

EPISODE 181

“DH: It's not like the world started treating me like I was the Dalai Lama, and I did not start to think I was the Dalai Lama. I have lots of flaws, but I'm not that delusional. I think, because, the whole brand was built around me being a fuck-up, like it was all based on a cocaine-fueled panic attack, and the book was called, 10% Happier. I think, like built into the whole endeavor was the idea of, oh yeah, this is an unlikely meditation evangelist, somebody who we can relate to. I was protected in that way, protected from my own ego, and protected from other people, projecting too much on me, I think, in that way.”

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:39] LW: Hey, friend. Welcome back to the Light Watkins Show. I'm Light Watkins, and 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 as their mission in life. And 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.

Today, I am in conversation with a man who has single-handedly been responsible for helping to make meditation relatable to the masses, mainly through his books, *10% Happier*, *Meditation for Fidgety Skeptics*, both bestsellers might add, plus his 10% Happier Podcast, which I was honored to be a guest on a few years ago, as well as his popular app of the same name. Of course, I'm referring to Mr. Dan Harris, former ABC news anchor and journalist of 21 years, turned meditation advocate, keynote speaker. I guess you could even say social media influencer.

Dan had an infamous panic attack on live television back in 2004, where 5 million people saw him break down in a panic attack. Can you imagine? I mean, sounds horrible, but that ended up being the catalyst to getting Dan into meditation. It just goes to show how the universe will use whatever it needs to use in order to get us into our inner work. Anyway, when Dan wrote his first book, *10% Happier*, it had more of a memoir feel to it than a self-help feel and his mom actually

tried to talk him out of publishing it. He didn't think anybody was even going to read it and lo and behold, it became a runaway New York Times number one bestseller.

I pressed him on the backstory of how that happened because there's always a fascinating backstory revealing the behind-the-scenes, things that are going on when people are getting their books or services out into the market. Dan's story did not disappoint. In his book, he talked about meeting Joseph Goldstein, who was his very first meditation teacher, and he talks about how our concept of happiness and the pursuit of happiness is a little bit misleading.

I also opened up to Dan about my own experience with panic attacks. Believe it or not, Light Watkins has had what I feel was a panic attack and is something I've never spoken about before publicly. Dan graciously offered me some very useful insight to my own experience. It just goes to show vulnerability begets vulnerability. That's how it went down in this episode. We also talk about his upcoming project on love and the details behind his writing process.

As someone who's very much in media and who's been interviewed all over the place on the largest platforms. I wanted to approach Dan a little differently, to try to bring something fresh and new to the table. I think I succeeded in getting some new aspects of his backstory that we're all familiar with. I think you're going to enjoy this conversation. I think you're going to have a new appreciation for Dan's work and for where he comes from and for how he moves through the world today. So, without further ado, let's just get into it. Let's get right into my conversation with Dan Harris, so you can enjoy hearing his story in his own words.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:04:33] LW: Dan Harris, welcome to my podcast. We had a conversation back in 2018 when I came on the 10% Happier Podcast to talk about meditation. I just published my book, *Bliss More: How to Succeed in Meditation Without Really Trying*. You were asking me a lot of questions about the differences and my approach to meditation and mindfulness meditation. We had a very colorful, lively conversation around all of that. You of course are the author of *10% Happier* and you got your own story leading up to that. I would like to start our conversation taking it back a little bit further in childhood just so we can understand how you got to that point

on June the 7th, 2004, where you had that meltdown, the panic attack on live television. Can you just give us a bit of a montage of how you grew up and what led you to journalism?

[0:05:32] DH: Yeah. I had, like an unfathomably privileged upbringing. I was raised by two physicians in Boston or outside of Boston in a little town called Newton. They were and are happily married, very, very highly educated, great parents. I was a rebellious kid, a shitty student. Got into college, but only because my dad knew the dean. He had actually saved the life of the dean's wife.

[0:06:04] LW: You needed a hookup to get into Colby College?

[0:06:07] DH: Yeah, I did. I needed a hookup. Yeah, born on third base firmly. Then went to Colby College where I finally got my act together. I got very interested in academics and just being more serious about life generally and graduated and started getting into journalism and then I ended up working at ABC News for 21 years. Now, I'm a washed-up anchorman, an ex-anchorman.

[0:06:35] LW: This is like a pivotal moment in your backstory, this panic attack thing that you experienced. I would love to just double-click on that, just to enlighten the listener about where you've come from, because something I haven't really talked about before, Dan is, I have also experienced what I think was a panic attack. I'm not positive about this, but get this. It happened when I was teaching meditation. When I was teaching meditation, a part of my experience is — I do this whole Puja ceremony. I went to India and I learned how to do this whole Puja ceremony, which is where you sing this song in Sanskrit. It's about a three-and-a-half-minute long song. Nobody knows what the hell I'm saying, but I know what I'm saying and you're doing offerings, flowers, fruit, and da, da, da, da.

I found myself being overly worried about what if I mess up, what if I miss a word, what if I forget how to end this thing and my heart starts racing. It's like you have an out-of-body experience. I started feeling myself breathing a lot more rapidly. I ended up getting through the whole thing, but I was like, "Oh, this is really interesting how I'm in this meditation space and I've been meditating for many, many years, yet I'm experiencing this thing."

When you have something like that happen, especially when everyone's looking to you to be the person that's going to give them the thing that's going to keep them from having panic attacks, it's very confronting. It's not something I've ever talked about before, but I feel like, because you've been so open about your experiences, it makes me want to share my experiences. Can you talk a little bit about your experience with that? Was that the first time it ever happened? How did you know you were having a panic attack? What were some of your symptoms?

[0:08:37] DH: It's amazing how openness is contagious. It's like, as soon as you admit that you're fucked up, everybody's comfortable admitting that they're fucked up and it's like, yeah, I mean, I find that to be very powerful, actually. I heard this term. I didn't make it up, but I like it. Cathartic normalization that if you're willing to talk about the most embarrassing stuff that ever happened to you, you have to do it in the right way.

A friend of mine. I have a close friend named Sebene Selassie, who's a meditation teacher and she often, she quotes somebody else whose name I'm going to forget who says, that it's best to teach from scars, not wounds. If you're talking about, especially if you're in a teaching position. If you're talking about stuff that you've actually metabolized and dealt with, then it can be very useful. I think for other people, even just saying what you're dealing with actively right now, can be really helpful. You don't want to be oversharing and that's a funny and interesting line that we can get to.

Let me just get back to you in the panic or anxiety that you experienced. You can think of panic as just anxiety on steroids. Anxiety can come with an elevated heart rate, but panic, I think is when you, I'm not truly an expert in this, I'm an expert in having panic attacks and not necessarily an expert in describing them, but I do think that in order for it to be a true panic attack and I could be wrong about this. If psychiatrists are listening, I say this with apologies. It's a full fight or flight response. What you experienced may have been just high anxiety or panic. I don't know exactly where to draw that line.

One thing that came to mind when you were talking about it is one component of panic. I just learned this recently, even though I knew it intuitively. I didn't really know it explicitly, until a recent guest on my podcast explained it to me that a component of panic is a fear of social rejection. This is why so many people freak out in public speaking, because social rejection, we

are wired to have that as perhaps the primordial fear, because during evolution times a lonely human was likely a dead human. The only way we could survive was through cooperation and collaboration, etc.

It's possible, I could imagine and I'm projecting here that you're up there, you're worried about somehow the sneaky little thought infiltrated your mind stream of, "Am I doing this puja right?" Then, "Oh, my God. All these people are watching me and I'm starting to panic. But I'm the guy who's supposed to be the help you calm down guy. Now I'm panicking and shit, maybe they can see it." Now you panic more. Then there's this toilet vortex that happens as the mental proliferation interacts with the physiological response and the more panic you feel in your body, the more your mind freaks out and the more your mind freaks out, the more the body freaks out. So anyway, is any of what I'm describing landing for you?

[0:11:31] LW: Yeah. 100%. That's exactly how it went down. I had never experienced anything like that before, which is really odd until that moment. From what I gather, you also had that experience where you never had anything close to like, to that happening as a professional on live television, having done these thousands, and thousands, and thousands of times. Why do you think it happens at that time as supposed to any other time?

[0:11:59] DH: Well, to be honest, I had always had stage fright and I have joked that my career up until that point was a triumph of narcissism over fear, because I had very bad stage fright and did it anyway, because I liked being on television. I had never had a full-on panic attack on the air, but I'd had a few like dicey moments. I had had full on panic attacks, however, smoking weed as a teenager. Those were my first panic attacks.

Why I think it happened for the first time in a full-blown way in that June of 2004 on that morning, on Good Morning America is that I had a new cocaine habit which can change your brain chemistry. Just to be clear. I was not high while I was on the air, but I had spent a lot of time in the preceding years between 9-11 and the panic attack as a newly minted war correspondent, so I was in Afghanistan and I covered the Second Intifada in Israel and Palestine. I spent a lot of time in Iraq months and months and months in Iraq and that messed me up a little bit.

Then I started experimenting with cocaine a little bit, because it made me feel better. After I had the panic attack, I went to a shrink who explained to me that even though I wasn't high on the air or even really that close to the morning, my drug abuse was enough to change my brain chemistry and make it more likely for me to freak out. It's an interesting thing about panic, if your nervous system is degraded, it makes panic much more likely, so that obviously, if you're putting a lot of unhealthy chemicals into your bloodstream as I was doing, that can be a real contributor.

I highly doubt you were doing cocaine, but I mean it could have been possible that you had a few bad night sleep or there was some stressor in your life, economic stress, or romantic stress, or whatever that could have contributed in some way, but it's just a useful takeaway for anybody with panic or anxiety that one of the great preventative moves is to do all the things your mom told you to do, exercise, sleep well, eat right and meditate. Although, your mom might not have told you to do that, because those things will keep you in some equilibrium, homeostasis that will put you in a position where you're less likely to freak out.

[0:14:17] LW: Would you say that at the time you felt like being a journalist and war correspondent and all those things was a part of your – was it a line with what you felt like you were here to do? Did you feel like you were living your purpose, your dream and all the things?

[0:14:33] DH: I don't think I ever thought of my life in terms of purpose. I certainly was living my dream, but that dream was more I think egocentric than mission oriented. It was like – I remember growing up watching lifestyles of the rich and famous and watching movies, like Wall Street. My parents did not model this for me. They were actually ex hippies and they were quite idealistic actually and very committed physicians. So, we weren't super wealthy or anything like that, but somehow, I think it got in my head that I wanted or needed to be very successful and TV news struck me as like a great way to do that.

I guess, I did have some – it's possible, I'm being a little too hard on myself, because I think about motivation as a range. If you're honest and you look at the full range of motivations for anything you do, it will probably span somewhere between idealistic and craven. I've just described the craven aspect of my motivation. I would say the idealistic part of it was that I very much believed in journalism and the power and importance of journalism and the importance of bearing witness at the tip of the spear, so for me it was very important.

I thought it was very important to play the role of risking my life to explain to Americans what was being done with their tax dollars overseas, but I don't want to pretend that that was all that motivated me, because it was also curiosity, ambition, desire for success. But I don't think I would have ever framed it to get back to your question in terms of purpose.

[0:16:10] LW: The reason I'm asking is, because when people imagine I've got this crappy job and I'm not doing what I'm here to do, that experience could lead to a sense of panic or anxiety I'm falling behind, but then you have on the other end of the spectrum, you feel like you're very much doing what you're here to do and yet you have a little bit of imposter syndrome, like they're going to figure me out. Yeah, that I'm not this smart journalist or this wise meditation teacher who's always got a layer of calmness beneath. How do you think about that in relation to feeling those things, like panic and anxiety? If someone's listening to this, how would they be able to use that in a way to determine if I'm in the place where I'm supposed to be?

[0:16:55] DH: I think there's a lot in what you just said. I do think panic, the body is sending us signals all the time. We may not care to listen. I could imagine a scenario in which the body is telling you there's something about the way you're living that is off and that if you don't listen for long enough, it could scream at you in the form of a panic attack. I could imagine that happening. For me, I don't think – I mean, clearly my body was saying stop doing cocaine, but it wasn't about you're in the wrong line of work.

For me, it was closer to the imposter syndrome that you described that I was quite young. I was 28 when I arrived at ABC News and I had spent a bunch of years in local news in New England. All of a sudden, I was working with huge names in the news industry. People, it's very sad to me that I'm going to list these names and some of your listeners probably haven't heard of them, but Peter Jennings, and Barbara Walters, and Diane Sawyer, gigantic figures in the news, who I grown up watching.

I did feel, I don't know if like an imposter so much, but a little bit out of my depth and nervous and scrutinized. This need to prove myself and it's back to this social approbation that we discussed earlier that knowing at any given moment that Peter Jennings is watching me and evaluating whether he wants me to be on the show that night or that on the other side of the

room when I had a panic attack was sitting Diane Sawyer and Charles Gibson, two massive figures in the news. That absolutely, fuels the fear for sure.

I would say for people who feel like they're in the wrong line of work. I've recently been corrected, because I have often said, "You should follow your passion." Hopefully, I've said it in less hackney terms, but it's been pointed out to me recently that's a bit of a, it's an argument for the advantaged. Many people don't have the ability to follow whatever dream they may have. Some people may not simply be that passionate about any one thing. I've been lucky. So, if you like that, that I was passionate about journalism now passionate about mental health, meditation, and happiness. So, I've always had something that I've just loved and then, and that's really helped me pursue it, but for many people, there isn't something like that, never mind two things.

The passion can emerge through finding something you like well enough and committing and the interest and the energy can emerge from that in some cases. Then finally to say that I've had some guests on my show recently who've educated me about the fact that we may be spending too much time defining ourselves by our jobs and you may have a job that you're stuck in that feels like a dead end job, but maybe you shouldn't define yourself by your work. Maybe you define yourself by like the kind of person you are, the kind of friend you are, the kind of parent you are, the volunteer work you do, the hobbies you have. That's just all been a very useful shift for me in terms of like how I talk about work stuff publicly.

[0:20:03] LW: Yeah. I wrote in my recent book, don't even worry about trying to find your passion or your purpose, just follow your curiosity. Then through following your curiosity, eventually your purpose or whatever it is that you're meant to do in the season of your life will eventually find you. So, you have this panic attack, you go home, and somehow, somehow you find yourself in the meditation. Walk us through that process. What was your relationship with meditation like prior to that day? How did you find yourself embracing this practice?

[0:20:34] DH: I think my attitude about meditation was somewhere between I never thought about it and openly hostile, like I said, my parents were ex hippies. I have this formative memory of them forcing me to go to a yoga class when I was five years old. The teacher did not like my

jeans and made me take them off and do the class in my tidy whiteys. So, I hated yoga and all things.

I also then went to Colby College, which was filled with lots of grateful dead-listening hippies, which I did not like, so I hated anything having to do with the new age or crystals or incense or anything like that. I was completely ignorant about meditation. To be clear, it's not I started meditating as soon as I had the panic attack and quit doing drugs. There was a strange journey that I talk about in my book that I won't bore you with now, but ultimately, over several years, I landed through several misadventures on meditation and what changed my mind was the science.

This was about 2009. I like to joke that this is the first time in my life I've ever been ahead of a trend, because meditation wasn't cool at that time. But I started to notice all of the science that strongly suggests that meditation can be very good for you, rewire key parts of your brain, and be very good for anxiety and depression, both of which I've struggled with since I was a little kid. That's what really got me interested. I would say one other thing, which is one of the steps along the way towards me getting interested was I read a book by a guy named Eckhart Tolle, who I know you've heard of him, Light, but he's some listeners might not have. He's a huge, best-selling, self-help writer.

I had never heard of him. One of my colleagues recommended I read his book. There was a lot I didn't like about Eckhart Tolle, but there was one thing I really liked, because he was the first person who ever pointed out to me that we all have a voice on our heads. This inner narrator that is chasing you out of bed every morning and is yammering at you all day long and you're constantly like in its thrall, wanting stuff, not wanting stuff, judging people, comparing yourself to other people, thinking about the past or the future instead of whatever's happening right now.

When you're unaware of this non-stop conversation, which if we broadcast aloud, you would be locked up. When you're unaware of this chaos and cacophony, it just owns you. You just act out every little thought like as my meditation teacher says, like a tiny dictator. Tolle, that wasn't actually his insight, but he was the first person I ever heard talk about it. Then I got turned on to the Buddha, who was, I think, really onto this 2600 years before Eckhart Tolle.

I got very interested in Buddhism and meditation. Then I started to learn about the science, and I started to do it myself for a couple of minutes every day. I noticed that it was helpful. I often tell the story about how a month after I started meditating, my wife and I were at a cocktail party and I overheard her say to somebody, “Yeah, Dan started meditating and he's a little bit less of a shitbag.” I thought that was really funny, but it was also, like a really good data point, because often it's the other people in your life who noticed change before you do.

Somewhere in that time, I got the idea of like, “Oh, I'm reading all these books about meditation. They're really helpful.” But I suspect other skeptics like me would find them annoying. So, maybe I'll write a book that uses the F word a lot and tells really embarrassing stories and has a sense of humor and is really directly aimed at skeptics through the humor, through the reliance on science, and finally, through something you and I talked about and that you personally modeled a few minutes ago like which is through this cathartic normalization. I want people to get a sense of like, “If this guy can do it, I can do it.” So, that's what all led up to my writing a book in 2000 — or publishing a book in 2014.

[0:24:33] LW: Did you write the book yourself? Did you have help?

[0:24:36] DH: I wrote it myself for better or worse. I had lots of help in terms of editing. I had an editor at the publisher. I actually hired a freelance editor, which is really helpful just to have somebody who's a little less busy than the professional editor at the publishing house. He was on my dime, so he took his time and really read it carefully and said, “Here are the parts that don't work.” Then I have a big kitchen cabinet, my wife, my brother, several of my bosses, and several friends who read. I have a screenwriter friend who was extremely helpful on this. I give it to a lot of people and then I get a lot of notes and then I do all of the rewriting myself.

Yeah. I'm a control freak in that. I want every word to be mine. However, I'm really open to and really trained in a system where you get a lot of intense feedback, because that's how television news works. It's a very collective activity. I wanted it to be in my voice, but I also know how fallible I am, so the notes really helped.

[0:25:37] LW: Yeah. I mean, you're also considered a local celebrity in New York City. You have a wife and a very busy life. How do you find time to write the book yourself when a lot of people would just hire a ghostwriter and just, have a couple of interviews and that kind of thing?

[0:25:56] DH: Yeah. I don't want to portray my decision not to hire a ghostwriter as some noble act. It really, I didn't think it was an ego. A lot of it was an ego. Well, first of all, I took five years to write it. I didn't rush it. Second. I didn't have a kid at the time. I had a wife, but she was at the time of more than fully employed physician at an elite institution in Manhattan. So, it was not that hard for me to find the time. Also, at that time I traveled a lot as a journalist. I would travel around the world and around the country. I would just work everywhere I went.

This is in my late thirties, early forties. I had a lot of energy. Now, I'm 52 and like I said, five or six years into writing my next book. I don't have a day job the way I used to, but I also have less energy. I'm not the energizer bunny, I used to be. Yes, sometimes I just have to lie down on the floor in the middle of writing.

[0:26:54] LW: This being your first book, is it took many, many years. Were you doubtful that people, I mean, it's insane — it became really popular in New York Times bestseller, but during the process of those handful of years, were you doubtful that this book was going to be any good for anyone?

[0:27:09] DH: Every day. Every day. The world was aiding and abetting in that doubt. I shopped the book around to a million publishers. Nobody wanted it. I finally got —

[0:27:19] LW: Did you write it first and then shopped it or you had the proposal and then you shopped —

[0:27:23] DH: I had several chapters and a proposal and nobody wanted it. One editor bit and paid me very little money.

[0:27:31] LW: What were they saying?

[0:27:33] DH: I didn't get any feedback. They were just like, "Pass." I remember I was standing with my literary agent two or three days after the book came out. Again, I did not expect this book to be popular. It was really taking off within days. He showed me an email from one of the editors who had passed and all it said was, "Fuck."

[0:27:56] LW: Wait. Wait. Your mom even told you not to publish the book.

[0:27:59] DH: My mom. Yes, but not that she thought the book was bad, but my mom was worried that my admitting that I had panic attacks and did cocaine and all that stuff that was going to tank my career, because bear in mind. We've gone through a lot of cultural changes since 2014.

[0:28:14] LW: Yeah.

[0:28:15] DH: Now, it's like really widely acceptable to talk about mental health, but it was not at that time. Definitely, not for anchorman. It was a really risky move. My publisher was so unenthusiastic about the book that she tried to bargain me up to 30% happier. Because she thought that would be a better title. She only printed 15,000 copies. Within days, they ran out of books. That was because, just to say it's not that the book was that amazing and that's why it sold. It's because I worked for the biggest media company in the world, Disney, which owns ABC news.

My bosses and colleagues, like especially, Diane Sawyer, actually, we've already referenced. Were insanely supportive of this. Diane did two stories on the evening news about the book. I was on Good Morning America twice. I did a full half hour on Nightline. I was on the view, like everybody. All of the shows within the Disney ABC news family supported the hell out of this. I actually, haven't thought about this in a minute, but it's moving even to recount that. That's why the book, especially at first, did so well, because my colleagues were really in my corner. That was, I think, really amazing. I will say that Barbara Walters, when she heard about the book several years before it came out, she literally said the words, "Don't quit your day job."

[0:29:44] LW: Do you think they read the book or they just were really supportive of you?

[0:29:49] DH: Diane read the book and gave me notes. The president of ABC news, who then went on to be the president of all of ABC, Ben Sherwood, read it twice and gave me notes both times. After the first time he read it, I did a major rewrite and it was already, you'll know these technical terms. It was already in first pass. I had already gone through a copy edit – and one other person came back with some pretty significant notes and I did a frantic rewrite.

[0:30:16] LW: What did they tell you to do more of as –

[0:30:19] DH: It was really about the issue of likability, that I was portraying myself in some rather lazy ways, that I was very careful in how I wrote about other people, but in myself and writing about myself, I made myself look a little crazy. I really went back and worked on that. Over the course of three days before the drop-dead deadline, I read it aloud to my wife and she would just stop me every other sentence and say, “You repeated that word or you sound like a douchebag there or whatever.” I just sweated and toiled over this thing, like right up until the end.

I think my doubt, there's good doubt and pernicious doubt. I think a lot of my doubt about the quality of the book over the five years to get back to your original question was well placed. I was a C-level network newsman writing about a very niche concern, meditation. It was my first book. I didn't know how to write a book. I was teaching myself how to write a book while I wrote it. It wasn't very good.

I think through just stubbornness and refusing to give up, I made it passable by the end. I would like to say that there is a good stubbornness and a bad stubbornness. I am guilty of both. One of my strengths, if I get an idea, I will not let it go, but that's also an interpersonal weakness because, and I've really done a lot of work on this to have more of an open mind about lots of things in the world. Yeah, it's a mixed blessing.

[0:31:49] LW: Every book I've written with the exception of my most recent book, *Travel Light*, the publisher has given me the title. This is the goal we're going to call the book, right? Every time again, they'll let me give them some of my ideas of what titles I want. I remember when I interviewed Herbert Benson about the relaxation response, he said, he came up with that term

when he was shaving one day. I'm just curious, what's the backstory with *10% Happier*? Were you on the toilet? How did you come up with this term?

[0:32:17] DH: You need to call me before you write your next book and well, I'm going to give you a, a buck up speech, because you should be insistent that you get the title you want. It's your thing. Yes. They did. They did try it. They also, not only did they try to get me to go with 30% happier, but they also mocked up a cover with the title, *Be Happy Now*. I had a fit because like the whole idea was, I wanted to write something that had more of a skeptical edge that was funny. So, *Be Happy Now* is like the exact opposite of that. It was not only, was it a terrible title, but they weren't listening to me. They didn't have any sense of what I was trying to do. So, I was very frustrated.

To answer your question, as discussed earlier, I got very interested in meditation a little bit before the world got interested in it. In 2009, and 2010, I'm doing my first, I'm really committing to a daily practice. In 2010, I did my first meditation retreat, a 10-day silent meditation retreat. Then I came home from that retreat and one of my very close colleagues, a friend, Chris Sebastian, I mentioned to her that I done this retreat and she was like, "What is the matter with you? Why would you do that? Why are you meditating at all? You used to be cool? Why is this happening?" I said, "Oh, because it makes me like, 10% happier. I could see the whole look on her face change from scorn to like interest.

I thought, okay, this is my stick. This is how I'm going to talk about it. I'm going to counter-program against the reckless over-promising that happens in the darker precincts of the self-help world. Hopefully, people will get the joke that you can't quantify happiness in that way. So, it's like, it's kind of multi-layered. Now though, that I'm stuck with math for the rest of my life, because people are always asking me like, "What do you mean by 10% happier?"

What I mean is that perfection is not on offer, but marginal increases in happiness. That is on offer and like any good investment, the 10% will compound annually. All of the mental states that you want. At the end of the day, all you really want is positive mental states. You might think you want achievements or a new car. I bought a new car today. A used car, actually. You might think that's what you want, but really what you want is the state of mind that accompanies that pride,

connection, recognition, a sense of achievement, happiness, peace of mind, all of these mental states.

These are not factory settings that are unalterable. They are skills that you can train. That is what I'm trying to signal through *10% Happier*. It's like, yeah, you can take responsibility for this shit. No matter how bad you fucked up in the past, no matter how badly the world has screwed you. You have some agency here. Doesn't alleviate your prior scraps or the injustices in the world, but it just, it's this little pocket of agency that is very powerful. That's really what I'm trying to signal there. I'm actually in a fight with my current editor about the title for my next book. I plan to be, this will not surprise anybody listening thus far, very stubborn in defense of my idea.

[0:35:53] LW: *10% Happier* becomes a runaway, crazy bestseller. I looked at it today, it's got like 19,000 reviews, which is insane. You having taken this nuanced approach to this idea of becoming a little bit happier as a result of this practice are now thrust into being seen, I'm sure by a lot of people as a meditation guru. The embodiment of the practice. How are you navigating that, trying to keep it real, trying to be authentic, trying to tell the truth of your experience while you have essentially the world treating you like you're right up there with the Dalai Lama and Eckhart Tolle?

[0:36:33] DH: That's not quite what happened, luckily. I mean, a lot of complicated shit happened, but it's not, like the world started treating me, like I was the Dalai Lama. I did not start to think I was the Dalai Lama. I have lots of flaws, but I'm not that delusional. I think, because the whole brand was built around me being a fuck up, like it was all based on a cocaine fueled panic attack. The book was called *10% Happier*. I think like built into the whole endeavor was the idea of, "Oh, yeah. This is an unlikely meditation evangelist." Somebody who we can relate to. So, I was protected in that way, protected from my own ego, and protected from other people projecting too much on me, I think in that way.

That being said, the universe started to rain down upon me lots of opportunities. I got a book deal to write three more books. I started a podcast. I started a meditation app with a venture capital funding. I started giving all these speeches. I started getting invited onto big TV shows that I'd only ever seen on TV. That was complex, because it really kicked into high gear. This acquisitiveness. This back to the lifestyles of the rich and famous. This idea of this hyper

ambition, which I now really see is rooted in fear. That was complicated. As part of the over committing that I then did, because I kept my job at ABC News. I was the anchor of Nightline. I was the anchor of the weekend edition of GMA, Good Morning America.

I was a traveling investigative reporter around the world. I had a meditation app, a podcast, a multi-book deal. I was doing all of this at the same time. Then in the middle of that, we had a kid, our first kid, our only child. I was way over-committed. I was being a dick. It wasn't so much that I fell into the trap of thinking I was God's gift or anything like that. It was more that this opportunity weaseled its way right into one of my vulnerabilities, which is this, fear-based greed.

[0:38:37] LW: That was going to be another one of my questions, but I have a friend who wrote, I think it's to date the most popular vegan book in the world. It's this, no-nonsense book called, *Skinny Bitch*, where she uses a lot of –

[0:38:49] DH: Oh, yeah.

[0:38:51] LW: She got to the point several years later where she said people were expecting her to still show up like that, and be cursing, and keeping it real. She didn't feel like that anymore. I'm curious if there's anything about your journey with presenting yourself as this skeptic, that after having practiced meditation for many years, you realize I'm not really the person I was when I first started this journey, but people are still expecting me to show up as this person. Is there any truth to that within your experience?

[0:39:26] DH: It's a bit of a different spin. I think the book was the first time in my life I'd ever been publicly honest and real. I have been an anchorman for 20 years leading up to that, which is like inherently a bullshit job. Right? I mean, like your – it's an important job and I love to doing it and I actually miss it, but you're not yourself when you're anchoring the news, right? At least I wasn't. I think it's the very rare person that can be really authentic as they're delivering the news.

Interestingly, over time, especially as a morning news anchor in my later years. I actually, was getting closer to that, because I was starting to take myself a little less seriously as a little older and a more comfortable my skin. I'd had this experience of getting up and admitting to the world

the most embarrassing shit in my life and getting a standing ovation, which is really encouraging.

Again, not in that I was thinking, like I'm the man. Although, I think, I guess I thought that a little bit. mostly it was a relief that you can be honest. Now, I feel like as a result of that book, I am way more myself than I've ever been. The version of me that is talking to you right now, I do swear a lot, like from around the house, I swear a lot. Yeah, and I tell embarrassing stories and this is me. In terms of my skepticism about meditation, that has obviously changed. It's almost 10 years since the book came out. It's about 15 years since I started meditating. I have a very different attitude about it now.

I actually had this attitude when the book came out. By the end of *10% Happier*, the story, I'm like a pretty committed Buddhist and that is what I am today. I'm even less skeptical now, of course, and my practice as I hope move forward. I'm even more interested in esoteric, deep end aspects of the practice. But no, I don't feel trapped by it at all. I think part of it is, I took this big risk to be fully myself in that book. Therefore, it didn't create a prison for me, because it was just the truth.

[0:41:32] LW: What's your relationship like with terms like reincarnation, karma, destiny, enlightenment as a practicing Buddhist?

[0:41:41] DH: I have like a – I hope and intellectually humble approach to all of this, because I've not experienced reincarnation firsthand to my memory, nor am I enlightened. Karma, I think is actually something you can explain in very down to earth terms. Destiny, I'll set aside, because I'm not sure I believe in that at all, but karma in the Buddhist sense is just cause and effect. This happens, so that happens. Light invites me on his podcast. I'm on his podcast. We exist on the lip of a vast ocean, an unfathomably large ocean of causes and conditions that have landed us in this very moment.

Dating back to the Big Bang and perhaps beyond. This has happened. Then that happened. This happened. That happened. A bunch of Jews got chased out of Eastern Europe. Now, I live here. There's just – two nerds met at Stanford Medical School and had a baby and now I'm here. So, like there's all of this stuff that has happened to lead us to right now. That's my

understanding of karma. What's interesting about enlightenment is it sounds like a serene subject. I guess, if you were enlightened, it must be serene, but as a subject matter, as soon as you start talking about enlightenment, you're in an argument, because there are all these different traditions, even within Buddhism. They have different conceptions of what is nirvana, how does one achieve it? What are the impacts of that experience? How many times you need to experience it to be fully enlightened.

I find all that very interesting, but I have to be humble because I've never had an experience in nirvana or enlightenment. Then finally, on reincarnation. Again, I have no evidence. I'm an agnostic. I'm not going to sit here and say it's not true. I do have this sense that I'll be curious to hear what you think about this. I have this like sense for which I have no evidence, just an increasing suspicion that maybe it's true. I don't know why I feel that way. Maybe I've just spent too much time in Buddhist circles, but do you feel that way as well?

[0:43:52] LW: For me, the spiritual path is holding a space for things that you don't have a lot of evidence for, but it resonates on a deep level. I interviewed this guy, Dr. Jim Tucker on my podcast. Have you heard of him before? He's –

[0:44:07] DH: Oh, from Virginia?

[0:44:07] LW: Yeah. University of Virginia.

[0:44:08] DH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. He's on Netflix. He's incredible.

[0:44:11] LW: Yes. Yes. He came on and talked about the scientific approach to reincarnation. He studies these cases that are almost exclusively reported by young children below the age of six. They still have a memory of things that they've experienced from a time that it doesn't relate to what they're currently experiencing, and it's very accurate to stop. It's really compelling. I think you should have them on your podcast if you're interested, but they could lead to an amazing conversation about that.

[0:44:42] DH: It's interesting. There's a Netflix series, I think it's called After Death or something like that.

[0:44:47] LW: Yeah. Something like that.

[0:44:48] DH: Surviving death or something like that. One of the episodes about reincarnation, they follow him as he interviews these kids who have these very vivid memories of past lives, and he gives them these tests and they're able to show.

[0:45:02] LW: Show some pictures.

[0:45:02] DH: Yes.

[0:45:02] LW: One of the high school that they claim they attended and another just random high school, and he sees that they can recognize which one is the one that they – and they recognize it with like 95% accuracy or something like that.

[0:45:14] Yes. I was watching that one night here at our house with Joseph Goldstein, who's this eminent Buddhist teacher. He's my meditation teacher. I mean, he's almost 80 years old, just a legend in the meditation world. He was spending the weekend with us, and my wife and son had gone to bed, and he and I were up late watching Netflix, and we watched that together. He knows I'm a skeptic, and at the end of it, he looked over at me and said, "See." I found it very compelling. I did later learn that I'm not sure how strong the science is here, really, but those anecdotal stories are very compelling. I certainly wouldn't pound the table and say that they're absolute proof, but seeing stories that, and then I don't know, just having this sense that what it's often talked about the third law of thermodynamics, energy cannot be created or destroyed.

If this mind stream that we're in, that we mistakenly claim as our own. If this mental energy that is us on some very hard to find level, does that just completely dissipate when we die or is it possible that it goes on in some other form? I don't know. I mean, we're getting pretty mystical here, but I'm certainly open to that.

[0:46:30] LW: I don't know if anybody can say definitively when you're in a body that this is how it is until you die, and you get to actually see, "Okay, is there anything after this?" But what I've

been trying to do. I encourage people who follow my work to do is just to adopt the belief that empowers you the most, since no one can say definitively one way or the other. If reincarnation is real or if it's not real, just which one of those two approaches makes you feel like you can be more yourself. Makes you feel like you could be more authentic. That's the lens through which I try to present this stuff.

I agree it can be a little bit off-putting if you're especially if you're very science-minded. This idea of enlightenment even, where it can veer off into this spiritual competition. Who's the most enlightened or what's the most enlightened response to this scenario? I have equated enlightenment with just being authentic, just being yourself. The degree to which you can be yourself, is the degree to which you are enlightened. Meaning you understand that you may be a spirit, but you're also having the human experience. So, everyone else has as well.

I think when we get upset with people and we get offended by people in a way, it's because we're holding them to a higher standard than we even hold ourselves to. So, one of the consequences of moving closer towards enlightenment is you just, you're not offended as much. You don't get upset as much. If you do get upset or offended, it passes more quickly. That's my understanding about the whole thing.

[0:48:06] DH: Well, I'm definitely not enlightened, because I get pissed off all the time. I would add that another way to think about it is, well, Joseph Goldstein, we just talked about often describes enlightenment as lightning up and not taking yourself so seriously. I sometimes describe it as like pulling your head out of your ass. I had heard a really interesting definition of morality the other day. That's such a loaded term, obviously. I had this professor on from Yale to Tamar Gendler. She studies ancient Greek and Roman philosophy. She described morality as the consciousness that there are other people on the planet besides just you.

I think enlightenment is like lowering the ego walls, getting a sense that you're not this isolated ego peering fretfully out at the world through your eye sockets that in fact, you are inextricably interwoven into something larger. This is the experience people have when they take psychedelics. This is like at the core of every religious and mystical tradition. Yeah, I think it's also the way to be happier. I often tell people to think about this. Well, what's your mind when you hold the door open for somebody? This tiny little moment. If you're paying attention, it feels

pretty good and you're probably not worried about your own bullshit at that moment. That is like infinitely scalable or organize your life around being useful.

It doesn't mean you have to like wear a hair shirt and give away all of your possessions, but you can orient your life around the question that another great spiritual teacher, Ram Dass, has asked his students to pose, which is, how can I help? Again, we're not saints. I'm not. I lose that question sometimes, but just to have it, like I got a little tattoo recently on my wrist, F-T-B-O-A-B it's an acronym for Buddhist expression for the benefit of all beings. It's a little bit cheesy, in my opinion, but it's just a great reminder.

I look here a lot, because my watch is here on my left wrist and I look down a lot to look at my watch or if I'm working out. You look down sometimes. Just anything you could do to remember to wake up, pull your hat out of your ass. Again, you are part of all beings. This doesn't have to be tragic altruism where you're giving away, you're being worthy of being a shit about too, but anything you could do to remind yourself to wake up, to get out of the sleepwalking that most of us do in most of our lives. That's a step toward what you might call enlightenment, or if you don't like that term, just like improvement.

[0:50:52] LW: What about toxic positivity? I have a love-hate relationship with this term. What's your thinking on toxic positivity?

[0:51:01] DH: Like going on Instagram and everybody's got hashtag blessed and things like that.

[0:51:06] LW: Yeah. I guess so.

[0:51:07] DH: That move feels forced, earnest, inauthentic. Life is amazing. There's so much positive stuff in the world, and we are wired to see the negative. We have an evolutionarily wired negativity bias. So, it's great to counteract that in some ways to tune into all the amazing stuff that's happening around you all the time. That being said, life is also ugly and difficult, and bloody, and messy, and unfair. You don't want to overlook that either. I think it's just about having a balanced view. How does that sound to you?

[0:51:47] LW: Well, I think to your point, we're wired for pointing out all the ways life is unfair, and life is bloody, and messy, and all of that. I think it's not really all that remarkable to just reiterate how screwed up everything is. I think it could be useful, personally just to – like for instance, I have a very small cohort of friends. A lot of my friends challenge my beliefs, because I can be negative sometimes, obviously. I'm human and I can be in a situation where I'm feeling like I'm being slighted or taken advantage of and not report to these friends of mine. This or that happened. They'll help me see the bigger picture. That's one of the reasons why I value these particular, like I don't want somebody tell, basically reiterating the negative aspects of it or instigating something that's not going to make me feel better.

I also understand that I'm very much asking for that. There's a reciprocity within those dynamics where I'm also doing the same thing for them. Maybe not everybody has that same level of reciprocity. So, like anything, I think there's a time and place for it. If you're in a space for that to have the positivity reinforced in an authentic way as well. For me, that means you're not making the other person out to be the villain and you're not making yourself out to be the victim. There's within that term gray area, there's some learnings there and the opportunity is to take what's useful and to leave the rest of it behind.

[0:53:22] DH: Two expressions are coming to mind as I'm listening to you talk. One is, I forget who said this first one, but it's relevant to the idea of recognizing that the world is both beautiful and horrifying. What do you do in response to this reality? The expression is participate joyfully in the sorrows of the world. I like that. I can capture the paradox. I think that's the same approach. Then the other expression that came to mind, and I heard this from Robert Waldinger, who is the latest chief of a long-running multi-generational study of people who live in the Boston area.

Been studying people there for like 80 or 90 years and looking at who lives the longest and why? What comes screaming through the data is that the most important variable is the quality of your relationships. How does that impact your longevity? Because stress is the biggest killer and stress can be reduced through doing what we were evolutionarily wired to do, which is to be with other people. The expression that he uses that came to mind when you were describing your friendships is, “Never worry alone.”

[0:54:29] LW: When I met my teacher in 2003, I knew within about 10 minutes that this man was meant to become my teacher and I was going to learn a lot from him. You've mentioned Joseph Goldstein. I'm sure, if somebody here is listening to this is thinking, "I don't have a meditation teacher." How did you know he was meant to be your teacher? What does that even mean to you? What is a teacher-Dan Harris relationship like when it comes to meditation? Do you guys talk on a regular basis? Do you listen to his recordings? Do you hang out all the time? If someone's listening to this and they don't have a teacher, what can they do to locate a teacher?

[0:55:10] DH: Excellent question. I'll start by talking about my relationship with Joseph. It's a bit idiosyncratic. Then I'll try to say something more generally useful. I met Joseph on my first meditation retreat. Meditation retreats, especially with Joseph, are almost impossible to get into. Just like I got into Colby, because I had a connection, because I'm, like hitting me. I've got all the privileges. Literally everyone. I have – except for I'm not tall. I'm short, so I don't have that one, but I got everything else.

White male, straight, wealthy, all that stuff. This is another example of my overweening privilege, but Sam Harris. We're not related, but he's a very famous atheist, writer and meditation proponent and a good friend. I think of him as a mentor, really. Sam is an old friend of Joseph's. Sam was trying to get me to go on my first meditation retreat, and he got me into this retreat with Joseph. Because I really admire Sam, I was already primed to really like Joseph, but then during the course of this 10-day meditation retreat, this guy would get up and give these talks.

First of all, he's the exact same age as my dad, like my dad, he's a New York Jew, and like my dad, he's super brainy. My dad went into medicine, but this guy, Joseph, took that same intellectual horsepower and applied it to the Dharma. He talked about the Dharma with the same **[inaudible 0:56:36]** energy that my dad would talk about medicine. I just found that irresistible. He's so smart, so funny. He grew up in a bungalow colony, like hotel for Jews in the Catskills. It was the type of place where comedians would come through every Saturday night, like the guys named Shecky or whatever, come through and work the crowd.

He has that borscht belt humor, literally borscht belt. That's where he grew up. He has that humor, which is, of course, like a huge part of my family upbringing. So, to have this guy was so

smart, so insightful, saying so many things that really opened my mind and doing it with a sense of humor. It was just like a perfect combination. I basically just forced him to be my friend. We knew some people in common. I would see him in some of these settings. He basically offered me one day to, he's like, "Do you want me to be your meditation teacher?"

We're actually – I remember we were at dinner with a group of people. He said that to me pretty casually. Somebody else at the table kicked me into the table and was like, "That's a big deal. You should take advantage of that." I didn't really understand what a big deal it was. It's not like I'm sitting at the feet of the master on the regular and he's calling me grasshopper and instructing me and the ways of the world all the time. In the Buddhist tradition, they talk about gurus as like a spiritual friend. Literally, friend.

He's like a friend or an uncle. He just knows a lot about this thing that I really care about. So, I call him when I have problems in my life. I call him to talk about my practice. I go on meditation retreat once or twice a year with him. He'll come stay with us just socially. He's just a huge part of my life. For all the things I'm grateful for. I'm I keep making jokes about how many advantages I've had in my life, because I really tried to be grateful for them. My relationship with Joseph is right up there, just like an unearned gift that I've received. I'm very grateful for that.

In terms of how other people can get a teacher. This is a tricky thing. Then there is no real system for this. I think it's something that it's from an, like entrepreneurial standpoint. It's kind of an opening in the market. There should be a better system for matching people with teachers. If there's a teacher who you would come across on Light's podcast or my podcast or if you use a meditation app and you, like you listen to, say you use the calm meditation app and you listen to Jeff Warren on there or Lama Rod Owens.

Both those guys are people that I'm very big fans of. You go to their websites and hit the contact button and ask, "Can I be your student?" Maybe it's that you'll be part of a group zoom teaching or maybe they're willing to do one-on-one work with you. I think that you just have to poke around and see what you can get. I think showing up in person to a retreats or talks, meditation teachers giving talks. I think that's another way to meet people. There is no real system here. I think that's a shame.

[0:59:21] LW: You consider yourself to be a bit of a meditation teacher. Do you have people wanting to be your student?

[0:59:28] DH: No, I don't. I have a very high bar for what I think. I'm the child of two doctors. I'm married to a doctor. I think meditation teachers have that kind of training. I would include you in this. You talked about meeting your teacher in 2003, 20 years ago. That is a lot of work up silent meditation retreat, apprenticing as a teacher, months and months and years and years of work and study. I'm not calling myself an ignoramus. I've written a few books about this. I've done some meditation retreats, but it's not on the level with the amount of seated practice that one needs to do to truly get under the hood of somebody else's mind, which is a position of great responsibility.

I mean, there's a reason why there's an etymological relationship between the word meditation and medicine. I mean, they call the Buddha, the great physician. This is like you have a responsibility to do no harm here. I can answer meditation questions for sure. I tend to answer it with the frame of, well, here's what's work for me or here's in my experience how this can go. I tend not to be super prescriptive for people, because I just don't feel I've earned that position the way, for example, you have.

[1:00:42] LW: You've talked about how consistent you've been over the years and you rarely miss a meditation. I heard you on this other interview. You were talking about a 360 Review that you had received first time after all these years of meditation and it was shocking. Would you mind speaking a little bit about it?

[1:01:00] DH: Yeah. Well, yeah, I alluded to –

[1:01:01] LW: What is 360 Review?

[1:01:02] DH: Sure. Sure. Sure. I alluded this a little bit earlier when I talked about the fact that I wrote this book, it became super successful. It's like this book about controlling your ego, put my ego on steroids. Again, it wasn't like I had a guru complex. It was more just that this super ambitious part of me kicked into high gear in ways that were really unhelpful. A few years into

this jag of experiencing this success, I was getting ready to write my third book. I wrote *10% Happier*, then I wrote a little how-to-meditate book called, *Meditation for Fidgety Skeptics*.

Before that book even came out, I convened a meeting with my brain trust, my like editor, my brother, and my wife — my kitchen cabinet. We were trying to figure out what my next book was going to be. I wanted it to be about love or at the time, I was considering it to be about compassion. When I talk about meditation, it's mostly mindfulness meditation, which is derived from Buddhism, but taught in a pretty secular way now, where you focus on your breath. Then every time you get distracted, you start again and again and again. This is a great way to develop a kind of self-awareness, that's called mindfulness, which allows you to see the voice in your head, your ego, so that you're not so owned by it.

There are companion practices that have been taught for 2,600 years that are designed to make you friendly or more compassionate. Those practices have not gotten a lot of air time in the mindfulness revolution and the hype around meditation. I had this idea. This is back in like late 2017, early 2018 that I want to do a book to popularize these flavors of meditation. The idea was it was going to be a how to book, not like a big memoir, but we wanted it to have a narrative overlay.

The idea came up that my wife was saying, “You know? you should talk to the people in your life and figure out what they think you should work on. then that could be the inciting event, the narrative propulsion for the book.” Which of course was very well played on her part, because she was basically, designing a book in which her husband becomes even less of a shit bag, which was smart and I tipped my hat to her. Then the idea came up, “Well, Dan, why don't you have a 360 Review?”

A 360 review is something that's often used in a corporate context, where a coaching service like an executive coach will come in and identify a specific executive and then they will run an anonymous survey of that executive's bosses, peers, and direct reports to get a sense of this person's strengths and weaknesses. My idea was that I would get the colonoscopy version of that, which would also include my wife, my brother, Joseph Goldstein, Jeff Warren, so friends, meditation teachers. We got 16 people from ABC News, from my personal life, from my

company, the meditation app company that I co-founded. They did this anonymous survey and I get this 39-page report filled with blind quotes.

I did not think it was going to be that bad. I really didn't think it was going to be that bad. I didn't think it was going to be awesome, but like I really didn't think it was going to be that bad and it was bad, really bad. It was people pointing out these things that are now very clear to me, which is that I over-committed and that could make me really short and grumpy. I am stubborn in good ways and in bad ways. One of the things we haven't talked about yet is like this emotional guardedness that where people felt like I had a ceiling on my emotional capacity.

Many people had never seen me sad, for example. They'd definitely see me angry. There were comments about how – and this was particularly humiliating, that I could be very rough with my humor and also quite tough on junior staffers, which I found to be very embarrassing, because I didn't think I was that person, but I definitely was. So, I had these 360 Review and at that point, I was like, “Oh, well, I can't write this book.” I probably should quit talking about meditation at all, because I'm clearly an asshole.

I went into the fetal position for several days. Then I finally realized through some good coaching and talking to friends and family that this was an opportunity. It was an opportunity to do better at my life, but also, like this is a better book than the one I had in mind. It actually should be a memoir. I got this huge wake-up as a self-help guru, no less. What am I going to do about it? So, that was in 2018 more than five years ago. I have spent the last five years basically single-mindedly working on this, working on addressing all of the things that came up in that 360 Review.

Three years afterward, I got another 360 and was totally different, totally different. After reading it my wife said, “Congratulations, now you're boring.” She was mostly kidding, but I've done a lot of work on it. I continue to do a lot of work on it. Part of the reason why the book is taking so long is that I want these learnings to really like get into my marrow, into my molecules, so that I can teach from scars, not wounds, so that I can turn around and really explain to you what I've learned in an open, undefended way. That's really the number one project in my life right now.

[1:06:14] LW: How did you know it was time to pivot from journalism from being a full-time journalist?

[1:06:18] DH: The 360 Review was a huge part of that. You know, like it was obvious that I was doing too much. It was insane. What my schedule was insane. My coach, my executive coach who administered the 360 was like, "Don't make any changes immediately." So, I didn't. I let it sink in for a second, but then about six to 12 months after the 360, I went part time at ABC News. I quit Nightline and my job responsibilities were pared down to anchoring weekend, Good Morning America, and then doing big prestige, special investigative stories around the world.

I've spent time with Amazonian indigenous tribes. I've spent time with the drug cartels in Mexico. Chasing down pedophiles in Cambodia, like I did big award-winning journalistic endeavors, which I really love doing. I still love it. I miss that. But even after a while, it was clear that like, that was too much. I was still doing too much. So, eventually in two years ago, I retired from ABC News entirely, which was a huge, like swallow hard kind of moment. I'm even stepping away from my meditation app. I am really pairing it down to working on this book and then whatever books I do after that. My podcast and speeches and I might do some TV work, but it will be related to happiness and meditation. I'm exploring some projects in that zone, but I'm really, really trying to focus.

[1:07:45] LW: You mentioned starting a newsletter when we first started this conversation. Is that something you're going to be heavily involved with or is it something that you have a team working on and you're going to be a consultant on?

[1:07:57] DH: I did mention that. I'm a bit of a control freak. I am, I do every word of it, but I have somebody on my podcast team, Marissa Schneiderman is amazing. I basically, all week long, I send her the things that I want to put in the newsletter and she like, kind of puts it together, and sends it back to me. Then I rewrite it. It's a very simple newsletter where I include a bunch of things that crossed my radar in the past week that I think you might find interesting. Then I do some like behind-the-scenes stuff on my podcast, upcoming guests, maybe some pictures, and some stuff that you haven't seen.

Then also just like a list of my upcoming events retreats, I'm leading or whatever it is or speeches I'm giving. Just very simple, but it's really designed to, I mean, I know – I imagine you do a lot of these things. Just like, just create a little community of people who are interested in my work. Then I can expose these folks to the work of people that I care about. I mean, that's the – I mean, I'm sure you've noticed this as a podcast host. That one of the great joys of having any platform is finding people whose work you admire and exposing that work to the world. I got to do that with you back in 2018. So, that's a huge source of pleasure for me.

[1:09:08] LW: Having had the impact that you've had, what's one thing that has surprised you the most? You initially, many years ago said meditation has this big PR problem. You've helped to try to be a solution to that and make it more accessible. Is anything surprised you about the 10% Happier movement? Because it is a movement.

[1:09:38] DH: I think what surprised me the most about it, I think it's much what I'm about to say is much bigger than anything I'm associated with. What I am really surprised by is how far the culture has come on mental health awareness. I give a lot of credit to the often-maligned Gen Z and millennials, people who are sometimes accused of being, like people, my – I'm a Gen Xer, but boomers and Gen Xers sometimes complained about these younger people who were talking about, they need a pet bereavement day off and can't give them feedback, has to be feed forward and they have to be pampered in the workplace. Everybody gets a trophy and all this stuff. Maybe some of that is legit.

I actually think as much as I – as a curmudgeonly old man can get a little salty about some of that. I actually think that this focus on basic human rights as it pertains to mental health and thinking about work in a less militaristic and hierarchical way. I actually think that's a great gift. I didn't see that coming. I was trying to make the world more open about mental health. I'm sure, I made some small amount of difference, but something way bigger than me has happened. I think that's really cool and multileveled and not uncomplicated.

I've heard some people argue were too focused on our mental health. I read one mental health official saying, that mental health awareness day always makes him cringe a little bit because we're too aware of it and maybe we're overmedicated and there are lots. This is nuanced, but I think in the main, it's very helpful that we – it's okay to say, "Yeah, I panic disorder and I need

some accommodation or I have anxiety. I'd see a shrink." You don't have to keep that stuff in the closet. I think generally speaking, that's super positive.

[1:11:17] **LW:** Yeah. Well, you and I around the same age.

[1:11:20] **DH:** Wow, really? Cause you look like you're 20 years younger than me.

[1:11:23] **LW:** No, I just turned 50 in May.

[1:11:25] **DH:** Oh, man. You wear it well.

[1:11:27] **LW:** But I grew up in Alabama. There's not a lot of meditation happening down there, even still.

[1:11:33] **DH:** Yeah.

[1:11:34] **LW:** It's just interesting to reflect back on if someone had told me that in 30 years, you'll be this meditation person written all these books on meditation. You'll be called the Light Watkins – like I would have been completely shocked by that. I feel like the same may be true for you back when you were an aspiring journalist.

[1:12:57] **DH:** Oh, yeah.

[1:12:58] **LW:** Someone to tap you on the shoulder and say, "Dan, you're going to be one of the biggest advocates for meditation in the whole world. You would read the books and have a popular, this thing called an app and people will be turning to meditation all over the place because of your work." I mean, it's just so amazing how surprising and even ironic life can be. I just wanted to acknowledge you for stepping into your curiosity around all of this, which then led you to your purpose. I'm honored to be able to have this conversation with you.

[1:12:28] **DH:** Thank you. I really appreciate that. Those are very kind words and to go from Alabama to Light Watkins. It's no small feat as well. Thank you.

[1:12:48] LW: Absolutely, man. Thank you so much.

[OUTRO]

[1:12:51] LW: Thank you for tuning into my interview with Author, Podcaster and Tech Founder, Dan Harris. You can follow Dan on the socials @danharris. His books, *10% Happier* and *Meditation for Fidgety Skeptics* are available everywhere books are sold. Of course, I'll put links in the show notes to everything Dan and I talked about, which you can find at lightwatkins.com / podcast. If you enjoyed this conversation and you found it inspiring, so now, you're thinking to yourself, "Wow, I'd love to hear Light interview President Obama or Oprah Winfrey." Guess what? I would like to interview President Obama as well or Oprah Winfrey or anybody at that tier of guests.

Just a little behind the scenes on how that all happens is when I reach out to those types of people and their gatekeepers get my invitation, the first thing they do is they go to my podcast page, mainly on Apple podcast and they look and they see, okay, how many ratings, how many reviews does this podcast have? They want to see if the audience is engaged, because that tells them that a President Obama or an Oprah Winfrey will get a lot of exposure and they will have a lot of engagement as well from being a part of this podcast.

All that to say, if you want to help me get bigger guests on the podcast, one very easy, free, quick thing that you can do is you can go to my page on Apple podcast. All you do is look at your device, click on the name of the podcast and you scroll down past those first six or seven episodes. You'll see a space with five blank stars. Click the star on the right to leave me a five-star rating. If you want to go the extra mile, that would help even more. If you just write one line, what do you like about this podcast? What do you appreciate? What do you find inspiring? That's it. You've cast your vote for getting those bigger guests on the podcast, because that's how it happens.

There's really no hookup. There's no magic formula. It's just getting ratings and getting reviews. So, you can help me, help you by leaving a rating and review right now. Also, don't forget, I have a YouTube channel. If you ever want to put a face to a name and all you do to see my episodes on YouTube, is you go to youtube.com and you type in Light Watkins Podcast. I also, would ask

you to subscribe to that, because those gatekeepers are looking to see, okay, how many subscribers does he have on YouTube? Those gatekeepers are always gatekeeping, right? Anyways, I also publish the raw, unedited version of every podcast. I got that from listening to On Being with Krista Tippett, one of my favorite podcasts. She publishes the unedited version and the edited version at the same time.

I publish the unedited version inside of My Happiness Insiders online community a day early. Normally, these episodes come out on Wednesdays. If you're a super fan and you want to listen to the episode on Tuesdays, you can do that in My Happiness Insiders online community. The way you join the community is you just go to the happinessinsiders.com. I've got a bunch of master classes and challenges. You can sign up for anyone.

There's 108-day meditation challenge. There's a 30-day gratitude challenge. There's a no complaining challenge. There's a strength challenge. There's a resting squat challenge, a walking challenge, a healthy eating challenge, basically anything that you want to do for self-improvement. There's probably a challenge associated with that or a master class. Find your purpose, radical authenticity, manifesting abundance, etc. You'll have access to me. I lead live meditations inside of the community. I facilitate goal setting and accountability and all kinds of cool stuff.

It's a way just to improve yourself little by little, bit by bit on a daily basis. You can also listen to the podcasts a day early and you can listen to all the chit chat that Dan and I have before we even hit record on the actual episode. That's available. Other than that, I look forward to hopefully, seeing you back here next week with another story about someone just like me and you taking a leap of faith in the direction of their purpose.

Until then, and this is very important, I want you to keep trusting your intuition. I want you to keep following your heart. I want you to keep taking those leaps of faith. It's very important. If no one's told you recently that they believe in you, I believe in you. So, you have me in your corner. All right. Thank you so much. Sending you lots of love and have a great day.

[END]