why developing your attributes, your innate traits might be more important than skills for getting more out of yourself. In other words, it's not about being good at something, it's about changing your innate abilities, your innate traits in order to do it.

You're going to learn about how these attributes can change how you absorb or you process, or you respond to the world around you. You might have heard me talking more about your lens on reality, or your filter on reality and how its programmed by things that you don't know programmed it usually earlier in life as your brain was evolving, but also as a grown human. You get these things that are invisible to you, but they filter out parts of reality. And we're going to talk about that and we're going to talk about mindset, optimism and stress resilience. This is the first time in recorded history, which isn't that long, because it's about a survey.

When you ask people what they want from health, the No. 1 answer for decades has been I want to lose weight. For the first time ever, thank you government response to viruses is that people are no more worried about stress and anxiety than they are about weight loss. And just by a couple of percentage points, but this is a pretty big thing. So, you want to be resilient so when stress comes like, yeah, I got this. That's what you're going to learn and we're going to get some examples of the 25 attributes that are in five different categories. You're going to learn a lot in this show. Our guest is Rich Diviney and he's someone who's really learned how to do this. He teaches people like the US Navy SEALs, how to choose the right people to be an elite performance.

And he was in charge of training for a specialized command as part of the seal selection process. So, this is a guy who knows how to sort out high performers, and then how to build them. And he's looking at attributes, not skills. It doesn't matter if you can shoot accurately because you can teach that skill. But if you don't have the attribute to do it, that's the issue. Rich, welcome to The Human Upgrade.

Rich Diviney:

Thank you, Dave. It's a real pleasure and honor to be here. So, thanks for having me.

Dave:

You're not just a part of the selection committee, 20 years of service, by the way thank you for your service. 13 overseas deployments and most of those Afghanistan, Iraq. So, you know about life and death stress resilience. How does that translate to the non-military life?

Rich:

Much more easily than one might imagine because as we know well what causes us to be afraid and to be stressed is contextual to the individual. Those physiological responses that are the results of that stress and fear are identical in every human. And so, the example which might seem funny to hear is that I could be I or one of my buddies could be in combat in a gunfight in Afghanistan and literally feel less stressed or have less of a physiological response going on in our systems than, say, the 10-year-old at a spelling bee.

So, any types of the reasons why this becomes important and why it's applicable is because those things that we can do inside of stress to deal with it, to deal with our stress, deal with our fear can be cross contexts. The same things that Navy SEALs use or do whether consciously or unconsciously are the same things that a 10-year-old can do at a spelling bee or the same things that someone can do in a workplace or in traffic. And so that's why it becomes very human, not just SEAL.

Dave:

Do you know what the No. 1 fear of Americans is?

Rich:

I don't.

Dave:

It's public speaking.

Rich:

Ah yes, that's right.

Dave:

That's the thing that makes most people lose their mind which is, which is pretty, pretty interesting. I'm guessing you're familiar with Lieutenant Colonel Grossman's work, the book on combat On Killing?

Rich:

I am, yes.

Dave:

He's been on the show as well. And it's really interesting what happens also Mark Divine, when you take the extreme of fear, which is there are people shooting at me, and you'll learn how to be resilient at that and to be able to operate. He talks about dropping into your training because you're not going to be able to think when you're truly in operations mode. And I know the first time I gave a big talk to 1,500 people, I was maybe 25, 24, I have no idea what I said because I was pretty much terrified the whole time. But they laughed and apparently, it was a good talk. This is a roomful of the early, the first generation of what we called webmasters back then.

And so, at the end of it, I have no idea what I said because I was pretty much terrified the whole time, I realized I needed to learn how to do that. My path there was, I'll just become a teacher. So, after five years of teaching most nights to a roomful of 30 or 50 people and I'm completely resilient so I did stress conditioning. When you're dealing in a military context, how do you stress condition? Or do you do some other training so that people don't lose their minds in the situation like that?

Rich:

Yeah, it's a really interesting angle. Because really, there is stress conditioning like you said, the key to be able to do stress conditioning or even fear inoculation is to do repetitive activity inside of that one context. So, if you want to get better, if you want to get over your fear of jumping out of airplanes because you have a fear of heights, which I did. All I had to do was jump out of an airplane 50 or 60 times and suddenly I'm feeling a little bit better about it, right? So, that inoculation is really is really

helpful. The problem with it is that it requires a repetitive activity inside the same context. And as we all know, fear, stress, anxiety, uncertainty imply unpredictability, right?

I always used to nickname I called the SEALs when I was in it and when I was training them and all that stuff, I said, "Hey, Navy SEALs aren't in fact the mythological shooters and skydivers and scuba divers that we see on TV and movies, what we actually in fact are our masters of uncertainty." We are able to drop into what are called VUCA environments, volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, it's a military term. Drop into a VUCA environments and perform and I think the way we do that is less about mastering certain things and more about understanding how to operate. Manage our stress responses, and operate our mental game so that we may make decisions in those environments and decide what to do.

And really, that decision has to come after we figure out the environment. So, that the first job is okay, let me figure out what's going on and now let me decide to do something. And that's really what we start training ourselves to do. But it all starts with basic SEAL training because basic SEAL training, again nicknamed BUDS, basic underwater demolition/SEAL training. Nine months long on Coronado, California, some of the toughest training in the world. It's all about getting thrown into misery, unpredictability, uncertainty. So, you realize that what's going on at an unconscious level is you're hyper developing this ability and that only gets more intense and applicable in things like combat.

Dave:

It's really cool to use that as, well they call it the crucible but you use it for learning. What piques my interest in your work and we'll get to your new book called The Attributes in a minute here, I want to know and I'm going to teach people what those attributes are. But you created the first ever Mind Gym for special operators and you were tying together things like emotional, mental and physical all together. What made you decide that was an important thing to do for special operators?

Rich:

Yeah, because I recognized, I was one of the, it was a few of us at the time that recognized that we were pretty good physically. There's only so much weight you can bench, there's only so fast you can run the three mile or swim or whatever. And so, getting better at the physical aspect wasn't necessarily going to get us better at the uncertainty aspect. And so, what we recognized was that training our minds to operate better was in fact the key. And so, we didn't know much about what we were doing, we started researching stuff and throwing some stuff against the wall we brought in float tanks. First stab at it was can we help folks just be more resilient and understand the relationship between their conscious mental processes and their physiology.

In other words, we all know now you can through breathing techniques and through even visual techniques, you can actually shift your physiology from sympathetic into parasympathetic. You can start to get into more of a recovery mode, you can start to bring yourself off of or bring yourself down off of an autonomic response. And that's really the key because in stress, uncertainty and fear, to be able to act decisively and appropriately takes conscious logical thought. And what happens when we get that amygdala kick in and we start to approach amygdala overload is our conscious mind begins to go offline.

So, our experimentation was let's start teaching guys to manage that better. And in fact, because guys at that level we're pretty good at it already. Can we actually, in fact, get guys into a recovery mode? And do what I called micro recovery, recover in between gunfights, can we do that? And you can do that, you can do that physiologically. And so, we were just really throwing a bunch of techniques HRV breathing, float tanks, what else were we using? We were using mental acuity, games and things like that, and just trying to see what worked. And I don't know, we didn't do it long enough to

see all right, in teams, in any military environment, you're in charge of something for a short period then you get moved on.

So, whether or not what you started, whether or not that that goes on is up to the next guy in charge. And I'm not sure where they took it, I think they ended up angling a little bit more towards the physical stuff but it was fun for us and certainly a cool project.

Dave:

So are you the guy who brought box breathing out, it's a military technique, I've used it on stage and with audiences and all but it's definitely military derived. That's one of the techniques, five seconds in, hold for five, breathe out for five kind of thing. Was that you?

Rich:

It was not me, I think it was, from what I understand it was someone who has almost the same name. It's our mutual friend, Mark Divine. And Mark and I-

Dave:

Mark actually was the box breath guy in the military. Okay, so yeah-

Rich:

That's how I understand it. I mean, I first heard of box breathing from Mark. Mark and I it's funny, because our pathways didn't necessarily converge. He was getting out of the Navy as I was getting in mid '90s. Yet, I always heard his name because like, "Hey, are you related to Divine because my name is literally spelt with one letter off of his.

Dave:

It sounds different, because Diviney is different than Divine. And when I interviewed him, I always tease him that he's the only Navy SEAL with a porn star name that I've met.

Rich:

That's right, yeah. Well, he and I, we got to meet finally, I got to do his podcast, we're now connected which is fun and he's done great work. But as I understand it, he was he was certainly the first guy I heard talk about box breathing. What's interesting about the SEAL teams is that everybody assumes that you go to the SEAL teams, and they teach you all this fancy stuff. You don't learn any of that stuff. I mean, you might, I should amend that, maybe nowadays you're learning it the trainees are learning it. When I went through again, in the mid-90s, it was just throw you in the in the soup and see if he could swim and a lot of our capability and capacity to do these things came about on an unconscious level.

So, that allowed me later on years later, when I was doing the Mind Gym work, and of course, writing the book, to sit back and say, "Okay wait a second, what were we actually doing? How can we actually articulate this in a way that makes sense, because once we do, we can actually start explaining it to people and help it.

Dave:

I really liked that and what I wanted to ask you though, is something that a lot of operators won't really talk about unless they're either really drunk or in a safe space. You talk about physical, mental, emotional but I didn't see the word spiritual in there. When you do these breathing techniques, a lot of

people on the battlefield do have spiritual experiences they can't explain but they don't oftentimes talk about them. Did you ever get into that with your guys?

Rich:

It's a great question. We quite deliberately we're careful on how we tread it because when you start talking about spiritual, again it's subjective to the individual what is spiritual for them. And what you don't want to do is turn one person off by promoting one thing and you're almost letting people figure out their own spiritual journey. Because again, we know and you know this because you've talked about it. A spiritual experiencing come from yes, religion or church, it could also come from surfing, it could come from reading it can come from doing art. It could come in some guys, some of these just phenomenal warriors, sometimes they had spiritual experiences in combat, who knows?

And so, we were careful about that and we, instead of saying spiritual, we're really like, "Okay, what are those things that that lift you up?" And in some cases, those things that you can get into flow states doing, I think that's where you start to approach that spiritual experiences. When you start, you're able to enter into those flow states more frequently, whatever that is for you. So, we were careful how we treaded on the spiritual part and let guys try to figure it out.

Dave:

So, after you had a lot of experience in operations, you figured out what's it going to take for us to filter out what makes a good SEAL? And that's what came up with your book, *The Attributes*, and by the way, thank you for your kind words on my signed copy. My shelf is full of only signed copies so you're going to be on my shelf. And what are the five things that you look for to see if someone can perform at the highest level?

Rich:

So, it's a bigger question. So, let me just start at the beginning here. When I was running this very specialized assessment selection training, what I found was and this of course, for the course that I was running we would take some of the best Navy SEALs from across the country. Bring them to our own course and put them through our nine-month selection course and get about a 50% attrition, which is okay, every assessment selection, attrition is implied. But what was not okay at least when I came to be in charge of it, we had not yet been able to articulate why guys were making it, why guys weren't. And we were coming up with excuses that were pretty lame.

A guy couldn't shoot very well, a guy couldn't skydive, whatever those things were. And these guys again, they were the they were some of the best and to tell someone, well you couldn't do very well, didn't make sense, didn't make sense to them, it didn't make sense to us, it didn't make sense to the leadership. And so, I set about saying, "Okay, what are we actually looking for an act," and I had to actually think back to my basic SEAL training again, BUDS six months long.

In BUDS, you spent hundreds of hours running around with big heavy boats on your head. You spent hundreds of hours exercising with 300-pound telephone poles, and running around those things on your shoulders and freezing in the surf zone. And I thought back and I said, you know, at the time, I had conducted hundreds of combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. I had done thousands of training evolutions, never on any one of those that I carry a 300-pound telephone pole or a boat on my head. So, the what they were doing to us in that time during SEAL training, wasn't in effect training us in the skills to be Navy SEALs, they were doing something different.

They were looking for these qualities, looking for these attributes that we're displaying. Did we have what it took to become Navy SEALs. And so, I began to say, "Okay, there's a difference between

skills and attributes." And came up with this idea that, "Hey, these are different things." When we talk about performance we conflate them. And a lot of times we get seduced by skills, and we don't think about attributes. And the reason is very simple, skills are not inherent to our nature, we're not born with the ability to ride a bike or throw a ball.

They direct our behavior, they tell us when to throw a ball or when to ride a bike, and how. And then they're very visible, which means they're very easy to assess, measure and test and you can put scores around them and stats around them. You can see how well anybody does on any one of these things. This is why we get seduced by them when we're building teams and we're hiring people. You can see it on a resume and you could see it on numbers.

What they don't tell us is how we're going to show up in stress challenge and uncertainty, because an unknown environment, it's very difficult if not impossible to apply a known skill, right? This is when we lean on attributes. Attributes are inherent to our nature, we're all born with levels of adaptability and situational awareness and resilience. Now, you can see, you can definitely develop them over time and experience but you can see levels of this stuff in small children, right? So, there's a nature and nurture element. Attributes don't dictate our behavior or director behavior, they inform our behavior.

So, for example, my son's levels of resilience and perseverance, informed the way he showed up when he was learning the skill of riding a bike, and he was falling off a dozen times doing so. And then because they're hidden, they're hard to see, which means they're hard to measure and assess. You can't sit across the table, in an interview process for example and assess someone's levels of adaptability and resilience, okay? They're the most visible when we're in challenge, uncertainty and stress, which made the environment I had available to me perfect for a laboratory. Because everything about SEAL training, whether it's basic or the stuff I was running, it was about throwing guys into challenge, uncertainty and stress.

So, we went about saying, "Okay, what are those attributes we're looking for?" We did it for the SEAL teams, fast forward to five years later, I retired from the SEAL teams, I'm out and about. I started getting questions from businesses and organizations, "Hey, we're putting together these high performing teams," but a lot of times what's happening is when we put them together, everything goes great for a little while but as soon as something happens that throws the team into uncertainty. As soon as things aren't predicted, the team starts to turn toxic. And I would tell them the same answer, I said, "That's happening because you're picking your team based on the wrong things. You're picking them based on skills, and attributes."

So, in the book I talk about this idea of optimal performance and what are those attributes that actually help us perform optimally.

Dave:

But you're saying that we're born with attributes. And in the book, you talk about how they're informing your behavior, but not telling you exactly what to do. That's kind of what you'll default and I actually use a test with all of my employees. And that helps like, what kind of decision maker are you? And these are also attribute kind of tests. And the thing is, there's no positive or negative there, it's just okay like do you want more information or less information to make a decision. Different roles that's more or less useful and if you know that that's an attribute and you're in a role that requires something else, then you can go on to learn behaviors.

You're saying in the book though, that you can actually modify your attributes. And I find that really interesting. So, let's say that I'm not a highly resilient personality at birth, for whatever reason. How would I go about changing my attributes?

Rich:

Yeah, you could definitely develop attributes, you just can't do it the same way as a skill. So, just a quick for the audience a quick back of the envelope test to determine whether or not it's a skill or an attribute. And it's simply to ask this question, can I teach it or can it be taught? If the answer is yes, it's probably a skill, okay? If the answer is no, it's probably an attribute. So, the example would be Dave, you say, "Hey Rich, I want to go learn how to shoot a pistol and hit a bull's eye every time." I can take you out to a range and teach you how to do that within a couple hours, that is a skill.

Or you say, "Hey, Rich, I want to learn how to be more adaptable or more resilient." I can't teach you that, so developing an attribute takes three things, it takes self-motivation, you have to want to do it. Self-direction, you have to set out to do it and then it takes a willingness for that individual to deliberately find environments inside of which they could test and tease that attributes. And they will be uncomfortable, okay, so you have to find uncomfortable environments inside of which you can test and tease and develop that attribute. So, patience is a great example because you could say, "Well, if I want to become more patient, I need to go find environments that test and tease my patients," whatever that looks like for you.

I say, I mean it could be a deliberately driving traffic, I'm going to go stand in longest line at the grocery store and say having kids that'll develop your patience, right? Resilience is the same way, if I want to develop my resilience, you must then go find environments that test and tease. In other words, knock you off your baseline so that you can practice getting back to baseline. That's the only way to do it but if you do that, you can start to develop attributes and get higher on some of those ones you're a little bit lower on. And just a quick caveat, all of us have all of the attributes, the levels that the only difference in us are the levels to which we have each.

So, for example, we take adaptability and 10 is high and one is low, I have probably on level eight on adaptability, which means when the environment changes around me outside of my control, it's fairly easy for me to go with the flow and roll with it, okay, I'm more adaptable. Someone else might be a level three, which means the same things happens to them it's difficult for them to go with the flow. They're still adaptable, because human beings are, but it's just difficult there's more friction there. And so, it's really about understanding first where we stand on these attributes, where all of our dimmer switch's line up. And then asking ourselves, "Okay, based on my scores," because again, there's no judgment there. And it's not about having a lot of all of them, that's impossible. And it's also not contextual, right?

It's about understanding where I think I need to improve each attribute I might want to improve. Because again, having too much of one attribute may in fact, be detrimental to what you want to do. Okay, so I always joke, like the standup comic doesn't need a lot of empathy, because too much empathy might interrupt that standup comic's ability to find the funny at a funeral. So, too much of something may interrupt what you actually want to do. So, it's really about what do I have and where in terms of the context of the niche inside of which I want to succeed or excel? What are those one or two things I want to develop?

Dave:

I believe that resilience is a teachable skill, not necessarily an attribute, but the way we teach it is so different than the way we would teach a pistol learning skill. The way that that I teach it is with neurofeedback. You put electrodes on someone's brain and you show the brain the skill of organizing in a more resilient way. Where essentially different parts of the brain fire in different ways. So, it feels like it's teachable, or at least it's trainable versus teachable. And I guess you're saying the difference

between teaching and training there is you can train someone to be more resilient through these kinds of exposures.

Rich:

I think it has to do with it has to do with whether or not the individual being taught is a willing participant or unwilling participant. The example would be this, someone who uses the computer over and over again is eventually going to learn how to type whether they like it or not, that's a skill right? But if you set about to teach someone resilience, if they don't want to be more resilient, if there's not a self-motivation to do it, self-direction, it's not going to happen. Someone who doesn't want to be more patient, it's not going to happen. So, there has to be a choice for someone to develop. And I agree with you, I think especially with what we're discovering, the leaps we're making in neuroscience and neurofeedback.

Everything we're seeing about the brain, we can break some of this down and say, "Hey, this is what's happening this, this and this." And so, once you do that, you can start saying, "Okay, I can actually help you train and develop your resilience or whatever attribute is by showing you some steps that you can take to do that." And so, you can break it down into that, I think.

Dave:

That's really cool, I've never thought about this before. But that difference between teaching and training, where there's something going on there. And I know resilience is one of the biggest things that I hear from people who do the 40 years is in my like five day intensive neurofeedback program. Where stuff that would have taken you out, were just taking you completely off your game. It just doesn't feel like it's big anymore. And I'm guessing after you go through carrying a 300-pound telephone pole around for a while, like, well if I can handle that and some cold water, the fact that someone cut me off in traffic just isn't a big deal.

Rich:

Right, well and I think so it's definitely contextual. I believe, just like you do that resilience is a muscle that can be trained. And I think the more you do it, one of the things I talked about in the book and I talked about resilience as an attribute is I tell the story of one of my commanding officers who used to tell us what his grandfather told him. He called it the two-minute rule and the two minute rule went like, when anything bad happens or something that you're upset about, go ahead and take two minutes and kick the dirt, feel sorry for yourself wallow. But after 120 seconds, deliberately go back to baseline and start getting on with it.

And then same thing with any good habits is resilience goes both ways. If you're unable to come down off of the high stuff as well, you may get complacent and you may get thrown off track. So, anything good happens, take two minutes and celebrate, rest on your laurels, pat yourself on the back and then after 120 seconds, get back to baseline. So, what that allows someone to do is basically practice resilience but with a little tragedy. Because again, there's trauma, there's things that happened to us that take a lot more than two minutes to get over. But you can use this for just the little stuff, the spat at work, the traffic you got stuck in, the spilled milk. Use the two-minute rule to practice some resilience and you start to exercise the muscle so that when you get to the bigger stuff, you understand the steps that you need to take.

And then of course there's context, right? Yes, if you go through some heavy, heavy trauma whatever that looks like it could be SEAL training, it could be disease, it could be a divorce, or a layoff. Your ability to get through that is going to inform your optic and perception on everything else that

happens. And if you're able to in a moment say, I mean, come on this is nothing compared to, that helps you be resilient. And I think that a lot of military members find that I know my wife and I do. I mean, we are so appreciative of each other, we've been married for over 20 years now. We're so appreciative of each other because we had to leave each other so often. And so, you experience these outliers in terms of emotions and experiences. And it helps you really appreciate and look at things as not a big deal.

Dave:

So, it's kind of your lens, some that would have felt big isn't big anymore, because you've been through the training. Well, there's five attributes from the book, can you just list the five that you're looking for? I think that'd be useful and we'll talk about those.

Rich:

Yeah, it's actually five categories of attributes, there's 25 attributes total five categories. And these categories actually came up while I was writing, I hadn't planned on them but just as I wrote, they seem to bend nicely into these categories, which was nice. The first category is grit because a lot of people think of grit as its own attribute. But grit in fact, is not a singular thing. Grit is a combination of things blended and stewed together to create the result that is grit. The four attributes that make up grit are courage, adaptability, perseverance, and resilience. And we can talk about those as we go. And again, the way I've described grit would be your ability to push through and persevere and get through those short-term challenges and endeavors, the short term grind it out type stuff.

Then there's mental acuity, mental acuity attributes are the way our brain processes the world. So, how do we take in information, our situational awareness. How do we take that information and prioritize it and focus on what needs to focus on, compartmentalization. How do we switch between focus points, which again, is task switching and we know multitasking is a myth, we don't multitask. We can't really pay attention to more than one thing at a time. Which is funny because people say, "Well, Rich I'm listening to this podcast and driving," but it doesn't count if we've relegated that other activity to our unconscious mind. We can do that because we don't have to think about driving.

As soon as someone swerves in front of us and we have to take evasive action, we will have to rewind that last 15 seconds of the podcast because our brain will have task switched. And then learnability, how faster and how able are we to metabolize things coming into our system and use them again. Third category is drive so, if grit would speak to the short-term endeavors, drive speaks to the long term. What makes up, what are the attributes that make up the driven person, those long-term endeavors and goals. Those are self-efficacy, open mindedness, discipline. And then cunning, which is a little bit pejorative and then narcissism, which is very pejorative but we could talk about that if we want to.

And then the fourth category is leadership. What are the attributes that make up a great leader? And again, the thing about leadership that we have to understand is leadership and being a leader is different than being in charge. One is a noun, and one is a verb and while you can self-designate being in charge, you can't self-designate as a leader. You can't call yourself a leader, that's like calling yourself good looking or funny. Other people decide whether or not you are someone they want to follow. And they do so based on behaviors that stem from these attributes. Those attributes are empathy, selflessness, authenticity, decisiveness and accountability. Those behaviors tend to create or allow for people to say that as someone I want to follow. That as someone I look at as a leader, versus just being in charge.

And of course, team ability, the word team ability I don't know where it came from, I stole it from the teams. But it means the ability to operate and work on a team with other people. Again, you

don't get to call yourself a great teammate, other people will decide whether or not you're a great teammate based on your behaviors, based on these attributes. Those attributes are integrity, conscientiousness, humility, and humor.

And then I talked about in the book, some others that don't really necessarily bend into those categories, which you can get into. But those are competitiveness and non-competitiveness, patience and impatience and then of course, fear of rejection versus I don't care what other people think. So, that's what I talk about in the book, there's more attributes than just 25 of course, but those are the ones I outlined for optimal performance.

Dave:

One of the reasons I write books is it forces me to structure my knowledge for myself. And of course, when you write the books, oh the process of writing it illuminates a lot of things and it makes the book more readable, more teachable. But then it also informs how you do things. So, you have these five things, now if you were to say, on a scale of one to 10, 10 is high and one is low. Where would you rate yourself with all the training you've been through on those five? Give yourself a one to 10 score.

Rich:

Oh, gosh, well I'd have to go per attribute and-

Dave:

You can go per category, you can sum them all up.

Rich:

Okay, let's see. I won't dodge the question.

Dave:

It was nice try through.

Rich:

I will say I'm pretty high on the grit attributes. I think pretty much anybody who makes it through SEAL stuff is, so maybe eight or nine. I'd say definitely high on the mental acuity attributes and I would say that's really a very distinguishing factor between Navy SEALs, especially at the highest levels of the Navy SEAL teams. Things like hostage rescue and things you have to be very high on mental acuity, all four of those. The drive attributes I'm pretty good at because I've been able to achieve some goals. I would say you get into that, I think things like narcissism there has to be a balance there. There's a healthy way to metabolize narcissism, a healthy way to metabolize cunning.

On the leadership attributes and the team ability attributes, interestingly enough, I can't decide. I can't tell you, it'd be wrong for me to tell you, "Oh, I'm a great leader, I'm high on all those." It's really about those other those other guys and people I've served with and whether or not they think I'm a great leader. And I will tell you, there are a lot of people who come back to me and said, "Hey, Rich, I loved serving with you and I loved serving under your command, I loved serving with you as a teammate." I'm sure there's a bunch of other people are like, "Yeah, I didn't like that guy at all." So, it's up to them really. So, I think when it comes to those attributes it's really about endeavoring to behave in those ways so that you may hopefully be designated or decided upon as a as a leader or a great teammate.

Dave:

So a great leader won't actually say they're a great leader.

Rich:

If someone tells you I'm a great leader, or if someone says I am your leader, run the other direction because they're probably a narcissist.

Dave:

I love it, in fact I'm thinking about writing a book about narcissism, given some of the stuff I've experienced over the last couple years in business. Wow, it's amazing how toxic that is just in society, in organizations and it only takes a couple of narcissists to just break a break an effective team.

Rich:

Oh, it's toxic and so it probably behooves us to just get into narcissism because people are like, "Well, why the heck is it an attribute?" And the reason why is because when I started thinking about the drive attributes and what makes up the driven person, I actually had to do some. Well, it's funny you'd probably agree with this, part of writing a book is also a lot of soul searching and self-reflection, which I had to do for myself. And one of the things I asked myself and I ended up asking a bunch of other of my team guy friends, why the heck did I become a Navy SEAL in the first place? Okay, and the answer is usually one main thing, and if people think it's because I'm a patriot that's wrong. It's true I am a patriot but most of us because we wanted to be badasses, right?

You're between 18 and 22 years old, you want to try something that very few people can do. You want to be a badass James Bond type guy. That's a hint of narcissism and then when you look at narcissism as a definition, not the disorder, because that's bad. Narcissism as definition means a desire to stand out, be recognized, be adored. Now, I dug into this and there's neurobiology that's associated with this. When we're infants getting paid attention to and adored, we're getting juiced with some neurobiology, we're getting dopamine feels good. We're getting serotonin, we're getting oxytocin, all three chemicals feel good chemicals, bonding and binding chemicals. It doesn't change when we we're adults. Okay, when we're being adored and recognized, we're getting those same chemicals, it feels good.

Every single human being at some point in their lives wants to be adored, and recognized and stand out a little bit. So, narcissism properly metabolized is often the impetus to some very audacious goals. Why else would someone want to be a Navy SEAL? Why else would someone want to be a top podcaster or a top business person or a top surgeon or an actor or a singer? There's a little bit of narcissism in there, and it's okay. The key to narcissism is to not be disordered. And again, the DSM five will tell you what a narcissistic personality disorder looks like, that's bad.

The key to metabolizing it in a healthy way is to look at the people you surround yourself with. Alright, because true like malignant narcissists will surround themselves with yes men and sycophants. And those people who only put them on a pedestal, only tell them what they want to hear. Oftentimes, those groups are transitory. So, in other words if someone, because it's hard to be a sycophant for too long, someone removes themselves from that group, that narcissist then that narcissism makes that person public enemy number one, that becomes public enemy number one.

Those people who can metabolize it in healthy ways have surrounded themselves with people who they trust, they love. They tell them the things that they need to hear. They tell them the hard truths. They don't put them on the pedestal all the time. They are just one of the group and you can see

it, you can see even if you take Hollywood, which people would argue is one of the most narcissistic communities out there. The healthiest Hollywood actors or actresses or those people in that community are the ones who talk about how their families are their grounding, their grandmas when they're with their families they're no one special. Everything's about they're just regular, they don't surround themselves with sycophants.

So, all of this to say metabolize narcissism in a healthy way to set those audacious goals to make it that driver, that accelerant. But surround yourself with trusted people so that you keep it in check.

Dave:

So, they help you to keep your ego in check. It's interesting Scott Barry Kaufman came on the show, who's a psychiatrist or psychologist. And we talked about narcissism quite a bit, and it becomes malignant or toxic when it comes with the I deserve because I'm great. Versus I earned it because I want to be great. So, the healthy narcissism I'm going to say that desire to be great versus I'm a SEAL therefore I deserve. Versus I'm a SEAL therefore I earn every day kind of thing.

Rich:

Yeah. Oh, I love that and my wife and I say that all the time. We hate that term I deserve, can't stand it.

Dave:

Entitlement, deserving none of that, that's not real.

Rich:

No, no it's not. And so, I always say I always try to be grateful and a little dissatisfied. That's where I try to be, because that keeps me rolling. That keeps me reaching for that next handhold and foothold to climb a little higher.

Dave:

I love that man, grateful and a little dissatisfied. So, we're in the drive attributes here and we talked about narcissism here. You also talk about open mindedness, but you pair it with discipline, which is an odd pairing for this category. So, talk to me about open mindedness and why that's an important attribute.

Rich:

Well, in the drive category, we're talking about the ability to set and pursue and achieve long term goals. To do that is going to take an ability to understand that these types of goals, that the outside world has a say in whether or not you achieve them or not. They really do and so open mindedness is required because the closed mind is the mind that says I'm done, I got nothing else to learn. So, open mindedness is really this assumption and this philosophy, this mentality that I always have something to learn and I'm open to suggestion. I'm open to new ideas, I'm open to things that come at me. Discipline a little bit different, discipline I actually separate discipline in the book between discipline and then self-discipline, because they're actually two different things.

The discipline in the drive categories the discipline in terms of again, those long-term goals that the outside world has a say in whether or not you accomplish. Self-discipline speaks to those goals that the outside world doesn't really have a say in whether or not you accomplish. So, the example would be I want to eat healthy and I want to work out and I want to get in shape. I could decide that right now

and the outside world really doesn't have a say in whether or not I accomplish that, because I could decide that and I can find myself in Vegas at a buffet. The buffet is not going to throw pastries at me, it's up to me whether or not I do that. So, the outside world does not have a say, that's where self-discipline comes in really handy.

Discipline, on the other hand, are those goals that the outside world does have a say. I want to be a Navy SEAL, I want to be a podcaster, I want to be a surgeon. The world has a say in whether or not you accomplish that. In other words, the world is going to throw things at you that you must navigate and move around and accomplish and conquer to achieve the goal. So, that separation is interesting to me, because I really again, in self-reflecting I'd say, "Okay, there are people who I know, who are highly, highly self-disciplined, but they actually haven't accomplished anything in their lives," so, they're low on discipline.

There are other people who are highly, highly disciplined, they've accomplished a ton, but they don't have a lot of self-discipline. And then there's the sweet spot which is both. And so, discipline overall needs to be looked at that way. What is your capacity to set, pursue and achieve long-term goals that the external world has a say in whether or not you do?

Dave:

What about cunning? That's typically perceived as a negative thing, but you have a different take on it in your book.

Rich:

Yeah, I went through a little debate mentally as to whether or not to put cunning or creativity. And what I realized, when it comes to drive and achieving long-term goals is that one, when we talk about cutting and creativity, one is passive and one is a little bit more proactive. And one has to do with solving problems and one doesn't. So, creativity is I think of new ideas. I just have a mind that thinks of new ideas. Cunning has to have a problem involved, there's some sort of problem that you're trying to solve when it comes to cutting. And so, cunning is almost a proactive form of creativity but it also involves looking outside the perceived boundaries and restriction.

So, that what the cunning mind does is the cunning mind looks at a problem and ask a couple of questions and said, okay, what are the boundaries and restrictions that are around this problem? Okay, are they perceived, or are they real? Because that's going to separate them. And if they are real, what happens if I break them? That's what the cunning mind does and so, the cunning mind is typically, it's almost in a very cliché way, it's thinking outside the box that's what the cunning mind does. And so, I would say, one of the most I guess predominant qualities in Navy SEALs is cunning, because that's what special operations was designed to do.

Special operations, originally were designed to think about ways to agitate, frustrate, defeat the enemy that other people haven't thought about. How do we go around the problem? How do we do things in a way that no one thought about? And that cunning is required.

Dave:

It's the creative problem solving versus oh I'm going to paint. Painting is awesome but it isn't necessarily-

Rich:

I would add to that, it's the creative problem solving that in some cases, issues the rules, right?

Dave:

Absolutely, so you're doing it in a way that you didn't think about. I love that you use the word cunning. I think that that's the right word, rather than creativity because creativity is such a soft word and this isn't a soft side of creativity. This is the hard side of creativity.

Rich:

It is and in the book, I actually used the example and say it's a fantasy example, but I talk about okay, imagine the King has a princess, the princess is in a tower somewhere and the tower is guarded by a dragon. And the king wants to save the princess so he sends knight after knight to go save this princess to slay the dragon save the princess. And every time he sends one, the knight gets incinerated by the dragon. Well, suddenly, the Navy SEAL, the special operator shows up and the king says, "Hey, I want you to go save the princess," the special operator say, "Okay, what's the mission here?" It says save the princess. Well, who gives a crap about the dragon right?

Then the spec operator is going to start to think about a way to get to the princess by bypassing the dragon altogether. Because slay the dragon save the princess is not the mission, the mission is to save the princess. And so, the cunning mind starts to organize ways to go around the dragon all together because the dragon has no bearing on the overall objective. And so, this is why cunning is so important and I think especially important in the driven person.

Dave:

It's funny, going back to Iraq, one of Saddam Hussein's biggest vaults, his troops had tried to loot it. And they'd shot artillery shells at the doors and just really threw everything they had, they couldn't get in. Had they taken half the artillery power and shot at the wall instead of the door they could have got right in. It's that whole idea of just thinking outside what you're supposed to do, like the door have to go through the door. And so, but this is an attribute and can you teach cunning, is it trainable? How would you make someone more cunning?

Rich:

Yeah, well I think you can develop it, sure. I think we can develop anything but the fact that it does imply some creativity. It does imply some looking outside the rules. I don't know if you can teach it, just like you I do think that once you dissect it, there are probably elements of cunning that you could help make visible to someone who wanted to improve their cunning. The way I would say anybody who wants to practice or think about cunning, just when you are approached by or approach a problem, the first question you should ask is, "Okay, what are the rules and conditions and boundaries around this problem? And are they real or are they perceived?"

And then if they're perceived then I don't have to worry about them, if they're real what happens if I break them? What are some other ways we can think about this? I think those are some of the first steps in developing cunning. I just think some minds, they just think that way a lot more automatically than other mind. So, if you're on a team and you need more cunning, that's where you start to build teams effectively. If you don't find you're very high on cunning, find someone who's high on cunning for your team so that you have someone you can lean on.

Well, and I'll add to that, sometimes, the cunning mind, the naturally cunning mind will almost always be looking for ways around. Whereas, sometimes the right solution is to go right up the line, so having a team with both is important. Because sometimes it's like, "Hey, no, no, we don't need to overthink this. Just go straight up the middle what we find."

Dave:

Let's kill the dragon and be done with it.

Rich:

We have the weapon, just kill the dragon to be done with it. Yup.

Dave:

Right. Yeah, so sometimes the pursuit of the elegant cunning approach is counterproductive and I'm guilty of that sometimes. All right, I want to switch gears a bit and talk about mental acuity. And I've spent a lot of my life developing that, working on that, I have a company dedicated to that. What are the sub attributes, the five sub attributes for mental acuity? You mentioned them earlier, or at least some of them, but talk to me about what those five are?

Rich:

Yeah, there are four of them and they're out of all the categories they're the one category that are these four are completely intertwined. And in some cases, they're in order. And the reason is a process, it's a mental process. So, it starts with situational awareness, our levels of situational awareness, which means how much are we noticing about our environment. You could also call it vigilance but we know that some people are just higher naturally on situational awareness, they just have more vigilance. And some people are the people who just walk around New York City and they're in La La Land right? There's nothing wrong with it, it's just how you how you show up.

Obviously, in my profession, vigilance is something that we are naturally pretty good at and in some cases, when we go to war, we become hyper vigilant, which actually can be unhealthy to a degree. So again, the other note on this, too much or too little of any of these attributes can be detrimental. You won't actually find the sweet spot. So, that situational awareness, how much information are you letting in from all your five senses and noticing? Again, I'm the guy who walks around New York City and I noticed the dark alleyways, I noticed people's hands and I noticed cars coming, I noticed a ton of stuff.

Once you do that you enter into compartmentalization and compartmentalization is the ability to take the information that's coming in and basically assess the relevance. What about this information is important to me? In the context of what I'm trying to do in this moment. Prioritize that list, out of that, what's the most important and then focus in on what you're going to focus on? That's compartmentalization and in that focusing haze out, I won't say fully block out but haze out everything else that's a distraction.

Compartmentalization is the single most, if I were to pick one is the single most important attribute for someone to become a Navy SEAL. Because almost everything about what you do, you have to focus, you have to block out everything that doesn't matter and focus in on what does. And this is what BUDS training does, it's so miserable, that all you can do is focus on the now and focus on what you want to focus on. And you shift those horizons as you go through it, but I just remember freezing in the surf zone, for example. And that's when most people quit, you're freezing the surf zone.

I remember, man this is miserable but you know what, soon I'll be doing so many push-ups that I'm really hot, and that's where I focus on. And then I'd be doing so many push-ups, I'm really I was like, well, soon I'll be in the in the surf zone freezing. So we talk about always just making it to the next meal or making it to whatever, the next evolution. That's compartmentalization at its finest and it's very, very applicable in combat environment as well. But holistically as humans that's what our brain does, our brain is compartmentalizing, what am I going to focus on, block out everything else.

Maintaining a soft awareness, because this is where a situational awareness gets intertwined. So that if what you're focusing on suddenly it shifts in priority, it goes down in priority, you can enter into the, you can focus on the new priority. That's how this is done masterfully, and you can task switch those focus points. So, this is where task switching comes in. How effectively and efficiently can I shift between contexts and categories? And again, we know our brains, we basically catalog everything in our brains. As we see something we say, "Okay, this is a cup. It looks like it has a handle, it looks like a coffee mug, it's a coffee mug."

We do this all the time, we create categories and contexts inside of which is that a different environments. So, an example would be the context is driving, the category is driving my car. And then and then when I park my car, I'm going into a different context, which is walking to the parking lot. And then I'm going to a different context when I enter into the Target store or whatever it is. Our brain switches between this stuff and it's doing that constantly. There are people who are very, very good at task switching. These are these are what we would typically call multitaskers. I talked about the book, there's like a 2% of people are what they call hyper, super or hyper taskers.

And they seem to, based on study, when their study they seem to be able to handle a bunch of different tasks at the same time and actually get better while doing so. But in fact, what they're realizing is they're not actually multitasking, they're just task switching very, very rapidly and very efficiently. Other people are actually bad at task switching. In other words, when they're in focus on something and they get shifted from focus, it's hard for them to-

Dave:

It's a speed and efficiency of task switching. And if you're really good at that, it doesn't cost you anything. But for most of us, there's some degree of I had to reset something and it took a lot of energy or time to do it. I get that, so the Navy SEALs are good at task switching. Situational awareness is really interesting, when I was doing that rapid immersion into the world of spies. I talked to the operators and they had this hyper awareness of everything around them. And so, for about three or four months, I said, "I'm going to see if I can do that." And what I found was it took huge amounts of energy and the return wasn't very high, because frankly there's no one really hunting me right now.

So, I think it improved things and because I was hyper vigilant, probably because of PTSD. I had a real problem with it even before that, where I didn't know this but I was so hyper vigilant, I had a tunnel vision and I learned to just ignore my peripheral vision entirely because it wasn't that relevant. So, I went through really difficult vision training, just exhausting for the brain for about three months to increase my peripheral awareness. So, I'm taking in way more info than I did, but it was about changing the bandwidth of my brain. But I think these are trainable but the training to do that is it's odd and it's counterintuitive, but-

Rich:

Like you said it, it can be dangerous. A lot of, I wouldn't say all but a lot of the seeds of PTSD of soldiers coming home with PTSD is due to hyper vigilance. In other words, I remember when you're overseas, everything about your environment is a threat. So, you're hyper vigilant all the time, and you're just wired that way for three months, four months, six months, whatever it is. Then you come home, and you're still wired that way, which means now you're walking around, you're looking at vehicles. You're looking underneath vehicles, you're looking at door handles, you're looking at hands, because that's where people have weapons. And you're realizing, actually there's nothing there, there's no threat.

But that hyper vigilance is super exhausting. It takes a lot of mental energy and it can be detrimental. This is PTSD, parts of PTSD is because people can't turn that off, they can't just relax in the

moment. I have to sometimes, well I had to, especially when I was in New York after coming back from overseas. I had to say, "Okay, I just have to accept that the person five feet walking behind me is not a threat. I don't have to constantly understand or be aware as to what they are. I can let certain things go but you're right it's exhausting and it's not applicable fortunately for us, in the first world environment we're in. You start going into some of the more dangerous parts of the planet, you're going to want to up your vigilance.

Dave:

I definitely experienced that when I was traveling in remote parts of Asia, where I know that there's people who will gladly steal all my stuff. But I'm pretty fortunate and you are too just because criminals can usually smell someone who knows how to take care of themselves. In my case, I'm really big so-

Rich:

Well yeah, and also, I'll add into that because of your situational awareness and your vigilance, you see things and notice things three steps before they happen. So, you can see, you're saying, "Okay, wait a second, that up there doesn't look right so I'm actually going to cross the street." So, you actually you're almost in some cases, unconsciously avoiding what would have happened anyway, because you're seeing things through step. The people who are just in La La Land, they just walk into surprises all the time, because they're just not anticipating steps through their vigilance.

Dave:

And that's something that I work on teaching my kids. We live in a forest on a farm, and oh, is the Ram going to headbutt you, that actually isn't a very useful city skill. So, whenever we go to a city, I like pay attention to where you're walking, all this stuff just so that they know what environmental inputs are actually important.

Rich:

Yeah, because the Dodge Ram will hit you.

Dave:

Well said, very well said. Now, probably my favorite attribute in the whole book that you talk about, is learnability, which is part of the mental acuity awareness. Talk to me about learnability, what is that?

Rich:

Yeah, learnability is the ability to process and metabolize all this stuff in a way that you can then learn and integrate it into your operating system. Now, the best way to describe that is those who are high on learnability, especially really high on learnability are those people who tend to see something or be shown something once, and they got it. Versus someone who's lower on learnability and admittedly, I will admit that I'm out of all those mental acuity ones, I'm lower on learnability. And what that meant for me was I was the guy whereas there were some guys when I was going through training, who you do a day of training and they're like okay they go drinking right afterwards. And I'd have to stay back and I'd have to look at my materials, I'd have to walk through the scenarios, I have to visualize because I made the same mistakes a couple of times before I picked it up.

It took a little bit more for me to metabolize that stuff. So, people who are high on learnability tend to metabolize lessons and learn stuff faster. And if you're a little bit lower, that's okay too just know it's going to be a little bit more work to do so.

Dave:

So, let's say that someone wants to increase some group of those attributes under mental acuity, what would you do? I want more mental acuity, what's step one?

Rich:

Step one, well you have to take each attribute and say, okay situate, I want to be more vigilant in situational awareness. You now have to consciously make a choice to notice more things, like you made that choice. And you have to start to understand, okay can I practice noticing things. Now, first thing you have to do is turn off all those distractions that are taking away your focus. I.e., the cell phone, because that is 1,000 different contexts and categories that are vying for your attention. And we all know even if it's on vibrate and you feel the vibration in your pocket or whatever, your brain is still switching. So, eliminate those distractions that are going to pull you away and then just start noticing stuff, that's situational awareness.

Compartmentalization is to start to consciously say, "Okay, in the context of what I'm trying to do, what are those things that I'm noticing that are relevant to my situation? And then how would I prioritize those things?" I give an example in the book about running through the airport trying to find your gates. And you're just saying, "Okay, out of everything I'm seeing out here. I'm seeing a Chilis, I'm seeing a bathroom, I'm seeing a coffee shop, I'm seeing the gate signs. I'm seeing the monitors. What about all that stuff are relevant to what I'm trying to do?" I say, "Well, the coffee shop, the Chilis and the bathroom are not relevant, it's more the monitors and the gate signs. Out of those, what's my priority?"

Well, if I'm running for my gate or I need to focus on the gate signs, that's my priority. That conscious process is something that can be thought through and I think practice. So, you can start practicing and compartmentalization and you can start saying, "Okay, now once I'm focused in on that, I'm going to maintain focus, I'm not going to let myself be distracted. I maintain focus until either it's complete or something shifts in that's higher priority." So, for example, I'm running for gate 13A, and I've decided to focus on finding 13A, I maintain a little bit of situational awareness and I hear that my flights has shifted to gates 11B. Suddenly, my priorities have changed, 13A is not my priority 11B is now my priority. So that's how you practice that.

Task switching, I don't know if I can, if I can give too many recommendations, other than to say that most of us tasks switch too much already. And we do it inadvertently and again, I'm going to hound on the cell phones, even though they provide a lot of cool stuff in our lives, we have now given ourselves thousands of distractions, that is shifting our attention. And those are very energy expended, they're high energy shifts. Task switching is a high energy activity. And this is exactly why by the way, when we all were quarantined for the first time, people were in their homes they felt exhausted even after. It was like, I didn't do anything today, but I feel exhausted. And the reason is, because prior to being quarantined, we had a bunch of different categories inside of which we just automatically switched.

At work I was working, at the gym, I was gyming, at home I was with my family or cooking or doing whatever suddenly everything's at home. So, I remember just writing the book. I was like, one moment I'm writing the book, the next moment, I'm helping my son with Algebra. The next moment, I'm making lunch, the next moment I'm walking the dog. Constantly shifting or task switching and then suddenly you're exhausted, it feels like you didn't do anything but you did, your brain was constantly shifting. So, I would say in terms of task switching, just be more aware of how often your brain is shifting

and switching when it actually shouldn't be. It doesn't have to be and you can start getting a sense of that. And I think learnability we talked about.

Dave:

One of the things that really comes up is compartmentalization, which means you're able to take things that aren't relevant and ignore them. And I've worked on this for quite a while and a lot of people say, "Oh, if there's a cellphone on the table, it sucks your attention." I compartmentalize my cell phone. Anything coming in on that is someone else trying to take my attention.

Rich:

Yeah, but you're so right and it's a mindset shift as well. But you're absolutely right and this is this is exactly how the highest performers do it as well. In combat, when you are in combat and your buddy gets injured. All right, all you want to do, all the all the movies that have the person getting injured and then the buddy is sitting there like crying over like, oh, my god. That doesn't happen, because your primary job is to win the gunfight and you have to focus on that. So, as visceral as that distraction might be, you have to focus on what's the priority right now. And so, something as ubiquitous as saying, "Let me just practice this with my cell phone," is such a great way to train it and just see it.

But I think you're right, I think the key is shift your mindset and say, "Wait a second, this is not as important as what I'm in right now."

Dave:

Let's invent a new kind of trend, so turn all of your alerts on your cell phone, set it down and do stuff without looking at it. And if you do that for a couple of days, and just say I'm going to look at it, I've got it scheduled on my calendar at 4:30 and I'm going to look at it and you'll feel like you're losing your mind. But after two or three days of not losing your mind, you'll go, "Oh, wait a minute, maybe it wasn't as important as my nervous system thought it was."

Rich:

And I guarantee you'll feel more energy and you'll have been way more productive over that three days because you have been able to focus.

Dave:

This is awesome, one of our live audience from the Upgrade Collective, my mentorship group just called it Cell hormesis. Thanks, Debra, that was good. All right, so there's some of the things that we don't talk about and most people think, oh increasing your IQ, which is something you can do and all but looking at how much energy is going into the world around you and then figuring out how do you filter it out effectively and efficiently? And then how do you switch from one task to another? Is it easy or is it slow? Can you train that? And then how quickly can you absorb information that's relevant to you? So, those are the things you're looking for.

But how would you in an interview for a candidate for the SEALs, how would you possibly know these things?

Rich:

Well, in the seals you're lucky because it's not about interviews, it is about experience. We just go guys into an experience, I'm not sure if there are, I shouldn't say that's really I think about if there are

interview questions you could ask that would tease out mental acuity. But I guarantee whatever those questions were, it wouldn't be about the questions. I always say attributes are found on the periphery of an environment. They're not directly what you're looking at and so, when you're looking to select people, the first thing you have to understand, okay, what attributes am I looking for?

And then second thing is, okay what can I do that actually helps tease out these specific attributes? And they're going to be on the periphery so, I don't know. Maybe I'm just spit balling here, but something like situational awareness, it could be like, okay, we're sitting here talking, tell me how many exits there are in this room right now? And they're not allowed to look around. Do they notice that, who knows? Task switching could be I'm going to ask a question, and then right as the person starts to answer, maybe I'll ask another question. Hey just forget about that question what about this one?

Yeah, who knows, I think there's different ways you could, it actually becomes pretty fun to start thinking about that, as long as you don't have to be Machiavellian about it. But it's pretty fun to throw people. It's going to be whatever helps throw some uncertainty and stress into that environment is where you're going to start to see attributes.

Dave:

Very interesting and I'm going back to that visual training that I did. It's almost exactly that, the therapists I was working with would say, "Look over there. Okay, now let's turn around. Tell me what you saw, how many whatever's?" And I realize, I had no freaking clue. And I thought, "Wow, how could I be blind to all this stuff?" And that was what led me to grow my situational awareness, because I would do that exercise of looking at something and then turning around and saying, "What did I actually see?" And eventually, my perception of the world expanded, but that was really hard, like rewiring the brain hard kind of work.

This isn't in your book, around the attributes but it feels to me like if you feed someone well, they're not exposed to neurotoxins. They're making enough energy that that makes almost all of these attributes more powerful. Is that your experience?

Rich:

Oh, 100% and it's experience I've been able to affect more outside the Navy than inside the Navy. Because again, when you go to Iraq or Afghanistan, even though the food's not bad, it's certainly not optimal in terms of health and nutrition. So, you actually learn how to really run almost in a depleted state, but I think SEAL training itself teaches you that. It's an environment where you are taking down to zero, sub-zero and asked, "Okay, what can you do right now?" And that's not a bad, I'm grateful for that experience, I don't know but not a bad experience for some people to figure out about themselves. Is that you can run into depleted state, it's not going to be fun, but you can do it.

And it makes you even more appreciative about running in an optimal state and you have all the optimal health and nutrition. I mean you and I talk about fasting because I love your book and I do love fasting. And this idea, I feel so clear and focused and sharp when I fast and it's because for all the reasons you write about. And when I'm off alcohol for a while, and I get enough sleep, I feel my productivity goes up and I just feel really very hyper performing. And so, I think it's without a doubt that these attributes, especially the mental acuity attributes are way more expressed when you are taking care of yourself and you're feeding yourself the right way to get enough sleep and you're doing the right things.

Dave:

I would argue that a regular fasting practice makes you a better leader too, because more energy, more focus.

Rich:

Unfortunately, I wasn't into fasting when I was in the Navy. So, I can't tell you that from experience but I will say, since I got into fasting. I would, again, you're just clear. You're noticing more things certainly with the decisiveness. Again, decisiveness, the ability to solve problems, but the speed with which you are able to solve problems is really what speaks to your levels of decisiveness because decision making itself that's a skill that can be taught. Decisiveness involves that speed factor and anything and we know just physiologically, that's what fasting does, it makes you sharper and more focused. Which means you're making decisions faster and more effectively.

Dave:

I just thought about it, I hadn't considered yet, but I've been fasting for 17 hours but I didn't really notice.

Rich:

Yeah, I'm actually the same as you, I think I'm at the 18- or 19-hour mark now. So, yeah, I feel great as usual.

Dave:

Yeah, and you can show up at an interview. There's a time in my life where if I didn't eat right before I went on stage, back when I was in tech, like I'm not going to be able to show up. And part of that was fear and part of that was just not knowing that your brain can work and that your physiology is trained. So, it feels like-

Rich:

Real quick, it's funny you should say that because I realized this without knowing it. When I was out in Iraq and Afghanistan, I would never eat before missions, ever. I just didn't feel like, I didn't do it because I just wanted to be, I just felt better when I didn't eat. And then when I get back from a mission I'd eat. But I didn't realize it until later, until learning about fasting and reading your book and understanding, okay wait, that's why I didn't do it. That's why it felt so good but I wouldn't eat anything before a mission and I'd just wait until I got back.

Dave:

Who wants to carry an extra pound of food around when you have enough ammunition that you're carrying, a pound of ammunition is useful and it's the same amount of weight. And then all the energy that was going to go into digesting that food probably should go into achieving the mission.

Rich:

Yeah, I agree, I agree yeah, totally. But on the other hand, there were some guys, and they were way better operators than I was and they would eat nice big meals before going so, who knows?

Dave:

I want to ask you a hard question and your sample said is, what 99.9% men? Do you have any data or info on how these attributes applied differently to women and men?

Rich:

The answer is no but I would also add to that answer, I don't think there is a difference, I think these are human attributes. Now we may, I think after a period of study, you may find that some attributes tend to appear more predominantly in women than men. And we could say empathy could be one of those as an attribute. Women tends to be more empathetic than men but I really don't think that there'd be much of a difference at all, I think it's very human.

Dave:

There may be some difference and isn't true for any one individual. But if you were to draw a big statistical plot of likelihood of attributes landing somewhere, there's probably some differences. I've heard from lots of women, they're saying, "Look, we're better at task switching on average." And that's actually a really good skill to have, I wish I had more of that.

Rich:

I would agree with that by the way yeah.

Dave:

It doesn't mean that any one woman is going to be better or worse at task switching, it just means if you have 100,000 women and 100,000 men and you knew nothing else about them, you could probably load the dice on that side. So, it's not an individual thing but these are from my read of your book, they're very human attributes. And it doesn't matter if a leader is a man or a woman, they're doing the five things you talked about in leadership, or four things, whichever one it was.

Rich:

Five things, yeah, five things for leadership. I mixed up the number so it's tough to keep track.

Dave:

Yes, some of them are four, some of them are five, but it's a really neat way of structuring how to think about your attributes. And maybe how to strengthen them versus how to learn them, which you learn the skills and you strengthen your attributes. So, the reason I like your book, and I wanted to talk to you on the show is that the way you structure it, so you can think about it in clumps, and then dive deep on a clump that's really useful or in categories. That's very well, just structured is the right word for it. So, thanks for putting in all the time both to get the knowledge but then to make it learnable in a book. So, you did a fantastic job on that Rich.

Rich:

Well, thank you Dave and I really for me, it's good to hear because I endeavored to write a book that wasn't another Navy SEAL book. There's a lot of Navy SEAL books out there and a lot of them are great and they're written by a lot of my friends and so there's nothing wrong with those. But I wanted to do something different, I really wanted to write a book that was about the reader not about the SEALs and really make it more human. And for me this attributes content was a really good way for the reader to start asking themselves the question, "Okay, how do I show up?" And I always relate ourselves to like

automobiles. It's not because of the movie, I love the movie Cars. It's not just because my kids made me watch it 1,000 times it's because it's really true.

We're all different, we're all automobiles, but we're different types. Some of us are SUVs, some of us are Ferraris, and some of us are Jeeps right and there's no judgment because the Jeep could do things that Ferrari can't do and the Ferrari can do things that Jeep can't do. But it behooves us to lift our hood and figure out what engine are we running with. And that helps us identify and understand our performance because we may in fact find out that we were a Jeep that's been trying to run our Ferrari track.

Or a Ferrari trying to run on a Jeep track and that understanding even if we decide to be a Jeep running on a Ferrari track, that's good, that understanding will help us understand what we need to actually work on to be better in the context, in the endeavor, whatever endeavor we're into. So, I appreciate you enjoying the book, and I appreciate you having me on so thank you.

Dave:

And one final bonus question, what kind of car are you?

Rich:

I'm a Jeep.

Dave:

You're a Jeep? All right.

Rich:

And it's not only because I have, I still own my high school Jeep which I bought in 1989. I still drive it every day but I just think of it like I'm rugged. I look okay, I'm not really that sexy, I just do my thing but I'm pretty rugged, I'm pretty tough and I don't go very fast, I never have. But I'll make it through the tough stuff if I need to, so yeah.

Dave:

I love it. I think I must be a hovercraft that's-

Rich:

There you go.

Dave:

Well Rich, your book is called The Attributes 25 Hidden Drivers for Optimal Performance. Guys, I do a lot of work, my team does a lot of work on finding guests and topics that are really, really useful for you. And I promise you that if you pay attention to your attributes, instead of saying, "Oh, I'm a bad person, I suck because I don't have strengths in this one attribute." You could just say, "Fuck that. I'm going to find a friend or a partner or a teammate who's good at that." But the areas where I already have some strength, maybe you should double down on developing those attributes so you really have superpowers.

I made that mistake earlier in my career, where I'd focus on the stuff I sucked at the most and maybe you want to fill in those potholes. But really put all the wood behind the arrows where you

already have strengths and you'll find really big changes in your resilience and your ability to show up. And then find friends who fill in the gaps and that's just, it's so much less work that way.

I hope this was a good episode for you. You can find Rich's work online, the paperback just came out. Congratulations, by the way making it paperback not all books get to do that. And what's the best URL for people to find you?

Rich:

theattributes.com, find everything there to include a free assessment tool that you can measure your great attributes, your mental acuity attributes and your drive acuity. It's got a score on that and get a snapshot of where you might stand.

Dave:

Nice, thanks again. Upgrade Collective thank you for being in the live audience, helping me with the questions. And guys if you're interested in the Upgrade Collective go to our upgradecollective.com join my mentorship and membership group. We have calls every couple of weeks with me and a group of people who are like minded as well as access to the live audience for the podcast which is a huge amount of fun. You should see the chats that are happening during this it's fantastic, ourupgradecollective.com. See you all later.