

EPISODE 162

“SV: It is not 80% diet, 20% exercise, or somebody will say, it's 50% of both, or whatever. To me, it is 100% of both of them. They actually have a bidirectional relationship. Yes, your food intakes and choices are going to impact your training. If you eat a shitty meal constantly, you're going to feel that when you start training. Therefore, your food can be somewhat supportive of your training, not just because it's providing you nutrition, but also, psychologically making you go, “Oh, training feel –” It's just like, when someone has a cigarette and then they try and train, they're like, “Oh.” Okay. It makes you want to quit smoking.

Now, exercise helps you with your food and helps you with your diet adherence, because you know that if you don't train, then your food is not going to have the same level of adherence, or power, or meaning to you. When you're training really hard, suddenly, food becomes valuable in a very different way, and you suddenly care about the value and the nutrient value of the food that you're eating, because you know it's supporting your performance.”

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:01:12] LW: Hello, friends. And welcome back to the Light Watkins Show, where I interview ordinary folks, just like you and me, who've taken extraordinary leaps of faith in the direction of their path, their purpose, or what they've identified with as their mission. In doing so, they've been able to positively impact and inspire the lives of many other people who've either heard about their story, or who witnessed them in action, or people who've directly benefited from their work.

This week on the show, I'm in conversation with someone that I've admired from afar for many, many years now. She is an Aussie, who is currently living in London and her name is Shona Vertue. Shona's got a massive presence on the socials, she's got hundreds of thousands of followers and she developed a platform that helps people and especially women optimize their health. It's called *The Vertue Method*. That really is her last name, Shona Vertue, which is spelled V-E-R-T-U-E. How cool is that? Well, *The Vertue Method* was developed after a decade

of teaching and it combines weight resistance training and cardio with Shona's lifelong passions of yoga and meditation, while placing as much importance on rest and recovery.

It's practiced in over 65 countries around the world by thousands of people and it encourages clients, who by the way, includes David Beckham, to acquire new skills while training, such as learning how to do pushups, or learning how to do a pull-up, or learning how to do a handstand. To play and to have fun, rather than focusing purely on aesthetic goals and punishing routines.

Shona is also a fan of skateboarding and backflips and scrambling up and down ropes and she's also practicing jujitsu. I was fortunate enough to meet Shona on one of my trips to Los Angeles and we actually had a workout together and I got to see that Shona is the real deal. She's authentic, she's helpful, and she's just an all-around amazing person.

In this interview, we go deep into her backstory of how she originally got into physical fitness, through gymnastics when she was four years old and how she had to take a leap of faith away from the conventional life, when she was in her late teens and early twenties, into making fitness her full-time thing and learning how to make money in fitness. I just love these stories, because it reminds us that it doesn't have to be one or the other. It's not about, do I follow my heart, or do I pay the bills? Shona's is an example of someone who was very intentional about doing both.

She had to make choices that were in alignment with her heart, but she also had to do what she had to do in order to pay her bills. Now she's living the dream. When I say that, I don't mean that she's got everything figured out. We're all very much still evolving. But Shona is making an impact and that's what living the dream ultimately is about, making an impact while still learning along the way.

In fact, Shona has recently enrolled into school to get her degree in psychology and she's incorporating aspects of her psychology studies into her online fitness presence, which is making her offering more and more unique to her. What's interesting is that she's always had an interest in psychology and now she's just giving herself permission to explore that interest in a very concentrated way. We talked about some of the misconceptions around working out, such as how to get into shape without burning yourself out in the gym, why it's important to eat more

if you want to lose weight, what are the right types of things you need to be eating in order to burn weight efficiently.

We talked about how movement plays a role with diet when it comes to being in tip-top shape and ladies, how exactly do you get that nice booty in the gym. I think you're going to love this episode and you're going to love Shona's transparency. She also revealed how she was in a cult in her earlier years. But what positive experiences that she ended up getting from being a part of the cult that later on informed her psychology studies. Without further ado, let's get into it. Here is my fascinating conversation with Miss Shona Vertue.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:05:43] LW: Shona, thanks so much for coming on to my podcast. It is an honor getting a chance to dive deeper into your backstory. We obviously have met in person and I followed you for a while on social media and I'm always inspired by your perspective, and it's not what you talk about, it's the way you talk about things from a very balanced point of view. I'm just really interested to hear how you developed into this person that you've become today, that's inspiring so many people around the whole globe.

[0:06:16] SV: Wow, what an intro. Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. I'm stoked to be here and to chat with you. I feel like, the first time we met actually and we sat at, I think we were down at White City House, we just sat and we chatted and it was non-stop. It was like play. It just went for, I can't even remember how long it was, but it was a while and it was just a really beautiful exchange. Let's say, we got the same thing going. I feel like, we'll have a nice unfolding.

[0:06:42] LW: I also had the unique advantage, I'm sure of many people who've interviewed you, of being able to work out with you and getting to experience *The Vertue Method* in real life. IRL. That's exciting. That's going to give a whole other layer of depth to this conversation, I feel.

[0:07:00] SV: Yeah, I hope so. That's good. Could you not need me now.

[0:07:04] LW: That was awesome. All right, but we'll get into that a little bit later in the conversation. I do want to start with talking about the early days growing up in Australia. I made it a bit of an ignorant assumption. I assumed that you were part Aboriginal and part Australian. Turns out, you're part Fijian. Is that how you say it? Or Fijian?

[0:07:26] SV: Fijian is how you say it. But even then, I'm not even Fijian. The funny thing is – this is so funny, and it's a fair assumption, it happens all the time because I often just say, I'm Australian because it makes it easier. Obviously, my dad is Australian, so I do have Australian in me and I was born in Australia. Australia is a tricky one because it's super multicultural and then we also have an incredible, indigenous culture and group of people that are there. Sometimes you actually can't tell whether someone's indigenous. Sometimes they're indigenous, but they don't necessarily have typical skin color people, and so people are like, “Oh, oh.”

People assume when I'm like, “I'm Australian,” and they're like, “Oh, cool. She must be indigenous.” Actually, what my mix is is that my mom was born in Fiji, but her family comes from a lineage of indentured, servitude, traveling from India, coming across through different areas. They've come to parts of Jamaica, so we think we have some Jamaican in us as well, as well as Indian. Obviously, the origin story is India coming down through there, mixing, and then coming to Fiji. Not mixing necessarily with Fijians and then having a family. It's really hard. We don't know. In truth, we don't know. We just know, there's definitely an origin story. When you do my 23 and me, which I don't know, the accuracy of these things, but it's a whole –

On my mom's side, it's this big, broad coloring. On my dad's side, it is French and English, or British. Not even really any – I guess, you can't even really call me Australian, other than I was born there. Because even on my dad's side, it's really quite British and French.

[0:09:07] LW: It's interesting. The Indians were everywhere, man. I know there's a big population in Nairobi as well. I have a friend whose parents are from Nairobi, but you just saw them on the street, you think they're from somewhere in India because they were fresh off the boat to Nairobi.

[0:09:22] SV: Yeah. Well, exactly. I think, especially the history of indentured servitude is really like, when slavery was abolished, then these plantations, not just plantations, but all different

kinds of places were like, what are we going to do? They went around, they traveled around and I mean, I'm telling a real cliff's notes version of this story. Obviously, it deserves way more respect and attention. But essentially, it was like, "Okay, we need more workers."

Indentured people that did indentured servitude were like, I don't want to say that they were owned, but they worked for seven years. They signed away their life, essentially, for seven years. There were certain different aspects of it because children that were born into indentured servitude were not owned by an owner, or a master like it was in slavery. But at the same time, they were raised in a household whereby it was like, well, you can't just eat for free. You have to get put to work. This was like, there are blurred lines there. It definitely wouldn't pass today's standards. But it was definitely way better than slavery and slave conditions.

It's an interesting history and one that I've read books. They were called the coolies, like my family were part of the coolies, this generation that came down through these different areas. It's very, very interesting. Obviously, filled with loads of sadness and trials and tribulations, but that's on my mom's side. Unfortunately, we just don't get a chance to really go back and look. Long story short, I'm not even Fijian.

[0:10:59] LW: Did your dad take any heat from being involved with a person of color back in Australia?

[0:11:05] SV: I mean, it was the seventies. Mom is very, very dark. She definitely tells me some pretty powerful stories about racism and assumptions people make about her, her being really dark as well. Having big, wild curly hair. I mean, she doesn't even look really that Indian. Even experience some things from other Indian people that were like, "You're super dark." Yes, dad definitely did. But in a way, it wasn't so much that he experienced heat. He just probably would have experienced attention, and I think to a degree that probably would have been, I don't know, maybe his perspective was like, "This is fun. I've got this fun part." We have fun and I get a lot of attention. We can unpack that with a sinister lens and we could unpack that with a kind of like, "Ah, it was what it was at the time."

[0:11:55] LW: I like to ask my guests what they were into when they were young kids and you were into gymnastics. But I'm not sure if that's something you chose for yourself, or is that

something your parents just introduced to you and you took to it, like a fish to water, or did you reject it at first and then you got into the process of it. What was your relationship like with gymnastics as a younger person?

[0:12:19] SV: I really loved movement from a very young age. There are old home videos of me dancing by myself, next to a jukebox, just really embracing movement and being really interested in movement. That was what actually prompted my parents to go, “Okay, she’s into dance, but there’s more to it than that.” They enrolled me into gymnastics. I just got enrolled into this program. Like, oh, sorry. This wasn’t a program. This was just basically, babysitting. It was jumping jelly babies is what it was called. Then they noticed some potential in me. Took me out of the jumping jelly babies and put me into an elite program. That level of intensity and training ramped up.

I think the thing that’s so interesting about children’s exposure to sport, or any pastime, music, any activity is that you’re introducing them at a time when the neural plasticity is insane. Just insane levels of firing. The adaptations are so fast that you accept a lot, and you don’t even necessarily really have time to think about whether you like it from an intellectual perspective. You just approach things. I mean, at least this was my experience is that I felt like, it was just, that was life. I was like, “Cool. How do I enjoy life?” I mean, because I feel like that was my running narrative, at least as a child was like, looking around, being like, “Cool, what’s the next game? What’s the next thing and what’s fun and what’s this?”

Yes, there were times when it got very serious, pre-competition, or when your coaches were mad at you, but you were always seeking out, I don’t know. I felt like this. I felt like I was always seeking out some kind of joy. When I look back on it, I can 100% say to you, it was hard, it was intense, it was scary. It was really scary. I was scared most nights, just because I was challenged in a way, but it’s like, you don’t get hung up on the fear. You do the thing, you lean in and then it’s just like, okay, next minute, oh I’m having a Fanta, or I’m having a Coke, or, “Oh, great. We get to have chicken and rice for dinner.” I’ve just done all this work.

I don’t know. You’re just moving through it. It’s not until you get older and then you look back on things and you go, “Oh, shit. That was a lot. I was scared a lot, or I was this a lot.” Yeah, you get to unpack it a bit more. At the time, it was just life. To answer your question, I think, yes, it was

something my parents exposed me to. Did they force me to do it? Absolutely not. In fact, it was my parents that sat me down and said, “Okay, we're at a point now where –” I was going between the Australian Institute of Sport, which was in Canberra and Sydney, doing workshops there to train for the Olympics.

I was too young for the Sydney 2000 Olympics. Instead, it was like, “Okay. Well, you're going to have to do another four years to train for the next one. Is this something you want to do?” I would have to give up regular schooling as it was. My parents just sat me down and said, “What do you want to do? Do you want to do gymnastics, or do you want to do life?” I chose life. I think, I probably chose life at that time, because I probably, even though, yes, I could find moments of joy within each class, or session, or whatever, training experience, I think it was just starting to just wear me down a little bit.

When I say like, I don't think that a 12 or 13-year-old should be feeling worn down, I mean, they exist and then we do, but I definitely really felt tired. I look at photos of me at that age, I have massive bags under my eyes. I was just haggard.

[0:15:58] LW: You were also in counseling as a young person. Was that helpful for you, or do you think that you found it unhelpful?

[0:16:05] SV: The reason I was in counseling was because my parents were also going through a pretty tumultuous divorce. The counseling was the thing that actually prompted me to go back to uni and become a psychologist. I have this distinct memory of being in kindergarten. I was four years old, and I had to do this counseling because they were taking some of the scripts, or like the transcripts of the sessions for court. They were analyzing me and my mental state and things like that.

Now, I remember sitting in this session and looking around at the room being like, I'm in this kids' room, but also I'm talking to this woman who's asking me to draw a picture of how I feel and how my day went and what's a typical day in a life of me. I remember feeling so patronized at the time, because, I mean, I was four. It's understandable for a counselor. I think she was just a counselor. I'm not sure if she was a psychologist. Probably was a psychologist. I felt so patronized, because I was like, “You know, you can just ask me this situation.”

I remember sitting there eye-rolling at four years old, drawing this picture that I thought she wanted to see, which was me standing between my parents with my arms out holding hands with those two and creating speech bubbles that was like, “I hate you. I hate you.” It’s like, “I just drew what I thought she wanted to see.” But I was so frustrated that I was like, “Why don’t you just ask me and I’ll give you the rundown of these things?” This picture, I’m not going to give you some subconscious illustration of what’s going on, or anything like that.

Anyway, really irritated me and I was like, I’m going to do a better job. I thought that I wanted to become a child psychologist from a very, very young age, which has changed for me now and I don’t feel that way right now. But I definitely was very frustrated at that. I don’t think that the counseling disrupted gymnastics. We didn’t even talk about it actually, which probably was actually a mistake in their part as well. But we didn’t talk about any of that. It was really just like, “What’s going on for you at home? Okay, let’s write a report about this.”

[0:18:10] LW: Then you eventually went into dance? Discovered your love for dance.

[0:18:14] SV: Exactly. I think that the reason that the dance transition came up was because, essentially, with gymnastics floor was my best routine, best apparatus. I was an artistic gymnast. Artistic is different to rhythmic, as one where you do the ribbons and have the balls, and artistic is where you do floor beam, bar bolt. That was my best apparatus. I had a ballet teacher as well to help with technique. She was like, “This girl has potential. If you’re going to quit gymnastics, at least put her into dance.” I ended up going to a performing arts high school and doing dance full-time. Doing as much dance as I was doing English and Maths, and all of those sorts of things.

Yeah, that was another interesting place in and of itself. But, yeah. I definitely love the movement, synchronization of movement, and breath and emotion moving through your body that you can evoke in alignment with music.

[0:19:20] LW: After school, what was the plan?

[0:19:23] SV: The plan was on one side, I had this desire to have some notoriety for my skill. My skill in dance. I also sang and did drama. I had this desire for recognition and notoriety. But it was like a hunger that existed throughout, probably, even from gymnastics to be recognized externally for some skill that you had cultivated. At the same time, my relationship with money was really bad. I found money to be so hard to come by, and I had such a not-abundant mindset.

I was really like, I don't think that I can pursue this and eliminate this feeling I have of like, "Where am I going to get money from? I have no freedom." I was like, "That's it. I'm just going to get a full-time job so that I just have some – I can just relax and have a bit of money and then really think about what I want to do and where I want to go." I still had this uni situation at the back of my mind, which was like, "Do I want to do psychology? Do I want to go and pursue this?" I was like, I'm just going to pause. I'm going to get some money and figure out what the hell is going on with life now that I'm apparently an adult because I've graduated from high school. I did that, and it was, I'm not going to say, any of my life choices have been a mistake, but it was certainly a quick lesson in what was not for me.

[0:20:49] LW: What was the job, just out of curiosity?

[0:20:51] SV: I think, my first job was working for a hair product company, but in their factory as a secretary, as an assistant. I was awful. I mean, I was so awful, they would – someone would tell me something and I'd just be so away with the clouds. Would be like, "Hmm-mm." Then I'd completely forget because I'd be thinking about dance, or I'd be thinking about – Just, I don't know. I can't say that this is like – I can't blame it on me being 19. I can't blame it on me – Actually, I was younger than that, because I finished high school. I was young for my year, so I finished high school when I was actually 16. All I wanted was like, great, get a job, get some security, get some freedom from the household that I was living in, I just didn't – I was living with my dad and my stepmom and it was not comfortable. I wasn't happy and they had just had a baby. All of this stuff was coming up for me. I just wanted to get away.

I was in this thing doing a terrible job, which I ended up getting fired from because I was just so terrible. They felt bad. I remember bursting into tears because I was so humiliated, but they just really – I mean, you just haven't done any work. I mean, I was awful. I was so bad.

[0:22:00] LW: I'm not clear about the timeline here, but I know that you were –

[0:22:04] SV: We're probably at age 17 now.

[0:22:07] LW: Yeah. I know you were working out with your dad in the mornings, but you were also experiencing some –

[0:22:11] SV: That was in high school.

[0:22:13] LW: Okay. Were you experiencing skin problems at that time? Were you tired? Were you going into the hospital from the stomach flu?

[0:22:20] SV: Stomach flu is later. Where are you getting this from?

[0:22:25] LW: I read your book.

[0:22:27] SV: From the book. You got the book. I'm like, I don't remember that bit in the book, because I remember explaining the emotional stomach problems. But the skin issues, they have been prevalent throughout life. Different phases, different things have always been some connection to emotion and gut-related things. Okay, so we're 17 at the moment and we're just trying to get some money to be able to have a bit of a life.

Now the part that hasn't really come up here and that was not included in the book, because I wasn't ready to talk about it and I don't think the publishers are ready for me to talk about it either. But I certainly wasn't ready to come out with it. Basically, I was part of a cult, actually, growing up. I found myself winding up in this, some people would call it a Buddhist group, but some of the things that happened in this space, which I won't divulge too much, but essentially, it really was a cult, if you look back on it and line it up with some of the criteria. There was some real cult-like behaviors.

Although I can look back on it with a type of fondness, there's definitely elements of it that were absolutely completely inappropriate and dangerous and not good. I ended up in this cult around

about 18, 19. It was through a boyfriend that I was madly in love with. He was learning from this guy. Anyway, so the stomach issues had started coming up probably from about 18. They started to crop up, where I would have gastroenteritis symptoms and I would be basically, throwing up – We don't need to go through the details. We know what gastroenteritis is. Most of us listening, if you don't know and you haven't been blessed with this amazing experience, then please Google what gastroenteritis is like.

But basically, I would have that once a month. Sometimes twice a month. That's not normal. It's one of those things you might be really unfortunate to get a few times in your life. If you have kids, probably more. It's horrible. I was getting it once or twice a month. It's not like I was living in really poor hygiene. It's not like I had poor food hygiene or anything like that. We couldn't figure out why this was happening. I ended up in hospitals a lot with a drip in my arm trying to figure out. The doctors just really didn't – They ran tests. They just didn't know what to say it was. They've just grouped it as like, a kind of unknown syndrome. We're not sure. Try to rest, which is the common thing to say.

One day, it started coming on. I was already attending these group things, this Buddhist learning. I started to feel it come on. I started to feel the stomach pain. I turned to my boyfriend at the time and I said, "It's happening." Because I was so well-versed in this experience, I was just like, "I need you to take me to the hospital now, because it's not going to get better and I can't just sit this one out." When I would have gastroenteritis and this is really severe, I would get dehydration very quickly. My body would just respond in a way that was so aggressive, that it would just be level 10 gastro. Not just at home, trying to rehydrate with HydraLight. It was like, they needed to put a drip in my arm, things like that.

I was like, "Let's just finish this quickly. Can you just drop me at the hospital?" He was like, "Okay." Instead, I'm getting dizzy, I'm throwing up already, he takes me to this teacher, whom we had to call at the time, master. He sits me down and he says to me, "Let's do some Chinese medicine work on you. We'll do some massage. We'll do some foot release. We'll do some **[inaudible 0:26:05]** points on your body." At this point, I had no energy to say no, but I was incredibly – I was just like, I don't know if I want to do this. But I had no energy to really get my boyfriend to, and I just didn't have the social energy to force this down.

He starts doing these things. I then have this fast-forward experience of gastroenteritis, but by no means, any more severe. In fact, it was fast-forward to the end of it, but no dehydration. Just pooping, vomiting, that kind of thing. At the end, he had sorted me out in about two hours. Whereas, normally, I'd be in the hospital for hours and hours and hours and I'd be on a drip and it would take me ages to be able to take fluids in again through my mouth. It was a very different experience.

I went home, rested, was really quite shocked, and also, quite intrigued like, "What just happened? What did he do?" I came back the next day and I had a private session to talk to him and he said, "Can I tell you what I think is your issue? You play different roles to different people." He just said, essentially, in his own words as well, "You are trying to be a different person for different people and that is causing sickness in your body." When he said that to me, I felt this – firstly, I felt seen, as we say now, but I also just felt so much deep resonance with that.

Normally, when we hear knowledge, it doesn't change our mind immediately. Normally, we hear something, maybe a therapist says, or something like that and we go, "Mm-mm." This was one of those moments where someone said something back to me that was such a deep truth for me at the time, that I was like, "Yeah. Something has to change." I never ever, ever had gastroenteritis again. It just left. Let me tell you, Light, I had been getting it so consistently for such a long period of time that I was just willing to accept that this was my life now. To have one man say to me, after really only a few interactions of seeing me interact with people, the group, different things, he was like, "You are overdramatizing every experience that you have and that is creating internal stress for you, and you're having to manage that individual relationship."

I mean, as it may be these days, trendy talk, we call it people pleasing. But it was like, to a very severe degree, when I look back on it now. It was creating internal dismay and sickness. To have someone just say that to me in one moment and then that sickness never ever, ever come back, it was very profound. As much as I can say, "Oh, I fell in love with this boy and I wanted to be in his group," it was like, I think I suddenly realized that Buddhism and Eastern philosophy could probably teach me a lot more about myself than some of the avenues that I was seeking at the time. That's what got me into the Eastern path.

By the way, that's the first. I've actually never shared that. I'm still quite nervous because it's definitely one of those things that I've – different people in my life, publicists, agents, managers have been like, “You just probably shouldn't share that story, because it's too much.” Now, I'm in a place in my life where I'm like, I think honesty and authenticity is better. But yes, it was a very deeply profound moment. I stayed in that group, or cult for seven years of my life. Lots of things happened. Lots of good and bad things happened in that space and time. But things that I look back on fondly.

[0:29:55] LW: Let's talk about your aspiration to reach the height of bodybuilding and the fitness competition, and when did that start. What did you learn about working out purely for aesthetics?

[0:30:07] SV: Yeah. This is a whole new phase. I mean, I'm still actually in the cult. It's coming to an end, but I had started working in a gym, because I realized, corporate work was not for me. I didn't do well in offices. I didn't do well in a sedentary space, and so I started moving into a gym, became a yoga teacher, then became a personal trainer, and I started working at a gym, Fitness First, Bondi Platinum Fitness First, and I was incredibly intimidated by everyone around me, because they were either bodybuilders, or they were powerlifters. I was a skinny yogi out here, and I could handstand and do the splits, but I didn't have the level of strength that everyone around me, and this is the importance of social acceptance, like feeling not excluded by people.

I really felt excluded and it was impacting how I felt about my business and how I felt about being a personal trainer there, even though funnily enough, the advice I would give to anyone trying to do this is like, niches are really important. Actually, it was a strength. But instead, I tried to assimilate. Being the Australian, I tried to assimilate. I was like, okay, I'm not so keen on powerlifting, but you know what? Why don't I just do some bodybuilding? I'll lean into this aesthetic side of things. I have to be honest with you. I don't have good things to say about it. That's not just my experience. I think I don't have good things to say about the process of bikini modeling and bikini competing.

I do have very close friends who I respect immensely, who do that for work, and who coach others into it. I respect their choices and I think that they are very intelligent and understand

themselves and understand, and have really high self-awareness around why they're doing it. But in terms of as a whole, I think you have to really ask yourself, why you're leaning into doing something like that. I guess, what I learned about training, firstly was, I guess, I owe a lot of what I know today about the body and about achieving “results,” or aesthetic results to bodybuilding.

I understand things about nutrition, not just because I've read the science, but also, because I've applied it to my own body and seen it happen, and I've seen it in my clients. The same thing goes for training and the different stimulus that's required in order to put on muscle and how important form is in order to create the shape that you want to create. I think for that side of things, it's a really powerful experience and does teach you a lot. But, yeah. Like I said, I just don't have a lot of nice things to say, because it starts to make you hyper-fixate on this body in a very ornamental way. I think that doesn't align with me spiritually and that doesn't align with me intellectually either. It's over-identification with the aesthetics that I think is problematic for many reasons.

[0:33:10] LW: I've met many, particularly women who have gone through fitness competitions and they never have anything positive to say about the experience afterward. I know men who have used that as an opportunity to transform from being, say, overweight to getting into shape, type of a thing. I think they find that process to be a little bit more positive in hindsight. What I'm really interested in hearing about, because I think all of these experiences you're describing are essentially leading you to your discovery of what became *The Vertue Method*. There's a lot of power in learning what you don't want and also, learning what society is teaching us and influencing us to think about. But this idea that the body has an algorithm that you could manipulate potentially, because a lot of people think that, “Oh, my genetics are such and such and I can't lose weight, or I can't –”

[0:34:07] SV: Yes.

[0:34:08] LW: “Or if I lift 2 pounds, my arms are going to get really big.” It's like, no. That's not how it works, actually. You have to be very intentional.

[0:34:16] SV: I wish it was that. Yeah, I wish it was that easy. That would be really fun.

[0:34:20] LW: People are spending so much time and effort and attention behind creating the body that they think they want, but everyone else is dismissive of the idea that yeah, you can actually manipulate things. But, I think, your larger purpose and that this is what I've seen in *The Vertue Method* is you need to have a bigger why behind the things you're doing, and maybe that why it could be functional strength, or maybe it could be learning a specific skill that you have always wanted to do a pull-up, or you always wanted to do a push-up, or something like that, but you've never thought you were able to do that.

Let's spend a little time just unpacking that and I guess, the genesis of *The Vertue Method* based on all of the things that you were learning. What are the big misconceptions that people have in terms of their physical fitness, that could also maybe be symptomatic of their mental fitness, or their emotional fitness, or their attachment style? Or how do these things all come into play when we look at what we think is possible for our body?

[0:35:22] SV: I mean, I think it's all dancing. It's all interacting. I think the biggest misconception is that it can be – that you could just focus on one only and achieve broad health. I think, maybe people are starting to lean into the fact that that's not the case, but I think, at least at the time I wrote that book, which was 2016-2017, it was like, people were very much either like, “I marathon run. This is my thing. Or, I do strength training and this is my thing. Or, I'm a yogi, or I'm a Pilates girl.”

I think that those groups still exist and we love to identify with things, but I think more and more, we're starting to go, “Okay, if I want to keep doing Pilates, I should probably also just take care of my cardiovascular fitness, too, because I'm not really doing much of that. Actually, if I want to have longevity and cognitive function and things like that, I need to do more than maybe just Pilates,” and the same for yoga and the same for all these different areas. I think it's maybe not so much as much of a misconception as it once was.

I think now, the running misconception, yes, you already brought it up is this concept around, yeah, genetics and people feeling stuck in a way. Maybe that's going to be the human state for a while. Maybe we just phase in and out of feeling stuck, and it's not so much that it's like, oh, this

is the current trend. But I definitely notice, there's dominant narrative that comes up for people where there are these limiting beliefs.

Actually, what drove me to create *The Vertue Method* to what it is today, not just what it was then, but even then, I dance around some of the topics. I touch on them lightly. It's still a transformational program, that book. It's very much focusing on, I guess, stimulus from exercise and nutrition, and we dabble in yoga and meditation. It was a bit, I don't want to say, I'm not going to call it revolutionary, but it was not being discussed in the fitness space to think about, or consider things like meditation as something that would support your fitness, or something that even just mental health as something that would support your fitness. It was just not discussed.

Now, I think people don't necessarily discuss the interconnectedness of those things still, but I think people are more well-versed in different kinds of meditation, or in different kinds of mental health practices. It's a much more commonly used word. But I think the thing that I'm finding coming up a lot is this stuckness, this limiting belief issue that people tend to have, which is like, "My genetics allow only this, or I just am not a sporty person, so I'll never be that way." While we have to be realistic about things and set realistic expectations, you're absolutely right what you said before, Light, is like, you can play with this algorithm to a degree. You can make adaptations. The body is absolutely incredible. It just needs a constant and a progressive stimulus, and you can create things you didn't realize that you could create in your body and do things that you didn't realize you could do.

I think the number one thing that I'm trying to get to the bottom of now for people is like, what is your running narrative about fitness, about flexibility, about any of these aspects of *The Vertue Method* that I talk about, and it's a really holistic practice. We do touch on flexibility, strength, fitness, mental health, and mindfulness, but I'm like, what are your narratives about those things? Are you like, "Oh, I know. I can't meditate. Oh, I'm not about that. I just can't. I sit down in my mind, just thinks." I'm like, "Oh, yeah. It's going to do that."

It's the same as someone saying, when I run upstairs, my heart beats really fast. It's, yeah, it's going to do that, because that's what happens. It's trying to unravel what those narratives are. One of the things that I say very commonly to anyone doing my programs is we're not just trying to feel better. We're trying to get better at feeling into what our body needs, what our mind

needs, what our heart needs at a certain point in time so that we can unpack that a little bit more.

[0:39:40] LW: I'd like to talk about it now in terms of say, a user case of someone who may be listening to this conversation and maybe they've been running some of those narratives. They think, is it something that you can self-diagnose, or is it something that you need to talk to with someone like yourself to understand the depth of these stories and narratives that you're running and what to do about them as a next step?

[0:40:02] SV: It's a really good question. One I'm like, I feel like, my internal jury is not out on this. Let me just set two perspectives here, and maybe you could help me to unpack this, actually. I would really appreciate your help. One narrative is it's really helpful to have someone to provide a mirror to you in some way and ideally, someone who's somewhat qualified to do so. Partly, the reason I went back to do psychology, because I was like, "Okay, maybe I can do this for people and we can go a little bit deeper into these schemas that people have about things, or narratives that people have built, and go a little deeper into the underlying things." Yes, you need someone to help you get to that point.

Now, all throughout history, those relationships have occurred, right? We have the guru. We have a teacher. We have a mentor. We have a professional. We have a doctor. Different people can help you to unlock different things in you, and I don't think that that's a bad thing. We live in an independent universe. It's relational. It's really important. The other narrative is like, I love the idea of people being really empowered with their own autonomy to be able to ask these questions and let's just say, be their own guru, or their own teacher, or their own mentor.

Can these techniques, can certain questions elicit your own inner guidance system in a way to make you go, so let's just go really simple, like a journal prompt for example. You have the right journal prompt that is presented to you at a time that it just seems to have some divine timing in your life. You start writing these things and you have this awakening. You didn't need to pay hundreds and thousands of dollars to a therapist to guide you in some way, which, by the way, we have to acknowledge that anyone teaching you is going to be teaching you from their perspective.

Ideally, if they're a good professional, they're going to try to eliminate their biases and always check in with themselves. But we're still all just coming from our own projection and lens and narratives. My thing is like, should we be doing both? Do we have the mentor? Cool. But then, we also have to be not so reliant on the mentor alone. We also have to have tools that we use to be our own teacher to uncover things. What are your thoughts?

[0:42:20] LW: I keep going back to the story that you told about the master, that cult who gave you the treatment that ended up temporarily fixing your symptoms. But then, he gave you something much more valuable, which was an instruction on what you can do to make sure that this thing minimizes, or doesn't come back at all. I think he got your attention with the treatment, but then the real value was the ongoing instruction to make you self-sufficient. Just like, with say, the fitness competition, you get your attention when you can see, "Oh, wow. I can change my body in this way that I never thought was possible for someone like me, even though it's technically not sustainable to do this all the time. But now I can take these Lego pieces of what I used and I can help other people do the same, or I could help myself to bounce back."

Once you understand the rules, you can break the rules. But if you don't know the rules and everything is happening in your mind arbitrarily, you never quite know how to make it happen again. It's what I've been doing with meditation. People come and train with me for four days, and I show them how to steer through their mind, and they never thought that was possible. They just thought meditation was something that was supposed to be hard to do.

It's not to say that people need to meditate like this forever, but you do want to learn how the nature of the mind works in contrast to how the meditation can also work. I think it's a both-and situation. One thing in Western society that we discount is the master/teacher/guru role in helping to give us these tools that we can then use for ourselves. Because we've been conditioned to seek out shortcuts, or you are the guru. To an extent, that's true. But there is such thing as people having more experience than you, and they can share that experience.

I think what you want to look for and what you're so good at writing about and talking about are principles. You want to look for principles. You don't want to look for necessarily, this is the format you always need to do, but why does this work? If you're going to someone who can show you principles, then you can really go far in whatever you're trying to do.

[0:44:41] SV: Yup. I think so, too. That's great advice. It's really interesting. It probably is the western side of me and the eastern side of me that has this battle about it. Because you're right. I noticed this a lot, and I don't want to shine a negative light on it, because I think that everything can be healed and fixed and everything's just going through like evolution, but I definitely think that there's this rejection of the mentor and the guru in a way because there's this lack – I don't know what the cause is, but it feels like, there's this lack of maybe we're trying to dismantle hierarchies in some way because that's the new western way is like no more hierarchies. Let's break this down and we're all equal and we're all the same.

I think as you say, we all come from different levels of experience. I think, there's a level of respect that we have to give to the experience that other people may have, the wisdom that other people may have, the dedication that other people have given to a certain craft that is worth respecting to a degree. There's a part of me that feels as though that's been a little bit lost in this other side of things that's about, let's just say, equality, which I feel isn't the right word for what equality is. I'm using it in the incorrect way, if that makes sense. But it feels like, that's been a symptom of this striving for. Trying to make equality also means sameness. I just don't think that that's what that means. I don't think that equality should be about everything being the same.

[0:46:12] LW: One of the things that has drawn me to your work is your willingness to be vulnerable and learn in real-time publicly with everyone else. You're asking these questions, not just to yourself, you're asking them on interviews. You're asking them and the things that you're writing, your newsletter. That humanizes you in a way that allows other people to think critically for themselves when they're listening to the things that you're teaching them. Because I think, one of the reasons why we may look at an experience like, “Oh, I was in this cult,” and then you realize it's a cult, you realize it's a Ponzi scheme, or you realize it's not what you thought it was. There's a tendency to dismiss everything you experienced, because that person was greedy, or was whatever he was that was a human trait that we all experience. I think the people who really excel in most areas of life are better at extracting what's useful from these experiences.

[0:47:14] SV: 100%. Yeah.

[0:47:15] LW: Which again, could be the principles. A fitness competition overall, it's probably not that healthy to do. But there's some usefulness in learning how these things work and how the body can change. The question is, what can I get from this that's useful for this season of my life, and then I'll just leave the rest of it behind and combine that with something else from a different area that I find useful.

[0:47:39] SV: Yeah. I think so, too. I think, not to be too cliché, but the obstacle is the way. I think like, I have found this to be the case in most of my life is that the very thing that has presented me with the difficulty at the time has been the thing that's yielded the most magic. When I say magic, I'm using that word, because I don't know what to call this. I'm like, is it resilience? It's like, each situation creates a different type of resilience in a way, or each difficult situation.

Another thing I love hearing. I can't remember who says it. He's a coach, actually. I think a coach for the women's swim team, men's swim team in Australia and he said in an interview like, "I'm always telling the girls, pressure is a privilege." I remember hearing that thinking, "Oh, that's interesting." Yeah, okay. That's true. In their case, in that context. Not every case, pressure is a privilege. But in that case and in many, many cases, pressure can really truly be a privilege. Sometimes if our lens is hyper-fixated on the problem, as opposed to what is the thing that you can extract from this, then we miss out on that privilege, actually, from that pressure.

[0:49:04] LW: I want to talk about some practical things, speaking of principles, that I think a lot of listeners, particularly the female listeners, would find interesting to debunk some misconceptions. In terms of booty truths, as you called it in your book, and maybe it also combines with why women should lift heavy. Let's talk about those principles related to that, and then there's another one about losing fat that I want to talk about because I think there's a lot of misconceptions around how exactly do you lose fat effectively without losing muscle.

[0:49:36] SV: Well, actually, it's funny, because the research has been constantly evolving. It is difficult, actually. I'm going to go with the fat one first, right? Let's talk about – even though you said, you're going to do it last. But essentially, you can lose body fat and build muscle at the same time. It's just difficult. When we say difficult, that's context-dependent. Some people will find it easy for genetic reasons. Some people find it easy because just their life situation allows

it. Maybe they have a chef, or maybe they have someone else cooking for them, or they don't have a job that creates busyness.

The main formula, essentially, is making sure you're hitting enough protein, between 1.5 to – Anyway, there's lots of these figures. There's a range of figures. I'm not going to sprout them to you guys. We can, but we won't sprout them to you now. But essentially, there's a range of figures of the amount of protein per pound, or kilo of body weight that you have that you want to eat each day. Now if you're trying to drop body fat, you want to keep that protein very high and eat in a calorie deficit. Eating less amounts of food that you are expending, essentially. It's all just about energy balance.

The reason we need to keep that protein high and we need to ensure that we're weight training is to keep the stimulus – essentially, everything in this world is just information for your body. Everything that you do, every activity is just information for your body. The body is so incredible, it is just constantly trying to make you better at whatever it is that you are doing. If you are sitting at a desk all day, the reason that people build that mound at their back sometimes you see it, and their head goes into this forward posture, things start to shorten, other things start to lengthen. We start to build muscle in certain areas that support us to sit in chairs for a long period of time.

It's not your body working against you to create bad posture. According to your body, it's saying, "Hey, I'm just doing what you're telling me to do based on your activities, based on what you're doing and giving me." If the information that you provide your body is weight training consistently, with progressive overload, so things getting harder over time, giving it enough protein and you're eating in a calorie deficit, you're saying to the body, "I need more muscle mass for my daily activities." Therefore, the energy that comes in should be ideally, converted into something that's going to support those consistent activities that I take part in. Now it's very oversimplified science, but essentially, that's what's going on there.

I think people make the assumption that loads of cardio is going to be enough. But if we're just working on a big deficit, then because muscle is so expensive to our system, it's very calorically demanding. If you are just constantly in a deficit and you are constantly just smashing that

cardio, your body's not going to hold on to muscle. It's just not going to. If you're not eating enough protein, it's also not going to have anything to make it with.

[0:52:38] LW: There are no exceptions, right, to this? This is the principle.

[0:52:41] SV: This is the principle. This is it. This is what needs to be done. I mean, there's exceptions in the sense that people have very specific individual expressions of their genetics. But generally speaking, we know caloric deficit is required and all diets are. There are just different ways to facilitate this caloric deficit. In fact, even really, medication, weight loss medication, which is super famous now is essentially regulating appetite in a way that's so profound that you can't override it anymore.

Therefore, you just stick to this appetite level that you have based on the medication. Again, I'm oversimplifying. But essentially, it's all about the calories in. It's all about energy balance. It's just that people forget how profoundly our body has evolved in a way to make these sensations so hard to resist within us. Hunger hormones, satiation hormones are really, really powerful. When they become a little bit dysregulated, or dysfunctional in a way for different reasons, it's very difficult to override them. The reason I'm giving you that little caveat is because I know, people like to throw shade on essentially, people who have more fat, people who have obesity, have overweight, this is not a moral issue. This is something that is very profoundly impacting their appetite and their physical function in a way that many fitness people don't understand, or many people in leaner bodies just won't understand because they haven't truly experienced it themselves.

[0:54:23] LW: What if I just don't eat that much and I just fast a lot? Will I lose weight that way? Is that sustainable?

[0:54:30] SV: Again, fasting could be one way to facilitate a caloric deficit. But it's not necessarily going to hold on to muscle mass because we haven't said anything about protein. We haven't said anything about what activities you're doing. But yeah, you will get to a point where your body will even out based on the deficit that you're creating.

[0:54:51] LW: How does that tie to me having a big booty? If I want to have a big booty, a big, nice –

[0:54:56] SV: Right. In the other end of the spectrum, this is where we actually need to be eating enough. Because actually, this is the other thing. It isn't just about protein. But let's say, you wanted to drop body fat and put on muscle, we do need to be eating enough of not just protein, but carbs and fats as well. I don't want to just slam protein as the star of the show. It definitely makes a difference and helps with satiation, helps with muscle building, but so do carbohydrates. That glucose is helping to shuttle nutrients into the muscle that we need. Again, I'm oversimplifying science here, but it's like, we need all of these macronutrients, and we need fiber as well.

For a big booty, we need to be training enough. I think in the book, I also talk about the fact that hypertrophy is not a dirty word. That's a really important one to me, because I still feel like, many women think that hypertrophy is a dirty word. If I feel nervous when I have to say, "Hey, we're going to have to grow some muscle." I mean, I was talking about abs the other day and people are like, "I want to just wish I could get rid of my belly fat." I'm like, "Yup. Okay. I understand that desire." Calorie deficit is one thing, but it's only going to take you so far if you want to have visible abs, for example.

In actual fact, this is where we need to actually put on – You have to have muscle underneath. Everyone assumes abs are made in the kitchen. But in reality, they're made in the gym. They're potentially revealed in the kitchen through a calorie deficit. But they have to be there. They have to be strong and developed. In that case, we need that muscle to grow. When I say to women, "We need to grow your butt," they're like, "What do you mean? I am trying to make it smaller." I'm like, you're trying to drop body fat. But essentially, you actually want those glutes to be bigger. In reality, we all want that, not just for aesthetics, but also, for function.

[0:56:46] LW: I know you tried vegetarianism for a couple of years. Plant-based dieting. Do you adhere to a certain diet now? Let's talk about food principles. When you say protein, what do you mean when you say carbs, glucose? What are you talking about? Obviously, it depends on life stage, age, location, etc., etc. But are there any principles that people listening to this could

start implementing? Obviously, not eating a lot of refined processed foods and sugar and stuff like that would be beneficial across the board, right? Alcohol, probably limiting that.

[0:57:21] SV: I definitely say, limiting alcohol is one. I try not to dichotomize food groups. I try not to label things as good and bad. The reason for that is not because I'm trying to be cryptic, or wishy-washy, but because we know that over time if we become too fixated on something being good and bad, we can develop a relationship with food that's somewhat dysfunctional. This is seen in the research, where people will, if they over-dichotomize foods and they start labeling sugar as bad, what can happen, it can just lead to dysfunctional eating disorder-type patterns. Sometimes, it can get really severe, and sometimes they're just covert and they just slowly dictate. Then you have some emotional thing that happens in your life and that derails you and suddenly, you're just binging on ice cream. That creates a chemical response in your brain and your body. Then suddenly, it can open you up to being vulnerable to eating disorders, or to very different things.

Now, I don't want to pathologize anyone or be like, this will definitely lead to this, so don't do it. We obviously have to have some understanding of what is optimal and not optimal for the body but within reason. I try to have a door-open approach. I actually talk about this a bit like monogamy and non-monogamy as well. Sometimes people that are in monogamous relationships go, "I'm really off track here." I will come back to the point, Light. I promise. Don't get mad at me afterwards.

When it comes to things, like everything, food, any pleasure, in a monogamous situation, sometimes when that door is closed and it's like, you're never allowed to talk to anyone ever again. No flirting, no talking, no interacting, blah, blah, blah, whatever it might be. Don't like their pics, don't do anything. That suddenly makes that person feel like, "Well, what's on the other side of the door? What if there's someone great out there? What if there's something really great?" Sometimes this can lead to someone cheating, or hiding things, or lying, or whatever, because they're like, "Oh, but it made it so much more appealing."

Where an actual fact, if that door is somewhat open and obviously, within reason, you have to decide what's right for you in a relationship, but it's like, if you can be safe enough and vulnerable enough and open enough to be like, let's leave this door ajar and just see what

happens. Suddenly, you – this is a terrible analogy, but you take the bullets out of the gun. Suddenly, it's not so loaded. It's like, okay, cool.

The same thing, I think happens with food. It's like, if you start labeling like, “I can't have any sugar and this is really important that I just stick to these greens only and this clean food,” then those times when you're feeling a little bit like, ah, you may just find yourself exploding into overconsumption. What that leads to and this is what I'm talking about is seen in the research is this yo-yo dieting, where you will have someone that goes hyper, hyper-strict and then suddenly, can't handle it and it's not sustainable.

But then, they don't just have a little something-something on the side. It's full-blown, intense pizza, hamburger, blah, blah, blah, all of these things, because they're just like, “I can't get enough.” They have it and then they feel really bad. Sometimes other things will come up. They might purge, or they might whatever. Or maybe, they just go, “Okay. You know what? Diet starts tomorrow. I'm going to go strict again.” They hold that down for maybe two months. It's this thing.

This is why, I guess, one of the strongest principles that I would have is like, no more dichotomizing foods. Sugar has its place. All food is nourishment in a way. All food. Even a refined, processed foods, they offer something to us. However, I would say that these hyper-palatable, really delicious foods that maybe don't have as much nutrients as fruit and veg, they may offer us something that's just enjoyable for a sweet moment that we want to experience with someone else, or by ourselves, or whatever. That's fine. Allow yourself to have that. Release that pressure, so that it doesn't build up and turn into some insane binge.

At the same time, know that other foods are going to nourish you better. This is why a second principle, I would say, is like, it is not – I don't know if you've ever heard this, Light, but it's like, 80% diet, 20% exercise, or some people say, it's 50% of both, or whatever. To me, it is 100% percent of both of them. They actually have a bidirectional relationship. Yes, your food intakes and choices are going to impact your training. If you eat a shitty meal constantly, you're going to feel that when you start training. Therefore, your food can be somewhat supportive of your training. Not just because it's providing you nutrition, but also psychologically, making you go,

“Ooh, training –” It's just like when someone has a cigarette and then they try and train, they're like, “Oh.” Okay. It makes you want to quit smoking.

Now, exercise helps you with your food and helps you with your diet adherence, because you know that if you don't train, then your food is not going to have the same level of adherence, or power, or meaning to you. When you're training really hard, suddenly, food becomes valuable in a very different way. You suddenly care about the value and the nutrient value of the food that you're eating, because you know it's supporting your performance. There is really an interaction going on between the two of them, so I think we just should never separate them out.

Then in terms of, let's give it third principle. Third principle is, yes, there's all the other macronutrient calorie deficit type principles that exist and I think it's definitely worth understanding them, but just making sure that you acknowledge that the rest of your life is going to interact with those principles, and so how well can you be fluid in understanding how to keep applying them, without letting it completely derail you, or being too rigid?

[1:03:24] LW: You break all this down in your book, which you said, it's an ever-evolving body of knowledge, so I'm not sure if you still even subscribe to everything you wrote in your book and the sequence that you wrote it all. But even still, it's a good point of reference, I think, for the layperson.

[1:03:40] SV: Yeah. You know, I do. I 100% do. I mean, I still have the book with me here and I look through it and I'm like, “Yes, I still.” Because every now and then I'm like, “Is there anything that I would change here?” But I think the only thing that I would change, or it's not so much change is that I would just – it would just be longer. It would probably have more writing on psychology and mindset and understanding oneself and less of the workout section at the back, because there's obviously a workout, the exercise stuff and I feel like, I already have that in video form. It would be more informational.

[1:04:13] LW: Because you've said and you try, you can't out exercise pain, or painful breakups and things like that. That's a whole other area that, I think, people also discount when it comes to just living a holistic life. Yes, exercise is great, it's perfect. Meditation is great, it's perfect. But

there may be some other things that we need to look at as well in terms of becoming a student of ourselves.

Speaking of change, you had a very successful training career. You were training David Beckham and the cast of major motion pictures, and you decided to go back to school and study psychology. I'm curious, how are you going to bring that into the fold of what you've been doing? How are things changing, and what are you learning in that area of study that you're now starting to think differently, or apply to the diet, nutrition, and mindfulness stuff?

[1:05:11] SV: Yeah, it's a good question. I ask myself the same thing likely all the time.

[1:05:16] LW: You're still in process. The wheel is still spinning.

[1:05:18] SV: I will say, it really is, because, I guess, this was my naive perspective going into it was like, cool. I'll just get some of this knowledge and we'll just systemize it and apply it. But the tricky part of psychological sciences is anything that's empirically tested is very, we could say, robust in one way. But also with psychology, it's very difficult to robustly study anything. Because it's not like matter. There are huge debates in the science community, where they're like, psychology isn't a science. It never will be, because we're testing things that can't be definitely seen.

[1:05:53] LW: Yeah. It's all context.

[1:05:55] SV: It's all context-dependent and it's exactly. There are all these biases that influence things. You have experimental bias. You have different interactions that can create different outcomes when you're studying a cohort of people and how they're behaving. I think that the biggest takeaway though for me is probably, the behavior stuff. Behaviorists tried to move away from the psychoanalysts, like Freud and things like that. The behaviorists were like, "This is not a science, because we can't test projection. We can't test some of these things that Freud is bringing up." All we can test is what we see and therefore, we can test and measure behavior. The behaviorists came out.

I still know that there is the underworld of things. I know that there's a lot that psychological science doesn't know and it doesn't mean that it doesn't exist, just because it isn't measurable. But, I think the thing that I'm trying to take away the most from this that is applicable and systemizable to *The Virtue Method* is the behavior-based stuff. Humans do act in ways that are very, like we have certain behaviors that are elicited in certain circumstances, especially when it comes to learning and then applying that learning. I think it's just about integrating some of those things. I think that will be how it's integrated into *The Virtue Method*.

I'm particularly interested in addiction. Some of the interesting findings around addiction. The way that we look at it, I think, maybe we're looking at it with a lens that's like, you're broken if you have addiction. But I actually think, I look at it from the perspective of like, how else could we look at addiction? In what other ways could we look at it? Yeah, there's many avenues. But yes, behavior is one thing. Then, I guess, addiction is one type of behavior. It probably falls under the same category.

[1:07:50] LW: If someone's listening to this and they think, "Oh, I've always wanted to study psychology." You're now living in the UK, you just went back there, you were in Australia. How does it work? Are you doing an online thing? Or, what's the format?

[1:08:00] SV: Well, funny enough, so when I started, it wasn't COVID. At least it wasn't COVID in Australia. I think it was COVID, but I was like, "Oh, I may as well finish this." The world's in COVID and maybe when it comes out, at that point, we didn't know if we were ever coming out of it. In Australia, it was sunny, everyone was out and about, nothing was there. They'd locked the doors, so everything was fine. I was just going in on campus.

It is an on-campus degree. Then COVID hit Sydney and things got severe. Suddenly, everything went online. Basically, the degree became – I mean, it wasn't technically an online degree, but it just became one. Now, I was like, well, I could always just come back to the UK, because I'm doing everything online anyway. Obviously, I have the option to be on campus and I've done many semesters on campus, but there wasn't that much of a difference.

I personally love to learn IRL. I really love to learn in a group situation. I love experiencing people and I love experiencing the interaction between a teacher and a student, and how you

can ask questions in real-time that feels very connected and I do think that I learned better that way. It has been a bit of a struggle to make it work, but it's not impossible, if that makes sense. Right now, I'm doing semesters online. Then if and when I go back, I may do another semester face-to-face and see how that goes. But right now, we're surviving. We're doing well, so it's okay.

[1:09:31] LW: Beautiful. Then finally, you have amassed nearly half a million followers on social media over the years. There are a lot of fitness people and all kinds of influencers who don't get a lot of traction in social media. But I do think that you tend to be a lot more transparent with your process than people typically are. But I'm curious, what you would credit the traction and the engagement that you get on social media with, in case somebody is also, again, building a platform, and they want to know what the best practices are for someone who's considered to be an authentic, more authentic, public persona. Would you say, that's what it is? Or from your end of things, how would you look at that?

[1:10:18] SV: I think, first and foremost, I can't take credit, like whole credit. Coming back to this running theme of having mentors, having teachers, and really, I really appreciate learning from people. I had a lot of people come into my life and were generous with knowledge and information as to how I could, I guess, in a way, commercialize what I'm doing in a small degree. It was like, well, how do we take what you're doing as a personal trainer and make it bigger than just personal training your small community?

I had help from people that had expertise in various different business areas and things like that. I think the reason I say that, and want to acknowledge that is that I think it's important to acknowledge that nothing ever just is from one person alone. Even the most successful people have a huge team of people that have helped them along the way, good and bad. That has definitely been the case for me. And so, I very much credit those people that have helped me. You know what? Even the people that have not, because in some way, it's been helpful along the way.

The second thing that I would say is two main principles that I follow with my social media and content creation is I ask myself like, what is the takeaway here? The reason I ask myself that is that as a consumer watching and engaging with content that you're not paying for, you have to

remember that you're paying with your attention. People are paying you with their attention. I try to respect that fact and I think I don't want you to just watch me gallivanting around in my life. I want you to be able to take something away from that. What are you learning from this post that maybe you didn't know before?

I can't always provide that. Obviously, some people have been like, "Yeah, I know about calorie deficit. Thank you very much." But hopefully, I'm bringing topics and concepts that cause people to at least question something in some way, so there's some takeaway. Then, I think, the second principle, again, this is so ridiculous, but consider things that might get brushed over, like lighting and being – I know this sounds so ridiculous, but because social media is on our phones and we follow our friends and it grew out of Facebook, which was more about and MySpace and things like that, which was more about just friendship sharing and sharing pictures of our friends and things like that, it has this feeling of it being very casual, but it's not.

Just like a magazine is highly produced. Everything on Instagram is still highly produced, particularly if it's a business, even if it's a personal brand business. There's nothing wrong with that. We don't need to start getting upset and angry about authenticity and whether someone's authentic or not, because even the people that are like, "I'm authentic," it's like, it's a show. It's all a show, okay. The world, what is the Shakespeare quote?

[1:13:11] LW: Is a stage.

[1:13:13] SV: Exactly.

[1:13:12] LW: All the world is a stage.

[1:13:14] SV: All the world is a stage. Instagram is no different. It is a mirror of that fact. Or, we can't call it a fact, but we can just call it a Shakespearean concept. Truly know that if you're providing a show, what are some other qualities that you like? Yes, maybe some people like that rough and ready look that seems a bit casual and I know that's definitely trending on TikTok. But it's like, what you will still see is that there is an element of production value that goes into even those videos that seem like they were just whipped together.

Just consider things. I mean, right now, I have terrible lighting, because the light's gone from outside. But I always try to place myself in front of a window. I always make sure that the subtitles are in the right place. Things like that are just super important. If you are really trying to do something with your business online, your personal brand, consider those things with as much importance, as you would consider the takeaway or anything else in your business.

[1:14:12] LW: Beautiful. Well, thank you so much for coming on and sharing your story and giving us your tips and principles for optimizing those areas of our life. I just want to acknowledge you. Again, I've admired you from afar. I've gotten a chance to meet you in person a few times and work out with you, and you're the real deal, and that's one of the things I love about you and why I want to have you on here. I love your book. It's very thorough and accessible, so thank you for putting that out into the world. I'd love to have you back on here, just talking about some of these principles, because I think it's so fascinating. There's so much misinformation out there and I think we need somebody to bring those various factions together and maybe help people understand.

You don't have to dismiss this whole thing, because you don't like this person who promotes it. There's some usefulness there, there's some usefulness there. Let's talk about what's useful and how we can use those principles to optimize things.

[1:15:09] SV: Totally. Totally agree. I love that. Thanks for having me.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[1:15:13] LW: Thank you so much for listening to my interview with Shona Vertue. For more inspiration, you can follow Shona @Shona_Vertue. That's S-H-O-N-A_V-E-R-T-U-E. Of course, I'll drop links to everything else that Shona and I discussed in the show notes, on my website, lightwatkins.com/podcast. If this is your first time listening to the Light Watkins Show, we've got an incredible archive of interviews with many other luminaries, who also share how they found their path and their purpose, such as Marianne Williamson, the author and the presidential candidate, Zachary Levi. I've got a wonderful episode with him. Ed Mylett, the motivational speaker, and so many more.

You can even search my interviews by subject matter, in case you just want to hear episodes about people who've taken leaps of faith, or have overcome financial struggles, or people who've navigated health challenges. You can get a list of all of those episodes at lightwatkins.com/show. You can also watch these interviews on my YouTube channel if you want to put a face to a story. Just search Light Watkins Podcast on YouTube and you'll see the entire playlist.

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Then finally, to help me bring you the best guests possible, it would go a long way if you can just take 10 seconds to rate this podcast. All you do is you glance down at your screen and you click on the name of the podcast, you scroll down past the seven previous episodes and you'll see five blank stars. Just tap the one all the way on the right. If you feel inspired to go the extra mile, leave a review with the one episode that you recommend a new listener should consider starting with as an introduction to this podcast. It could be the episode that had the biggest impact on you personally, or it could be this episode.

Either way, thank you so much and I look forward to hopefully, seeing you back here next week with another story about somebody just like me, just like you, taking that leap of faith in the direction of their purpose. Until then, keep trusting your intuition, keep following your heart, and by all means, keep taking those leaps of faith. If no one's told you recently that they believe in you, I believe in you. Thank you, love you, and have a great day.

[END]