

EPISODE 182

JA: *“When I was at Google, many people were taking Adderall, left and right. So, here I was thinking, “Son of a gun. All these people are taking pills from their doctors and here I am trying to do everything by myself. No wonder I’m not getting as much done as quickly. What am I doing? What am I missing?”*

So, everyone's talking about it, and they say, “You got to go to your doctor. They're going to ask you a bunch of questions. Here's how you answer it. Just start taking a few and you'll notice, you'll start to be able to do more quickly.” That's what I did.

Midway through my time at Google, I went to my doctor answered the questionnaire, “Oh, I must have ADHD, because I can't get stuff done as quickly as I'd like to.” So, 5 milligrams became 10 milligrams, and 10 milligrams became 20, and 20 became 30, and 30 became 40, and 40 became 50. It got to a point where I started to have diminishing returns. The pain that I was actually trying to numb of not feeling good enough, I was also numbing everything else. I was numbing the thing that made me strong and connected, my connection to heart, my empathy, my compassion, my kindness, my presence. I mean, I was there, but I wasn't there, and many people in tech are there, but they're not really there.”

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:01:18] LW: Hello friends and 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. 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 have directly benefited from their work.

Today, I'm in conversation with someone who I met at a retreat center in Baja California called the Modern Elder Academy, where I was facilitating a workshop. And then one day at dinner, I find myself sitting next to this, I'll call him a luminary, someone who's just radiating and shining brightly. His name is Julio Alvarez, and Julio is a coach and a podcaster out of New York City.

Julio, primarily coaches, tech executives and that's because he actually worked in tech for many years. He's had jobs at places like Google, Airbnb, Lyft, and he's got a podcast that helps leaders in the tech industry who feel stuck to connect more with their heart. He told me the story of how he got started using Adderall to become more productive while he was working at these tech companies, how he kept getting fired from all of these companies, which led him to face his own heart, and to see that he was actually burying a lot of his own feelings, based on the traumas that he experienced growing up with an abusive father, and how he watched thousands of Oprah episodes, as a way of learning to become more heart-centered.

So, Oprah became his sort of de facto mentor. As I'm sitting there listening to this story, I started thinking to myself, I really need to have this guy on my podcast. I want him to share this story with my audience. And it's one of those situations where my heart voice was very loud, and very clear about scheduling this interview with Julio. So, I reached out to him later on and we made it happen.

I just love this story of how he found his purpose, because it's so relatable. Every story of how someone finds their purpose is always going to be a little bit different and a little bit unique to their journey. But one commonality is that you end up using everything that you've experienced. So, the trauma that he experienced as a child, getting his first job in telemarketing, learning how to speak to people, and understand how to allow them to feel seen and heard, it all came into play. And I find his courage in just living from his heart and standing up for others to be incredibly refreshing in a world where a lot of people don't do that. We don't speak up out of the fear of losing our job or potentially our livelihood.

I remember reading something about Paulo Coelho, who wrote *The Alchemist*, one of my favorite books, how he was in and out of mental institutions as a young person, because he, deep down, wanted to be a writer, and his parents wanted him to be a lawyer. So, they kept having him committed to a mental institution and he kept escaping. It got to the point where

Paolo said that everybody in his town thought he was crazy, because, look, the upside to getting committed to mental institutions is people just dismiss you as, “Oh, this is a crazy guy. He keeps going in and out of mental hospitals.” And because everybody thought he was crazy, he discovered that it was easier to bet on himself more, because it didn't matter anymore how everybody else thought about him. We may think that we don't care a lot about what other people think about us, but upon closer inspection, we probably care more than we're willing to admit.

So, I just love how Julio was able to kind of do the same. Turn his messiness into a message and now he helps other people cultivate a braver heart as well and get unstuck as leaders and as people working in the tech industry. I just think, listening to it is going to have an inspiring impact on you as well. So, I want you to hear it from Julio's words, because he says it a lot better than me. Without further ado, let's get to my conversation with Mr. Julio Alvarez.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:05:40] LW: Julio G. Alvarez. Good to have you on the podcast, man.

[0:05:47] JA: It's a blessing to be here. Thank you for having me.

[0:05:48] LW: You're welcome. You're welcome. All right. So, I like to start these conversations off talking about childhood. My first question to you is when you think about little Julio, what toy or activity, do you remember connecting with the most as a young person?

[0:06:10] JA: I had these beautiful scale 3:16 diecast model cars, and I would buy them at KB Toys or Toys R Us, and I would line them up on a shelf. Every week, I would dust them and clean them, and they were particularly exciting, because as you turn the wheel, as you suspended it and held the car and turn the wheel, the steering wheel turned with it. So, I oftentimes spent a lot of time by myself in my room, listening to music playing with these cars, a Mercedes, a Hummer, a convertible, in my head, imagining using them one day.

[0:06:51] LW: You grew up in New York, right?

[0:06:52] JA: Yes.

[0:06:52] LW: You grew up to teenage parents. So, set the scene for us. Let us know what was going on. Maybe you could start with how did they come together, and then what was the vibe like at that age while you were playing with those little model cars in the house? Was it really religious? Are there any ideologies that were being echoed around? Were there other people in the house? Which part of town you guys in?

[0:07:17] JA: So, I was born, Long Island, New York, suburban conservative, Long Island, New York in the eighties. My mom came from a poor White family, and my dad, she met my dad when she was in high school. He was a teenager, and he had just moved from Ecuador to Long Island, New York. So, he couldn't speak very good English. He met my mom. They hit it off in high school, largely because they were both ridden with so much trauma from their upbringing and they connected through that. They had my sister, and then they had me as teenagers.

So, we were in a situation where we were in this conservative, primarily White town on Long Island. My dad was not very articulate in English. He was dark-skinned Ecuadorian, living with my mom, trying to raise two kids. You look back at old photos, and there's sheetrock on the walls or things are half done, and everything is slowly putting itself together. Because my parents were just trying to figure it out. They were just trying to make ends meet. I was a birth control baby. So, they didn't expect to have me.

When they found out that my mom was pregnant, I think it put a lot of stress on the family, let alone having one kid where you could barely afford it, now having two. Then, when I was born, I was born cross-eyed. So, I was in perpetual pain, crying all the time. The doctor required us to have surgery by the time I was 10 months old. So, I had been wearing glasses since a baby, and I think the way the family started to take shape was I didn't reflect back to my dad, what he had in mind for a child. I was a little chubby. I was light-skinned. I needed glasses. I had four eyes, which was the term that was used colloquially amongst his side of the family. And it created a lot of tension in the household.

My mom being the caretaker, being the mama bear, trying to protect her son. And my dad being like, "What is this? This is not what I expected. This is not what I asked for." So, the car and me

being in my room alone by myself was a function of how can I avoid being around him? How can I be in my own little world, in a world where I didn't feel welcomed, I didn't feel like I belonged in my own household?

That was the energy of the household for a while. My dad, he was a blue-collar work. My mom cleaned homes and my dad worked for the Long Island Railroad. He was a railroad union worker and worked on signals. So, I could also notice the tension in the household because my dad was dark, in a primarily white neighborhood, and there was this feeling of having to keep up with the Joneses. I need to make sure I have the car. I need to make sure I do this. I need to make sure dah, dah, dah. Feeling lack of, not good enough. And I think a lot of the energy of that was pushed onto me. So, that connects to why I spent a lot of time with myself in my room, with my music, and my cars.

[0:10:29] LW: I don't want to make any assumptions. Was your dad, was he abusive in that kind of behavior happening? I know, he ultimately kicks you out of the house, but you guys get into like fights or –

[0:10:37] JA: Yes, we did. We did. I mean, it was very normal to be verbally abusive, and physically abusive. I mean, that was what I recognize now, having done a lot of the healing is that that was his way of expressing love, and also keeping things in check, in control, was to escalate with his voice and escalate physically as a way of controlling the circumstance. So yes, I mean, at the time, I didn't have the language to articulate what was going on. I didn't know what it was. But looking back on it, yes, absolutely. That was a normal behavior. Also, the reason why I found myself in situations trying to get away, shutting my door, locking it, being in my room, spending time away from him as much as possible.

[0:11:22] LW: Would you characterize yourself as rebellious at all? Or were you just trying to survive?

[0:11:29] JA: I think in the beginning, it was trying to survive, and then it moved into rebellion. I think the older I got, the more I realized, “Oh, I'm wise here. I'm smart. I'm doing well in school. I'm running community service clubs. I'm going above and beyond to engage in extracurricular activities.” That's when I started to know, “Oh, I see what's going on here.” That's when it started

to change as I got into my teenage years, where it moved from survival to rebellion. I will show you. It was this, "I'll show you, and I'm going to push you and prod because I know what you're doing is wrong." That actually escalated it and made the problem worse to the point where eventually, as you said, in high school, he kicked me out. He said, "No, this isn't going to work."

[0:12:16] LW: Just before he kicks you out, I'm curious, what's your idea of success look like, in contrast with what's your parents' idea of success for you?

[0:12:27] JA: Yes, my dad always used to reiterate the phrase, "Get an effing job." He would say that to my mom, because she was just a cleaner. She actually ended up going to school to try and become a nurse, and that didn't work out for several reasons. But she was always striving for the next thing. But she was torn between striving for the next thing and just trying to make ends meet for the family. He would also say the same thing for me. He didn't want me to go to college. He wanted me to get an effing job, get an effing job.

So, for him, it was don't go to college, just start making some money, which makes sense, because that's what all he knew, where he came from. For me, I've been journaling since I was in middle school and I have some of my old journals. In fact, as I've been going through them, thinking about starting to lay out my book, there's one entry where I talk about wanting to make \$100,000. That once I make \$100,000 a year, my life will be set. Everything will be good. So, in my mind, I just wanted to make \$100,000. That was the thought in my head. I could release myself, I could have autonomy, I could live a successful life, I could retire like a king. My goal was Julio, find a way to make \$100,000.

It's funny how that changes. But that was my goal, that was success for me, which was be able to be on your own feet, have financial independence, such that you can make decisions for yourself. My mom always tells the story about when I was 12 years old, I came to her with a Pennysaver which was at the time this printed weekly book that gets sent to your house with houses for sale, boats for sale, jobs wanted, and I had found a job in the Pennysaver, a telemarketer job for a company called Unique Chimney. And the job was to go into a room, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 5pm to 9pm and make phone calls from Long Island to people in Westchester and scheduled chimney cleanings. Call people up and convince them to clean the chimney from this company.

So, I made the call. I set up the interview. I said, "Mom, you have to drop me off at this place." She brings me there and the woman comes out and it looks at my mom and says, "Is this the guy who called me yesterday? Really? Is this really happening?" And she agreed to hire me. She said, "Look, this is illegal but it's cash only. We'll give him a shot and as long as you can drop them off and you can be consistent Monday, Wednesday, Friday. We'll give it a go." And I had that job for years. Every day Monday, Wednesday, Friday, five to nine, I would take the money, and I read some Suze Orman, *The Young, the Broke, and the Fabulous*, and I started my 401(k), and I created my savings account, and I had my little safe under my bed where I was collecting my money.

Since 12, I've been on this mission to hit that goal of financial independence, so that I didn't have to be dependent on my dad, in a world where he didn't want to give me anything. It was the land of persistent no. Everything was no. "Can we go here?" "No." "Can I buy this book?" "No." "Can I go here?" "No." So, I got to a point where I was like, "All right, I'm done with these noes. I cannot be bothered with it. I do not ever want to be in a place where I have to hear no again." That propelled me.

[0:15:47] LW: Was your dad an alcoholic? Was he just a hard ass? Why was he so resistant? That you can identify now, looking back.

[0:15:55] JA: I think he was in a lot of pain. I think growing up as a poor boy in Ecuador, my grandparents were just trying to survive. There were many kids. There was a lot of struggle. They escaped Ecuador to come to America, to live the life. An immigrant family living the dream, working hard. So, I just think he had a lot of anger inside him. You look at old photos, I think of old memories of him, and he just had a lot of anger. It was a material household. One minute it would be calm, and then the next minute, something would happen, and we had five minutes. I had five minutes to eject before all hell broke loose. It was this very like, "Oh, I had this hypervigilance around trying to read his energy." And he just had a lot of anger inside of him. And I took the brunt of that anger in an increasing capacity because I was also willing to push back.

[0:16:48] LW: So, Unique Chimneys. This is your first job, and you said you had it for years. So, it's a sales job. Talk about what you learned as a young person, in his teens about selling through Unique Chimneys? I'm sure they gave you a script. They told you to say the script and all that. Talk a little bit about your learnings there.

[0:17:07] JA: You know what, I appreciate you asking that because I think to this day, it was the most significant job of my life, because it taught me, here I am, I have this stack of eight-and-a-half by 11 papers with line by line, and alphabetical order, everybody's name, Armonk, Scarsdale, White Plains, you name it. And I just went down the list and made the phone calls and I learned about so many things. This was over the phone at the time. So, I learned about energy was the first thing. That within two seconds of somebody picking up the phone, I could feel and tell where they were at. Were they just coming home? Were they sitting on the couch? Were they in an argument with their child? Were they preoccupied and frustrated with the present moment? It was like an AB test. I would make these instant predictions of like, "Okay, this person sounds like they're on the move, let me deploy this message. This person sounds like they're sitting watching TV being lazy, I can spend a little bit more time here. They're lonely, they're looking for connection."

So, after thousands and thousands of phone calls, you start to read the energy of people. That's the first thing. The second thing was learning different lines to how to connect with people, what resonated and what didn't resonate. I could see how it was like a Rubik's Cube, and I was just turning the Rubik's Cube saying, "Okay, that didn't work. Maybe this works. Don't do the whole first and last name, just do the first name. This is where you use pause. This is where you provide optionality for somebody. The person's not closing on this price, maybe I'll throw in a discount. I think that will have a high probability of closing. Don't talk to the man in this case, talk to the woman."

It was like a game and I started to learn about human connection through the phone. I credit my time at that job to doing such good interviews and being really successful as a marketer in my career was because of the nuance and being able to understand how you connect with somebody, especially being a telemarketer, because your window of opportunity to connect deeply or connect at all with somebody, such that they would stay on the phone with you is pretty narrow. Because most people are ready to hang up, but they didn't hang up on me.

[0:19:34] LW: Do you recall any specific examples of how you were able to turn a no into a yes in that job?

[0:19:41] JA: Yes. It was a firefighter after September 11th. I called him, I don't remember exactly when it was but it was during the cycles of people all rotating. When that happened, people from Westchester, they were coming down and doing rotations to clean debris and to do work. And I remember calling this guy, he was a firefighter from FDNY. He had just come home from a 36-hour tour at the Trade Center. And his energy was just, he was exhausted. He was exhausted. We were on the phone for about 30 minutes. For the first 10 of it, we didn't talk about chimney cleaning at all. I just started asking him questions, and we were talking, and he felt heard, he felt seen, and I didn't make a pitch to close on him for a chimney cleaning, but I followed up. I followed up a few days later. Ultimately, he guys chimney clean for \$40, or whatever it was.

But at the time, yes, I specifically remember being able to have this intimate conversation with a firefighter who had just spent 36 hours with a mask and gloves in the heart of ground zero. And here I am getting to talk to him on the phone. I remember specifically saying, "Okay, I'm not just going to try and sell this guy a chimney cleaning. There's something bigger going on in his life and I want to acknowledge it." So, I did that. I'll never forget that conversation. I remember that distinctly, because I think the people next to me were like, "Wow, that was a long time on the phone." Because I was using time versus closing and I thought it was worth it. And it was, because we built a relationship in some weird way, just allowing him to feel heard and seen, and that's what we all want, after all, isn't it?

[0:21:42] LW: So, you knew that you were gay, during these years, these teenage years?

[0:21:48] JA: I had a feeling. I was uncomfortable going to gym class. I hated gym class. It was very awkward to be in a room, a male gym, where everyone's changing, and everyone's punching each other, and throwing stuff at each other, and knocking jokes. It was a very vulnerable environment for me. I knew then something was up. I didn't know exactly what it was at the time. But I knew something was different. The older I got, the more I started to get the hints of that, and it wasn't until high school where I finally realized, "Okay, I think this is what's

happening here. I'm gay." And it wasn't until senior year college where I fully started to come out more broadly to people.

[0:22:28] LW: So then, why didn't your dad kick you out of the house? What were those circumstances?

[0:22:31] JA: Well, I think it was a culmination of things. I think the gayness was the straw that broke the camel's back. But it was a series of things. It was, this kid is annoying. There was this tension. Instead of looking at my successes, and being happy for my successes, and wanting to share words of affirmation, and love and kindness, and lift me up. His M.O. was, "I'm going to push you down as much as I can." It's funny, even to this day, I can still see that he'll check my LinkedIn every once in a while. So, there's a part of him that wants to be in connection. But despite the cards that I've sent, and the conversations that we have, he's so stuck in his patterns, and I give him grace, because I love him. He's my father. And I also recognize that that's how he learned how to love.

[0:23:22] LW: It sounds like you were doing everything he wanted to do. You got a job, and you're making money and all the things. So, what was the problem?

[0:23:31] JA: I think part of it was jealousy over the success that I was having and the momentum that I was having early in my life. He lives in this scarcity mindset, where there's never enough. So, I think I pushed against that a lot, finding a way to yes. "Oh, you're not going to give me money. I'm going to get a job." "Oh, I'm traveling here. I'm going to this conference. I'm doing that." I was always very opportunistic. I think he was opposed to that. I think he struggled with that. I also think my parents got divorced when I was in middle school, and the divorce was not a quick sever. It was a long and drawn-out back and forth, fights over money, fights over who got the kids, fights over property and assets.

So, I think he was in such turmoil between trying to do well at work, trying to reconcile his relationship, trying to be a father in a world where he didn't have the skills, he didn't know what he wanted. On top of that, again, back to the point of I don't think that I reflected back to him his truth. He wanted me to play soccer. I did that for a year, but I didn't like the shin guards. He wanted me to do baseball, but I didn't like wearing the cups. He wanted me to do all these

things where all I wanted was a computer and a book, and I wanted to stay after school, and do a fundraiser for a food drive, or a coat drive, or a community garden. I was very service-oriented, and that didn't align with what he had in mind for his child. Play football, hang out with the girls, so on and so forth. It was misaligned, and he didn't know how to honor that. There was a delta between who he wanted me to be and who I actually was, who I am.

[0:25:15] LW: So, he your mother split and you stay with your dad?

[0:25:19] JA: I stayed with my mom. I stayed with my dad. I stayed with my mom. I stayed to my dad. I probably went back and forth a few times, because like I said, it was drawn out, and there was arguments over who got the house, who got this, who got that. So, I oscillated back and forth, between my mom and my dad a few times, which was very chaotic. And what I recognize now is like traumatic, because the whole while I tried hiding it. I didn't want anyone to know. I was ashamed of it.

Finally, towards the end, I was living with my dad in the house that we grew up in. My grandfather, my mom's dad built the house and they moved into it. We moved into it. Then, when I was a teenager, my mom said, "Okay, you can have the house", meaning my father. "You can have the house, as long as you promise to give it to the kids." There was no paperwork signed. It was a verbal agreement. He said, "Sure." Then, the minute she left, he was like, "All right, get out." He had another wife and a kid coming from Ecuador and he wanted to move them into my new bedroom.

So, that was the straw that broke the camel's back, which was, wait a minute, you just agreed that we would stay here. Now, you're changing your course and you have a wife and a kid en route from Ecuador, and you want me to go. I remember being in my room, on my desk, looking at colleges. I had a printer. I was applying to 14 schools, every scholarship that I could find. I was getting ready early to figure out what my game plan was, what my transition was out of high school and into college. He came into my room, he knocked my whiteboard off the wall, and we just got into this fight. We just got into this fight over like, "I'm not leaving." He attacked me, and I hit him back, and I could see the fear in his eyes. Because it was the first time that I pushed back and I said enough is enough.

My sister called the cops. Cops came. He was arrested. Then, we had to make a decision, either he had to leave or I had to leave. And the truth of the matter is, is how was I going to pay for that? I mean, just wasn't realistic. And my mom had given up everything for the household. So, I had to leave. This is how Newton's third law of motion, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction come into play. Because all of the energy that I had spent outside of the home, doing community service clubs, being involved with Rotary International, all of the energy of that came back to me, because the president of the local Rotary Club, his name is Dr. Dave and Dr. D. They're the local veterinarians, and they were members of the Rotary Club. I knew them because I was president of the Interact Club, which was the high school version.

So, I would go to the hospital and I would do stuff. We would do pet photos with Santa and we would raise money for this and we'd raise money for that and we do car washes, all of this stuff. So, we shared it with them, and they're like, "What? How is this happening?" I never would have imagined, everything seems fine. Like how is this happening? So, of course, they took me in. I left my home. I packed my bags. I left everything else. Just packed some clothes, and moved in with them. They took me in for adoption, unofficially. I stayed with them through the rest of high school.

[0:28:38] LW: Why did you reach out to them, as opposed to anyone else? I mean, were you guys already in close relationship even though you were both –

[0:28:46] JA: Yes. He was the president of Rotary, I was the president of Interact. So, we already had a close relationship. I think it was just naturally – they also – they don't have children and they would do exchange programs, where you take a student from another country for three months, or six months, and so forth. So, it kind of felt like an extended exchange program where they just took another kid in, so I knew that they already had the system of taking in kids for a period of time. I was friends with them, and it was all happening around the same time I was winning an award called The Paul Harris Fellow, which is an award Rotary gives every year to stewards of the community. And I was getting the award at the same time that all this was happening. I was the youngest one in New York to get the award.

And all around this time, all of this was happening and unfolding, and of course, Dave and D, heard about it and decided to take me in and said they wouldn't want to see me struggle and

that they wanted to take me in. And frankly, I didn't have many other options. My mom had a little place. I would have lived in the living room. It was too small and she had her own issues that she was dealing with. So, I decided to go and live with them. And it was one of the best decisions I ever made, because in that household while it was hard, and I will never forget the moment of being in that bedroom, a new bedroom, twin bed. I was right next to the window. It was raining, and I was looking out my first night thinking like, "How the hell did this happen? What am I doing here?"

I remember in that moment, was when I could feel the armor around my heart. I could feel the moment where I was like, "All right, this is me. This is just me. I got to toughen up." I used to love The Rock. I used to love wrestling. Stone Cold Steve Austin and The Rock. I would listen to their entry. "Do you smell what The Rock is cooking?" it I would listen to the entry song of The Rock, and just be like, "You've got this. Toughen up. Toughen up. You got this." I just remember having to hype myself up to stay strong. Because then the next day, I had to go and drive to high school and act like everything was fine. So, I did that. I just pretended and play the game. I didn't tell anybody. I kept it quiet because I was so humiliated and ashamed, and I knew that I'd get a million questions, and I didn't want it to distract from my life. So, I kept it quiet.

Until later, I realized, pain that isn't processed gets projected, and it was actually, here I was, thinking I took care of it. But it was with me the whole time and it was metastasizing itself into my life, in ways that was not serving me.

[0:31:32] LW: How did you get the full scholarship to NYU? That happen to do with your volunteer activity? Obviously, your grades.

[0:31:40] JA: Yes. It was called the HEOP program. Higher educational opportunity program, and it was a government sponsored program. First of all, I'm so grateful to NYU for this because what they did was is I applied, and my SAT score was terrible. At the time, it was at a 1,600 and I think I got a 995. Okay, so I was nowhere near qualifying NYU. I didn't have any money. I got low SAT scores, and I was an average student. A strong B student. But I was a good storyteller, and I actually wrote my essay. Yes, I wrote my essay about my dad and what happened. It got flagged by a woman named Valerie Cabral. I'll never forget her. She lives in Inwood, Washington Heights, I think, and she saw something in me, and they flagged me for this HEOP

program. And the HEOP program is specifically for Black and Brown students who come from adverse homes who don't necessarily have the luxury of tutors who don't have great grades, but there's potential.

So, there was about 150 of us, and I was flagged for that program. I did several interviews. I crushed those interviews. I got the role. It was a full scholarship and I had to do work. I had to start school early. I had to do a pre-summer program. I had to do summer programs. I had to do extra help. I had to do tutoring. I had to do all this extra work to make sure that I was set up for success in college. You can bet that here I was thinking like, "Man, I'm grateful. I'm going to go I'm going all in. This is beautiful. This is exactly what I wanted. This was exactly my intention, my vision. I'm so grateful that they found it." I didn't even know about the program. They flagged me. I didn't know about it. And I just needed to go all in, because here I was, someone was paying \$100,000, \$150,000, whatever it was, for me to go to college. What a gift. What a blessing. So, that's how I got it.

[0:33:39] LW: How confident were you after your Unique Chimney's experience, going to these interviews, and talking to these people? Did you know you can get in person with them, you'd win them over with your charismas?

[0:33:50] JA: Yes. In fact, I remember saying to my mom, I just need to get in the room. I just need to get in the room. I got to get over this pay – I need the paperwork just to signal interest. But the minute I get in the room, I'm going to get this job. And I knew early on that I had an energy about me, that there was something different, and I now really see it for myself. But at the time I had whispers of it, but I didn't fully get it. But I knew that if I were to get in the room and share my truth, that someone would see me and someone would be compelled to want to take a chance on me, and that's exactly what happened.

[0:34:23] LW: Interestingly enough, that's what made me want to bring you on the podcasts, being next to you, and listening to your story, listening to tell your story. Will you think back to that essay about your dad, what was the angle about you and your relationship with your dad?

[0:34:38] JA: Oh, I'll never forget it. It was how I took the energy of that and turned it into, from pain to purpose, and how I morphed the energy of that, and I used it to propel me into service into something else in my life.

One of my cousin's in 2008 died of a heroin overdose. Another one is on the methadone program. I come from a family of struggle. So, it could have turned out very differently for me. The way this could have played out could have been very different. So, the angle of the story was, I took this really tragic, humiliating, shameful, difficult moment, and I transformed the energy of it to propel me into what was next, and I needed other people to help me rise. It was like a call to action to NYU, to give me a chance and to help me rise.

[0:35:35] LW: From there, you ended up getting a job at Apple, which is pretty impressive. So, same kind of deal? Give me the room with them.

[0:35:44] JA: Yes, same deal. That was fun and rigorous. I graduated NYU. My first gig was at Apple. I also gotten the door – there were like series of interviews where they would put everyone in the room together, and then they would cherry-pick people and put them in a different room together, and then put them in a different room together. I felt like it was like some American Idol-type thing, where the funnel starts up and then narrows down. Then, I thought, “I got this. I got this.” I landed that job. And yes, back to the Unique Chimney thing, those skills really served me and every single interview thereafter.

[0:36:20] LW: They say why they hired you? Like what about you stood out? Even though you knew that you have the charisma and all that, but what were their experience of you?

[0:36:29] JA: The common thread, I think through all the companies, they would use the word shameless, and I know that sometimes has a negative connotation. But this idea that I – and how I own it. I shameless. I do have less shame. I do have less shame, because I've done the work. But it was being able to put myself out there. unabashedly, confidently just put myself out there, said what was on my heart, said what was on my mind, and not think too much about it. I think that always triggered people's interest. It got me on roles that were significant.

I mean, at Apple, I was working with the retail team on the launch of the first iPad. So, here was this brand-new product that had a lot of hype and a lot of uncertainty around it, and I was filming videos for commercials. I was in the stores in New York City, helping to figure out how we were going to introduce customers to this new technology, this new device. So, the pattern kept repeating that not only was I getting into these companies, but I was getting on these projects that were like zero to one, brand new, required a lot of grit, and required a lot of confidence to just put yourself out there, and do something that is uncertain, and you're not copying a playbook from somebody else.

[0:38:02] LW: You end up working at Apple, Google, Tumblr, Airbnb, Lyft, all prime positions. Obviously, working at Unique Chimneys, would be in a completely different tier of sales and marketing compared to working at these of top tier tech companies. So, talk about the differences in the culture that you observed working at that level, at these named brand companies.

[0:38:30] JA: At the bigger companies, the Apple and the Google, because I would put them in a slightly different category than the other ones. At the time, the other ones were more startup-y, smaller. The Apple and Google were the behemoths and you're talking everyone's a valedictorian. I use that more symbolically, but you're talking like A players. I mean, people who are in the top of their game, how do you get all this done? How do you move so quickly? How do you do everything with such fidelity and such quality? That was a struggle at first, because I think there was a lot of impostor syndrome. There was a lot of not feeling enough. I was oftentimes the only Latin person in the room, oftentimes. So, it was a calibration that needed to take place for me to constantly come back to, "I am enough." And that was a real struggle. That lesson took me a long time to learn. But I would say, you're really the caliber of the people at these companies and the complexity of the problems that you're trying to solve are just next level.

I mean, we see a lot of this exacerbated now with AI. But these technology companies are dealing with really complex – these are not binary things. These are not like A or B, this or that. I mean, they're very complicated. So, it was very humbling, and I think starting off at the big two companies was so transformative. And honestly, I was very proud of myself, like here I was, I got into NYU on a scholarship, which was basically a minority scholarship, meaning I didn't have

money, and I didn't do good test scores. But I hustled, I got into these companies, I was rounded by all of these people. But I realized, while so many people at these companies are in their heads, not as many people were in their hearts. They didn't have the sort of day to day rough around the edges experiences that I had.

So, I would say that that was how I would characterize Apple and Google. Then, the other ones were a bit more – Tumblr, Airbnb, and Lyft, were a bit more chaotic. The reason why is because at Google, at a place like Google and Apple, everybody's using the same system, everybody's trained the same way, everybody's marching in the same direction, using the same processes and protocols. But when you go to more of a startup, they're growing fast. So, they're hiring people from all of these different companies. What results is everybody thinks that their process, and their protocol, and their technique is the best one. What you have is you have this competition amongst everybody to see who wins. What that creates is it creates tension in the room, such that not all of the energy is focused on one destination. Everyone's trying to get to the same place, but taking different routes and it creates a lot of turmoil.

That's really where I realized, “Oh, emotional maturity, emotional intelligence leading with heart is so critical in a world where we're trying to grow and be successful quickly.” But when we're all stuck in our heads, and all narrow-minded on how we want to do something, and this is the way. It actually reduces the productivity, because you're spending so much time arguing, or meeting, or in circular decisions. So, there was a stark difference between an Apple and a Google, and the way that caliber of the people and the way in which you would move, versus these smaller companies that were growing really fast, and moving fast and breaking things, as Facebook likes to say, in which we know how moving fast and breaking things, from a social media perspective, has created a cascading effect of lots of other second-order issues that we're now starting to reckon with.

[0:42:18] LW: How are you taking the edge off? Dealing with all of this, like, at the end of the day, you go home. What's your day like? What's your outside of work?

[0:42:25] JA: Well, I thought I had it figured out. I thought, going into a SoulCycle class, or drinking, or partying. I just watched the Netflix show Painkiller. And it was so sobering to the point where I'm learning how to tell even more of the truth of what was going on. I mean, for me,

when I was at Google, many people were taking Adderall, left and right. So, here, I was thinking, “Son of a gun. All these people are taking pills from their doctors and here I am trying to do everything by myself. No wonder I'm not getting as much done as quickly. What am I doing? What am I missing?”

So, everyone's talking about it, and they say, “You got to go to your doctor. They're going to ask you a bunch of questions. Here's how you answer it. Just start taking a few and you'll notice, you'll start to be able to do more quickly.” That's what I did.

Midway through my time at Google, I went to my doctor answered the questionnaire, “Oh, I must have ADHD, because I can't get stuff done as quickly as I'd like to.” So, 5 milligrams became 10 milligrams, and 10 milligrams became 20, and 20 became 30, and 30 became 40, and 40 became 50. It got to a point where I started to have diminishing returns. And seeing the Painkiller show was very sobering for me, and it compelled me to figure out okay, this story that I'm sharing with you, I think I need to share with more people because I think more people than we think are stuck in this pattern of how can I better perform? How can I better perfect? My situation? If I'm not doing enough, what else can I use to supplement myself such that I can perform at a higher altitude?

It was very interesting. In the beginning, I felt like Superman. I was getting so much done. I was so accomplished. But then it became a point where, the pain that I was actually trying to numb of not feeling good enough, I was also numbing everything else. I was numbing the thing that made me strong and connected, my connection to heart, my empathy, my compassion, my kindness, my presence. I mean, I was there, but I wasn't there, and many people in tech are there, but they're not really there. That's part of what led me ultimately out of tech into coaching is to help people on that journey. But to answer your question, the way that I learned to take the edge off was things like using a substance to help me get more done, in hopes that by getting more done, I'll have more room to relax. And that actually was a fallacy. It didn't happen.

[0:44:57] LW: I was looking at a World War Two documentary about Blitzkrieg and Hitler's strategy of overwhelming the Allied countries with just hours upon hours of attacks, more so that they couldn't possibly prepare for. Then, later on, it turns out the way that the German soldiers were able to do this without any sleep, because they were all high on cocaine, including Hitler.

They were high on cocaine as well. And as you pointed out, that kind of approach is unsustainable. You can get a lot done in a short amount of time, but over a long stretch, this is completely unsustainable, and that was one of the reasons why they ended up losing because they were all sort of out of their minds after a certain while.

[0:45:40] JA: It's common. It's such a common tactic that we don't talk enough about, because our minds rationalize it, as like, "Oh, well, I have ADHD. I have to take it. I have to take it." I'm like, "Okay, really?" How much of that is true? And how much of it is a story you tell yourself? I mean, it's very interesting, especially in the tech world, where somebody is having six coffees a day, somebody is taking Adderall, every night there's a happy hour, and people are getting bombed. It's like a work hard play hard. You see this on the WeWork documentaries and the party. You see this glorified in some ways on TV programs.

But when I watched things like that WeWork documentary, it's like, that feels very close to home. It's very real. And here I was, one of the few BIPOC people in these spaces thinking, "Well, I got to keep up. I got to keep up with the Joneses here." Connecting it back to my dad. The pattern of I got to stay relevant, I got to look good here, I got to keep going. Otherwise, I'm going to fall behind, and all this is going to be lost. So, that was a big lesson for me.

[0:46:44] LW: You ultimately decided to leave and get more coaching. I'm not sure where this falls in a timeline. But something we talked about in private conversations, you began to watch Oprah episodes obsessively. So, I want to hear about that. I also want to hear how you met your husband, because that was such a great story as well.

[0:47:02] JA: Yes. So, I'll tell you about the Oprah thing. Basically, what happened is I kept getting fired, so I got a job at Apple and then I got fired. I got a job at Google and then I got fired. I got a job at Tumblr, and then I got fired. I got a job at Airbnb, and then I got fired.

[0:47:18] LW: Let me guess. The thing that got you fired was the same thing we got to hired?

[0:47:21] JA: That's right and it was not the what, it was the how, and it wasn't until the first time I ever had a Black gay manager. He was at Airbnb. His name was Jonathan. He used to run Coca-Cola marketing. He built the Airbnb brand. It was the first time he ever pulled – I'll never

forget this, he pulled me aside and said, “You are well-intentioned, but poorly implemented, poorly understood. People don't know your motives and you need to slow down and figure out what's going on. What is the energy that you are putting out? It's not the what. It's the how.”

One of his homework assignments – so first of all, Airbnb, I had been fired for the fourth time, and I said, “Son of a gun. What the hell is going on here? I'm a failure.” It reinforced the humiliation from my dad like, well, he kicked me out, and then all these companies are kicking me out. So, I must be bad. I must be a horrible person. I should die, like I don't belong here. I really felt the energy of that and I was at the lowest point of my life in 2018. I remember saying, “I need to end this. I need to end either my life or this pattern of behavior that's not serving me.” And Jonathan said, “Your well-intentioned, poorly understood, and here are your homework assignments.”

The first is, you need to go to the Hoffman Process. I just went and it was really powerful. Now, what the process is, is not important. What's important is, is it was a moment it was seven days, no phone, learning how to meditate, learning how to visualize, learning what trauma was, learning what patterns of behavior were, learning what triggered me. I started to learn and understand myself. I took time to go inwards. That was project one.

Assignment two was, you need to watch every episode of Oprah that you can find, and I want you to find it because she is the queen of human connection and you have a gift. You have a gift of being able to connect deeply with anybody. That is your superpower. Your job is to one, start to do the work to heal. And two, figure out from the queen of human connection how does it happen? Then, I want you to watch it, and I want you to take notes and write me a paper about what you learned. So, it was it was amazing. It was like, “This is the moment.” And Joseph Campbell's where you have a mentor who comes into your life to shake you and wake you up. He was like, “Look” – and by the way, I had never told anybody that I gotten fired. Every time I lost the job at Apple, Google, Tumblr, I kept it quiet. Not a soul knew. Can you imagine the stress of me thinking, “Oh, my God. They're going to backchannel. They're going to call somebody. Somebody's going to find out. I'm not going to get the job. I'm screwed. I'm a failure. I'm a fake. It's just only a matter of time before they find out that I'm an imposter.”

[0:50:11] LW: I was wondering, how are you getting all these jobs, you keep getting fired, aren't they calling people up and betting you?

[0:50:19] JA: I'm telling you. Well, here's the thing. This is what I realized. It wasn't that I was grossly a bad person. And I used to use this thing that I'm like cilantro, 90% love me, and 10% hate me, and I'm okay with that. So, I would always get to a point on a project where one person who typically ended up being my manager, they manifested the energy of my father and I entered a triggered state. So, the visual that comes to mind for me is like the Hulk. He's smart, he's a nerd, he's a doctor, whatever. But then something happens and he transforms into this Hulk.

Well, that would happen to me at inopportune times, enough times with a person such that I would get the boot. So, I noticed, "Oh, this is the pattern." Typically, a powerful male, who I reported into, would push me, would prod, would be condescending, would challenge me in such a way that was misaligned with the values that I held, that the organization held, because it was about land grabbing. It was about throwing people under the bus. It was about leading with shame, and fear, and anger that I'm like, "Are you kidding me?" So, that would get me the boot. Everyone would say, "Well, we know what you're saying. What you're saying is true. But it's not really your job to tell him like you should just stay quiet and deal with it and transfer it to a different team in six months." I was always like, "No, I'm not doing that". This person needs to hear what's going on. Leading through shame and fear, this is not right. We shouldn't be doing this.

every time I would talk a little too much. It was the kind of thing where everybody would – you go into a meeting and then after the meeting, everybody talks shit at the watercooler table. And then I would go into the meeting and I would represent those voices. I would say, "Hey, we don't all feel this way." And I had the courage to say something, knowing that I potentially would get knocked for it and I did.

[0:52:10] LW: What did you learn from the Oprah experiment?

[0:52:13] JA: Yes. Okay. So, back to that, I had two homework assignments. I did Hoffman and then Oprah. So, I literally, getting fired from Airbnb. I took six months between that and the next

job, which was Lyft. I would say, when I got that job at Lyft, I had a new set of awareness. I had new tools. I was leading with my heart. I understood, I was more awakened. First of all, I went YouTube, podcasts, torrents, DVDs. I bought DVDs, like old DVDs of people recording shows, and I watched everything and everything that I could find, not because I was obsessed, but because my intention was to understand how does she connect with humans?

One of the big things I learned is, if you can understand – and this is very similar to marketing, anyone who's listening, who's in the marketing business. If you can understand the relationship between how people think, and feel, and behave, and how all three of those things work in concert, you understand everything. You can understand everything. Thoughts, behaviors, actions, and that was one big takeaway.

The other big takeaway was her ability to lean into vulnerability. Her ability to share her story and turn towards it and own it, and use it as a way to connect deeply with the audience that she's not up here on this high horse. She says, I may have better shoes, but I know what it's like to not have money. I know what it's like to be sexually abused. I know what it's like to come from nothing to go to something. And there was a real parallel there for me, of how do I turn towards my story, and instead of keeping it silent, and not sharing anything, how do I own those parts of me, and own them in such a way that I can crystallize them as intelligence, as wisdom, and then use that as my foundation to do what is next in my life?

All the while, the mentors in my life had said to me, like, “I don't think marketing is your career.” But what I recognize now is marketing is just the business of feelings and the reason why I was so good at marketing was not because I wanted to be behind a screen working on a deck, a strategy deck. But I understood how do you connect to another human being. How do you take a product, and how do you take a human, and how do you create a relationship between the two of them? That's the magic.

What Oprah does so gracefully in her work, is being able to use her ability to connect, to open people's hearts. First of all, I hadn't really paid that much attention to her and in fact, I thought it was kind of a weird assignment that he gave me. But I now recognize what he was saying all this while, that you have a gift, and your job is to look at others who have made headway with

their gifts, and to see what from that can you take, and can you leverage as you grow into this next chapter of your life?

[0:55:15] LW: Any episodes particularly stand out as poignant or pivotal in your understanding of that?

[0:55:21] JA: Yes. Every time she would fill the audience around the topic. So, for example, there was one episode where the whole room was full of men who had been sexually abused, and they all had a photo that they had to hold up on their chest of the age with which they were first abused. The topic was around abuse. She had done hundreds of shows on sexual abuse, having been somebody who had been abused. And the way in which she was able to make people feel less alone. That was really what the theme throughout. She always made people feel like they were less alone in a world where as a coach, now, what I recognize is we're all struggling in silence. Because all of us feel like we're alone in our challenges and we don't talk about it. We like to keep shame secret and silent and we hide it. The less you talk about it, the more you have it.

So, her way of being able to hold space for some of our deepest struggles. And do it in such a way that after the show you leave feeling less alone, and more connected, and more healed, those are examples of shows to me that were just – they weren't the celebrity shows. None of the celebrity shows were that interesting, really. The shows that were most powerful were everyday people who feel alone. And the way she used her platform to make people feel less alone. That was a big lesson for me of realizing, even in tech, these are not my people, necessarily, and the corporate game. Let me rephrase that. The corporate game was not the game that I wanted to be playing. The game of corporate politics did not align with what I can do, which is use my voice, use my passion, use my energy to connect people, and bring people together. I needed to trust that that's where I was headed in a world where I was so stuck in the golden.

We call them golden handcuffs in tech. You have the money, you have the 401(k), you have the title, you have sexy offices. Every time you travel to a different place in the world, like you get to go into a nice office. You get drawn in by all of these luxuries. But there comes a time where I was like, "This isn't it. This isn't it." When I recognize, I was the universe, this whole time was

trying to remind me and tell me, “Look, I keep trying to let you go from this so that you can move into something else. But you're hard-headed, you're not listening. So, when are you going to get the message?”

Which actually brings me to the last point I want to share about the Oprah thing, which she used to do this Q&A, it's called After The Show. After every show, she would do a Q&A where she would take a few questions from the audience, and the team has since captured some of those videos, and most of them on YouTube. One of them is someone asked how do you know that this was your calling? How did you know that this is what you wanted to do? She said, “I recognize that my life is not mine alone, that there's something else going on here, that I'm in the co-pilot seat, and that there is a bigger energy.” She calls it God, but you call it divine intelligence, the universe, whatever that is for you, that there's something bigger going on here. And your number one job is to get still and to listen to that, and to move with that, as opposed to push against it.

Man, that was a huge unlock for me. Because this whole time, as I felt like a failure getting let go from these jobs, what I now recognize is it was just life trying to nudge me in another direction and say, “Honey, this isn't it. You're not at capacity working in some big thousand-person organization and marketing, hiding behind a computer doing slides. There's a bigger calling on your life.” And finally, I see it. I can see it, and I can feel it, and I can taste it, and that's why we're here talking.

[0:59:22] LW: Was there a pivotal moment where you finally saw that, “Oh, wait a minute. I'm not a tech person who has an aspiration to be a coach. But I'm really a coach who's been masquerading in tech for all these years.” Was there a conversation? Maybe perhaps with a mentor, or were after watching Oprah? What was the moment that clicked?

[0:59:41] JA: I took six months after getting fired from Airbnb. I did all this work. I then said, “All right, I'm good now. I can go back into tech with this new awareness. So, I got a job at Lyft and I spent a couple years there, and it was actually great with this new level of awareness. I was growing in the role, managing people, working on autonomous vehicles, future forward.

[1:00:03] LW: Not giving unsolicited advice this time?

[1:00:06] JA: That's right. And having an awareness, having a breath, having a meditation practice, having a breath practice. Recognizing, "Oh, I feel what's happening right now. Somebody's saying something in this meeting. I know it's wrong and I'm feeling my armpits get tingly, and my chest is tightening, and I'm starting to sweat. And I recognize what's happening." Instead of using that, and turning into the Hulk, I now recognize, "Okay. I'm supposed to relax and lean away and let this pass and regulate myself." Come back to my breath, regulate myself. I realized, "Oh, okay, this is so interesting. I recognize what's happening." Then COVID hit.

Of course, the trifecta of Black Lives Matter protests, COVID, all the tornadoes and fires, of course, put a lot of pressure on the rideshare business, and I was rerouted from autonomous vehicles to working with the CDC to figure out what were all the things we were going to do as Lyft to keep people safe. Partitions, masks, venting the car, cleaning, all these protocols, right? Trying to figure stuff out day by day, as thousands and thousands of people a day were dying. A year into doing this work, we were asked by the CDC to include more mask messaging in our app, because people were getting in the car, and taking five minutes to find their mask while they're in the car. It's like, "Hello, the car is small. This driver is typically a Black and Brown person who doesn't have a guest full house." So, if they get sick, everyone in their family is getting sick, and they don't have the same access to health care and to so on and so forth that everyone else does. So, let's make sure people have their mask on before they get in the ride.

That push notification that says, "So and so is in route. We'll be there in a minute, please be outside with a car." I wanted to add, "Please be outside with your mask on before you get in the ride." The team wanted to put it under a several-month experiment to see the impact on bookings. And in that moment, I basically had a panic attack. I thought, "Are you kidding me? There are 50,000 people a day dying." And I know that because every morning we have a standup and my job on the first slide is to copy and paste the number from New York Times onto the slides so that the entire tiger team knows what numbers we're dealing with here. And you're telling me that in order for me to add the word mask on this push notification, I have to wait four months on an experiment? No, no, no, no, no, no. There's something grossly wrong here. We're misaligned.

All of a sudden, everything became very small. On top of that my family was getting sick. So many of us dealt with parents and family members who were hospitalized or sick. And so, it very quickly became real to me that this is not my purpose. My job here is not to stay within this system, where I keep bumping up against values, misaligned decisions that I'm losing. Instead of turning into the Hulk and getting angry, like I used to do. I said, "All right, I'm going to leave, and I don't know what's next. But I think I need to coach these people. I think I need to train these people, these leaders how to lead from their heart and live through their values." Versus we have these values, but then we're so myopic in our processes of, "Oh, you're changing a push notification. We have to put it under an experiment." And it's like, you're not thinking about the context of everything else going on in the world. You're not seeing the forest through the trees.

And that was the moment where I finally said, "Okay, this is it." I left. I read a bunch of books, one of them Michael Singer, *The Surrender Experiment*. And I decided to take the rest of the year and do my surrender experiment. So, I literally was like, "Let me surrender." I have this new awareness, I've left this job, I'm going to surrender and I'm going to see what the universe has in store for me. Oprah was talking about how she gets still and she syncs up with the source and she allows the truth of herself to come through from that inner world. I'm going to go figure out what that is. Let me just surrender to what the universe has and see where it takes me.

Then little by little, I started taking phone calls. Some friend from Airbnb is starting a new AI company. Some friend here is trying to reorg their team. Some friend here is having trouble working with their leaders. This, that, and the other. I thought, "Oh, my gosh, this is amazing. I get so much joy out of being able to get on the phone and create a brave space for people to lay down their guard, let down their armor, and be fully true about what's going on. And then use the energy of that conversation to unlock clarity and give them hope and purpose towards the way forward. Maybe I could do this for a living. Maybe I can make a business out of this."

So, it took me several months to finally be like, "Okay, I think I'm going to try it." So, I went to coaching school and got certified. I built my client one by one. My KPI was serve one person powerfully. Then, the second one was serve one person powerfully and then get paid for it. Then one became two, and two became three, and three became four, and four became five, and then this thing started to grow, and I started to get asked to come speak to teams at all

[inaudible 1:05:16] and offsites, about bravery, around creativity, and innovation, and being vulnerable, and leading with your heart.

Then, I started to realize, “Oh, interesting, there's patterns here.” Every time I have a one-on-one conversation with an executive in tech, most of my clients are startups. They all feel alone. They all feel like they're suffering in silence. But there's actually patterns here that I'm seeing across the board. How can I merge this with my gift of marketing, of storytelling, of being able to articulate an idea, passionately? That's where the birth of the podcast came and said, “You know what, let me just try this. Let me try for 10 episodes, I'm just going to give it a go, and see what happens. I'm going to take the patterns and the themes that I'm seeing, and I'm going to do quick, 20 to 30-minute, like, I'm going to preach. I'm going to take an issue and a topic, and I'm just going to get on the mic and preach and see what happens.”

Then before you know it, it started to grow. It's like, “Wow, I'm living in the space of the dream. I'm living in the space of no longer resisting and trying to control and pushing against, but just allowing, and merging with whatever's coming my way, and it's wild.”

[1:06:27] LW: Beautiful. And your audience for the podcast, Let's Go With Julio, it extends beyond, I imagine, tech people and anyone who's looking at potentially a career change, anyone in the process of personal growth, anyone who's navigating failure, or feeling like an imposter, or who feels like they are not leading in the way that they want to lead.

[1:06:54] JA: Yes, leaders. Some people say I'm not a leader. I would argue that we're all leaders. We're leaders of our lives and we're leaders of others, and I think thinking of yourself as a leader is empowering. It's an empowering term. It reinforces that you are responsible for your life, and that you have agency over what you do and do not do. So, my target audience is I'm speaking to leaders who feel stuck, or feel like they need a space to be able to talk about the hard things getting in the way of our success.

We spend a lot of time on five-point frameworks, and three steps to this, and 10 things you should know about this. But in order to get there, we have to be able to talk about what's getting in the way, and I think the biggest thing that's getting in the way is that we believe, particularly leaders in tech, but a lot of us, we believe that we are cognitive beings, cerebral beings that can

on occasion, feel an emotion, but then choose to push the emotion away, and get back to frameworks and formulas.

But I think that that's a mistake. I think, we're human beings. We're emotional beings, that think a lot, and emotions are at the wheel here. I recognize that from my time in marketing. I recognize that from my time watching Oprah. I recognize that from my time as a coach, that we are emotional beings that think a lot, and the work that I'm trying to do with the podcast is get leaders out of their head and into their hearts, which connects to you, and the heart voice. All of the best decisions are made from the heart voice. And part of what I'm trying to do is take that and evangelize that. Get people to recognize that all of their most important decisions do not come from their head. It comes from the heart. You have to be able to have a brave heart and trust that. But it's scary to trust that when your heart is armored up, and you can't access it.

[1:08:54] LW: This may not have anything to do with what we've been talking about. But I'd love to hear the story of how you met your husband.

[1:08:59] JA: This is actually really relevant, because I met him at the lowest point of my life, 2018. I had gotten fired from Airbnb and I thought to myself, and then Jonathan, my mentor was like, "Hey, remember the two homework assignments. Watch Oprah, go to Hoffman." I signed up for Hoffman, and I had a month to kill between the time that I made that phone call and the time that I was going to check into this place that was going to take my phone and teach me how to meditate. Which by the way, was the first time I ever learned how to meditate, and the first day, when I was like wait a minute, I paid how much money to sit here and close my eyes and to listen to some guy talk to me? Are you kidding me? I almost left after the first day.

I was so frustrated, because I was so in my head. I was just like, "This is wild." I had a month to kill, and so, I said, "You know what, I'm going to London. I'm going to book a one-way ticket to London. I'm just going to go and I'm going to party it up. I'm going to go meet friends. I'm going to go to the clubs. I'm just going to get all of it out of my system because I'm sad and I'm frustrated and I got all these emotions. And I know something's coming next. I don't know what it is. So, let me go."

So, I find a – I go on Virgin Atlantic, find a first class, upper-class ticket for 20,000 points, which by the way is like impossible to do these days. But at the time, same day flight 20,000 points, upper class to London. I land and I take a photo on my Instagram, a story of like, “Hey, I'm in London.” Some guy, in Wales, drunkenly on his way home, sees my story and DMs me. “Hey, you're in town, we should meet up.” At first, I was thinking like, “I have my whole week already booked. I'm going to this club. I'm going to that club. I'm meeting with these people. I'm doing this, dah, dah, dah.” I thought, okay, maybe I can squeeze you in tomorrow between 3:30 and 4:30 at the Tate Modern.

The next day comes, I realize he traveled three hours from Wales to get here. First of all, if he had told me that, I would not have confirmed this, because the probability of failure would have been too high, taking all these trains here. And then what if I don't like him, then he's stuck with me, and it's awkward, dah, dah, dah, whatever. But anyway, he came, we met. We went to the Tate Modern, and then it started to snow. It never snows in London. It snowed such that every train shut down and he was stuck with me. So, what became an hour date around the Tate Modern, ended up needing to be a couple of days, because the snow prevented him from going home.

By the way, I was in such emotional turmoil at this point, but I was hiding it. I didn't tell him. He didn't know about what was really going on. So, I'm sitting here, trying to compartmentalize all the pain of like having been fired, and not sure what my life is going to, going on this retreat, partying in London, having this new dude who's so kind. He's so sweet. He's so caring. He's so present. He's the small-town boy from sheep town, Wales. And I'm thinking, “What the hell am I doing here? I'm about to go do drugs and go clubbing until 5am. And this guy, he don't look like that kind of guy.”

So, we ended up hanging out for the week. I said to him, “Hey, this is like a vacation romance. I don't think anything's going to come on this. I'm going on this retreat. I don't know what's going to happen to my life after. Why don't we just leave it here?” He was like, “We could do that. Or what if I book a flight to San Francisco, and I'll come see you the week after.” I was hesitant, thinking like, I've played this game before. Listen, you know how holiday romances are. But I reluctantly said, “Yes.” I left London, went to San Francisco, spent a week at Hoffman. They take your phone on the first day. On the seventh day, you get your phone back. I feel like a

completely transformed person in the sense that I have a new awareness over myself. I understand myself in a way that I never understood myself before. And they give you your phone back as you leave, and he's the first person that I see pop up on my phone turns on.

I just remember thinking like, "Okay, you just spent all this time doing all this inner work, you're either going to use it one day, or you're going to make today day one." And you might as well try. What have you got to lose? You don't have a job, you've been fired, you've already surrendered to the process. Just give it a go. Just try it. So, I texted him back. He came to see me. We ended up having an 18-month long-distance relationship from San Francisco to London. We would call each other every night. He'd come visit once a month. I'd go visit, so on and so forth.

And every single time, I would use the tools that I learned. I noticed when I was getting triggered, I noticed when I was getting frustrated, we would sit down and say, "Hey, I need to have a conversation with you. Something is bothering me. I don't need you to respond. I just need you to listen to me and then we can figure out what to do. But I learned this thing at this retreat that I need to share my emotions, otherwise, it bottles up and then it becomes resentful. So, I need to just share with you."

We did a few of these sessions where we really listened to each other and heard each other, and was willing to work through difficult things. And then, a moment became where we feel like we got over the clouds, and we built a system for how to respect, and acknowledge, and engage with each other during the easy moments. But especially, during the hard moments.

After 18 months, I said, "Look, we can't keep doing this forever. We're either going to move in or you're not." So, he said, "All right, I have a six months visa. Let me come over to San Francisco for six months and we'll live together. And if we love each other, we'll get married. If we don't, like, you go home and it was a fun six months. Fine." He comes October 2019. He is an engineer, so he was able to work remotely. This was pre-remote life. March 2020 hits, and COVID is now shutting everything down. And this is the last – he's supposed to go home the first week of April and our attorney, we called our attorney and he said, "Well, I don't know. He has to go home and we don't know when he'll be able to come back." It turns out pretty people from the UK weren't allowed to come back for over a year. So, we said, "You know what, let's go to the County Clerk's Office." I called them, I emailed them, no one answered. I said, "Maybe

they're closed already. We should just drive there.” We got in the car. We drove to the County Clerk's Office in Napa Valley, San Francisco, they were getting ready to close. They had the tape everywhere. The six feet, dah, dah, dah. We said, “No, no, no. We need to get married right now.”

So, the staff woman with two or her friends, in a room with no windows, we did the marriage, they were our witness. We were the last marriage in Napa County before everything shut down, and we ended up having to go from 18 months long distance to being with each other 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and it was such a blessing. Because I know for a lot of people, that wasn't necessarily easy. But because we were so open to doing the work, and hearing each other and seeing each other, and working through our problems, it really blossomed.

I tell you in my greatest testimony that it was such a reminder of the power of letting go and just moving with the flow of my life. What are the chances that at the lowest point of my life, he slips into my DMs on Instagram, and we're now in this – he's my soulmate, he's my best friend. I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for him. Every time that I fall into some kind of struggle, or I fall into cynical talk about myself, or not feeling good enough, I come back to that moment and remember that my job here is to trust the process, and to trust that there's something bigger going on in my life, and I'm here accepting and receiving the blessing. Even when it's hard. And that's the story of how we met.

[1:16:45] LW: Beautiful. Thank you for sharing that. I think that's a good place to end man. Just reflecting back over the entirety of what you share, I'm sure there's a lot more there that we didn't get a chance to get into. But I think back to you as a kid playing with those model cars and working out the steering wheel, and the wheels are connected. For me, that's kind of like a metaphor for just realizing that you have control over your life of where it goes. You don't have to do the thing that's popular, or the thing that looks good on paper. You don't have to keep up with the Joneses. There is another path for you. You want to get into the driver's seat of your life versus just being in the passenger seat of your life, and allowing other people's ideas for you to dictate where you go and what you do.

So, first of all, thank you so much for being, again, open enough to come on to the show and share your story, to tell the darker truths. And there's parts that are probably not even resolved

all the way yet, and there's a lot of vulnerability within that. So, I think a lot of people will be able to relate to that. I'm just happy that we got a chance to cross paths down in Cabo at the Modern Elder Academy. Shout out to Chip Conley and Christine and all the good people at the Modern Elder Academy for connecting us. Yes, and I look forward to hopefully getting a chance to cross paths with you again, very soon.

[1:18:11] JA: Thank you. Thank you for saying that. I love the way you connected it back to the wheel. Yes, you have to be in the driver's seat of your life. Because if not, life will drive you. I love that. Beautiful.

[1:18:24] LW: Beautiful, man. Thank you again.

[1:18:25] JA: Thank you. This has such been a pleasure and you're an inspiration to me, really. I credit a lot of my calmness and my trusting of my heart voice to you. So, thank you for the privilege and the honor. I'm grateful.

[1:18:38] LW: Beautiful.

[OUTRO]

[1:18:41] LW: Thank you for tuning into my interview with podcaster and tech coach, Julio Alvarez. You can follow Julio on the socials, @letsgowithjulio, which is also the name of his podcast. And I recommend giving that a listen as well. Of course, I'll put links to everything that Julio and I spoke about in the show notes, which you can find at lightwatkins.com/podcast.

If you enjoyed our conversation, you found it inspiring, and your mind is turning with all the different people that you've heard on other podcasts, and you're thinking, "Wow, I want to hear the Light interview someone like this person." You can help me make that interview happen very quickly and for free. All you do is just, you're probably holding your device in your hand, just look at your device, click on the name of the podcast, the Light Watkins Show. Scroll down past those seven or eight first episodes, you'll see a space with five blank stars. My ask for you is just to tap the star on the right. It takes less than 10 seconds and that way you can rate the podcast.

If you want to go the extra mile and leave a little one-line review about what you particularly enjoy about the podcast, that would be appreciated. But that's how guests accept my invitation to come on to the show, is they go to my page or their gatekeepers go to my page, and they see "Oh, this podcast is getting a lot of engagement. It's got a good amount of reviews. It's got a good number of ratings. I'll do the show." So, just taking 5, 10, 15 seconds to leave a rating, a review, actually, goes a long way in supporting the podcast and in helping me book new guests on the show. You can always also recommend people. Just hit me up, light@lightwatkins.com. Send me the recommendation. If you happen to know somebody personally, feel free to make a warm introduction and that also goes a long way. So, thank you very much for that.

Also, don't forget, you can watch these interviews on my YouTube channel. If you ever want to put a face to a story, just search Light Watkins Podcast on YouTube and you'll see the entire playlist. Make sure you subscribe there as well, because the gatekeepers look at the YouTube subscriptions, as well. And if you didn't already know, I post the raw unedited version of every podcast a day early in my Happiness Insiders Online Community. So, if you're the type that likes hearing all the mistakes and the false starts and the chit-chat in the beginning and the end of the episodes, you can listen to all of that by joining my online community at thehappinessinsiders.com.

The way you join is you just start with a masterclass or challenge. So, I've got a 30-day mindfulness triathlon. I've got a no-complaining challenge, a walking challenge, a resting squat challenge. I've got masterclasses for all kinds of inner work such as finding your purpose, overcoming fear, manifesting abundance, et cetera. So, whatever you're wanting to work on right now, you could do so in a community with good, proper instructions and accountability. And that's what that community is all about helping you become the best version of yourself.

In the meantime, I look forward to hopefully seeing you back here next week with another story about someone just like you, just like me, taking a leap of faith in the direction of their purpose. Until then keep trusting your intuition, keep following your heart, keep taking those leaps of faith. And if no one's told you recently that they believe in you, I believe in you. So, you got me in your corner. All right, thank you so much, sending you lots of love, and have a great day.

[END]