

EPISODE 189

“CB: There was no solution to learn about music if you just heard it, which is the most logical thing, right? Because you go through life hearing music in different places, but there was really no way to then find out what it was. Most of the time, unless it was a really famous song. Obviously, it's a really famous your friends know what it is. They all go. Oh, yeah, that's Coldplay or whatever. So then you just knew, but for that really long tail of all that music that was not like the mainstream big hits, most people would not know what it was and so therefore you couldn't find out what it was and you couldn't do anything about it. And so I think we all share this vision of we're going to solve that because everyone carries a mobile phone with them everywhere they go. And so now they're going to be able to get the answer. We're going to change the way they discover music.”

[INTRODUCTION]

Hey friend, welcome back to The Light Watkins Show. I'm Light Watkins and I have conversations with 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 people who've witnessed them in action or people who've directly benefited from their work.

The goal is to expose you to as many people as possible who found their path and to humanize them. And after hearing story after story, eventually, hopefully you give yourself permission to move further in the direction of what feels like your path and your purpose. Because what you'll see is that anyone who does that has had to overcome many of the same obstacles that you might be dealing with right now.

And before I tell you about today's guest, I just have a quick quick question for you. Have you ever been out to a restaurant or to a store and you hear a song come on over the sound system and you think to yourself, wow, I love that song. I wish I knew who sang it. There's a solution for that these days. When that happens, typically you pull out your phone. And you open up an app called Shazam and you press the button that says tap to Shazam this song and within seconds, the name of that song pops up. And I would say that that app Shazam is the app that I personally use the most outside of my social media apps.

And so this week on the podcast, I have the pleasure of talking to the person who created Shazam. His name is Chris Barton. Not long ago, I watched a movie on an airplane about all of the ups and the downs that led to the development of the BlackBerry. And when I spoke with Chris about the development of Shazam, it was a very similar situation.

Believe it or not, Shazam was not a hit straight out of the gate. In fact, it was an 18 year long overnight success, complete with near bankruptcies and layoffs and gaps in the technology and arguments about the name and founders who left because they didn't see a future in the app and on and on.

But eventually the invention of Apple's app store in 2008 was what saved Shazam because it was featured as one of the most popular apps. And eventually Apple made an offer to buy the app for a reported \$400 million. So we go deep into Chris's backstory and we unpack where the initial idea for Shazam came from, how Chris was able to find collaborators to help bring Shazam to market. How he overcame the early limitations in technology that would be required to even just make the app work in the way that he envisioned it. And this was technology that did not yet exist. And how did he even know what the right questions to ask were? Why did he keep the whole thing going, even though the app still took a decade and a half to get recognition? How did Chris overcome the haters and the doubters who consistently told him that what he wanted to do was impossible? And he and I also talk about the mistakes that he made and learned while pitching Shazam and how he would pitch it differently if he had to do over again. And we talk about what Chris is up to now because he's got another fascinating idea of his sleeve.

And if you have an idea, we talk about what to do with your idea to get support and funding and everything that you may want from the idea. So if you're a fan of Shazam or if you're a fan of innovation, you're going to love this episode because it's all about new ideas, new ways of thinking, and you're going to get a lot of value out of listening to the process of creation of the app Shazam. So without further ado, let's get right into the conversation. I'm honored to introduce you to Mr. Chris Barton, the founder of Shazam.

[00:04:57] **LW:** Chris Barton, thank you so much my friend for making the time to come on to my podcast.

[00:05:03] **CB:** Thanks for having me, Light.

[00:05:04] **LW:** You and I met through this speaker community called ImpactEleven. We know each other from that community. We actually haven't officially had, I don't think we've had a proper conversation yet, but I'm super excited to dive into your world in this episode, you are the founder of Shazam which is the app that so many people, myself included, have used and have found that magically we can discover what song is playing in whatever bar or restaurant or shopping center we happen to be in. And I remember, I grew up in the 70s. but I remember coming home from school as a very young, like 5, 6 years old and watching Shazam. There was the TV show Shazam and there was another TV show. I think with this character called

Gold Star. I don't know if you remember that, but that was my 1st point of reference for Shazam. And so that's what was happening with me down in Alabama. Meanwhile, you're in, I believe, San Diego and you are being reared by a nuclear physicist professor. And a computer science professor, I don't know if Wikipedia sometimes gets it wrong, but you can correct me if that's the case. And you're surfing all the time. So just tell me a little bit about your upbringing and what you were watching and what sort of philosophies and ideologies, your parents were echoing to you as you were in your earliest developmental years.

[00:06:37] **CB:** Okay. Let's see here. I think, well my parents are both Physicist there. When I was a kid, they were professors. And it's funny because my perception of the world was that as students get the summer off, right? We all got summers off, but in my perception of the world, adults also got summers off, because my parents were professors, they also didn't have anything to do during the summer. And so we would go on family trips to Europe. They're actually from Europe. My dad's British and my mom's French. And it was a shock later in life when I realized, oh, my gosh, adults have to work like all year round. That was just my parents that got the summers off, and obviously teachers do. But yeah, I think they're obviously, since they're scientists, they're curious by nature and they like to learn things. And they like to have discussions about things and we'd always have family dinners. And even now, if I go home, they're now retired. But if I go home and to see them in San Diego, we would have real good discussions at dinner about something.

But they were also very open minded. They always just encouraged me to do whatever I was interested in. So there was never a direction like, they might give me tips and suggestions of like, here's a good thing to study, but it wasn't like, you need to be a scientist or you need to do this or anything. They might give me ideas and suggestions, but I always felt very free to explore and go with whatever interested me. And in the end, I actually did enter colleges as an engineer thinking that would make sense since I had parents who are physicists, but I ended up switching to economics and business because I ended up liking the business side of things much more than the technical and scientific side of things. I'm not sure if I'm answering your question exactly in the direction that you wanted.

[00:08:17] **LW:** So my dad was a lawyer and I remember him always saying stuff like, you're not going to get away with anything. You can increase the lag time of whatever it is that you're doing wrong, but eventually it's going to catch up with you. And he would give us these axioms and these legal axioms growing up and that's what we remember. Did your parents echo any sort of sayings like that kind of helped you shaped how you were going to approach life later on as an adult? Kind of Any kind of core sayings? Sayings or ideologies or anything like, even you had to work hard in order to be successful, to shape what success was.

[00:09:01] **CB:** Yeah, it's interesting. Isn't it funny how sometimes you don't...

So I'm sure your son would remember you say, I'm sure you say, oh yeah, I give him millions of things. Millions of things. I think you sometimes don't often don't appreciate necessarily how much you've actually learned from your parents. You think you've come up with it on your own, but if you were to dig into it, you're like, oh, wow, that is really due to the way I was raised.

My dad has always had a very high bar. No matter what I achieve, he might then say, what more could you do? So that's probably built into me in the sense that I always, whatever I do obviously starting Shazam was one big thing. And even now keynote speaking, I have this tendency that I'm like, how can I improve it? How can I make it even better? It might come from a lifetime of growing up with my dad, but it wasn't like he preached that to me in some way. He didn't say you always need to aim higher or anything like that. It was more just his natural expectation. I'd say almost everything was just built around expectations. And I use that a lot with my son where I felt motivated by I wanted to make my parents proud and that it wasn't that they told me you need to do this, you need to get these grades, or get into this university is more like I felt like I wanted to achieve things that would make them proud, basically.

[00:10:16] **LW:** You experienced undiagnosed dyslexia in school. Yeah, which I guess for people who aren't familiar, they can make it harder to read things you read backwards. So what did you were you open about that with your parents? Or you just had to work hard and just didn't know?

[00:10:34] **CB:** We didn't know. Back then, they didn't diagnose this stuff, right? It was just like, they didn't have any of those things. It's not always backwards, by the way, with dyslexia it's actually just the way your brain processes language written language in particular is just different. It's less efficient and more tiring to do it. So it just makes reading harder and slower and more taxing, shall we say, as a way of absorbing information. So I tend to try to find any way other than reading if I want to learn something, whether it's a video or an audio podcast or audio book or whatever it is.

Yeah so, I mean, I didn't realize I had dyslexia, but I just knew the main sort of symptom, I guess you should say, if you described it as a symptom. And by the way, dyslexia, it's not a binary thing, like you either have it or you don't, it follows a normal distribution, so you can have different levels of it. So there's no doubt that some people have really extreme dyslexia, and I've met parents who have kids who their kids are you five years behind all the other kids in school, and that's like really much more extreme dyslexia, and I think they could read, seeing things backwards and things like that is it would fall into that category.

Yeah, I mean, the main way I experience is I just struggled. And much like my son who has dyslexia as well, I just simply struggled with certain kind of basic things and in academics because academics is designed for one brain type and the way those tests are designed and so on, it can be a disadvantage if you process information in a different way. You end up just coming up with your own coping mechanisms. I come up with my own systems.

[00:11:10] **LW:** What's an example of your system from when?

[00:11:15] **CB:** Yeah, I remember one thing, I remember, for example, is that I could for the SAT, I remember, there's the English part and the Math part. And so I remember getting a much higher score in the math and on the English, because English was just seemed so hard. All

these things with read this paragraph and then now tell us the conclusion so I remember studying for the SAT and then trying to come up with strategies on the English where I would think of it almost like a math problem. I know that sounds a bit weird, but like I would try to systematize and come up with these like mapping mechanisms to tie back answers to paragraphs and I would just analyze a paragraph of information in a very different way, probably than most people. That would be an example of a coping mechanism.

Another one, it's funny because I'm trying to think of what my coping mechanism was because I was helping my son with his school. He's ninth grade now. He had some assignments in, read this whole book and then write up these little essays with the answers and oh my gosh, that just feels like the most overwhelming, by far the most difficult assignment that he could be given and or I could be given. So when I'm trying to help him, I'm like, Oh my God, this seems impossible. And it would be much easier to go solve some physics problem or math problem or, something where you can just like this sort of this deterministic approach to it. But when it's just like an entire book and compare and contrast these two characters is like, Oh, my God, it feels like insurmountable. And I would try to think how can I turn this into a sort of more like a math problem. Here's a character, here are their main traits, and pull that, just find some easy way to go and find that information in the book and then distill it so that you can summarize it.

But honestly, it's really hard to come up with a hack with things like that. So I can't exactly remember. I'll tell you what my biggest coping mechanism was that once I got into college. I just literally chose my major and my classes. Here's how I did it. There was a thing called the syllabus, right? Which is that every class has a syllabus. And it tells you all the books you're going to read and things like that. I don't know how many students did this, but I was at UC Berkeley undergrad. And I literally, before while signing up for classes, I would go and I'd dig up the syllabuses for every class, and then I would go find out how big their reading list was.

And then basically I would avoid all the classes and all the majors that had big reading lists. And so that was my strategy. So that's how I ended up as an economics major because In economics, it's like all the classes, it was basically just one textbook rather than some list of 10 or 12 different books you had to read.

And I thought, okay, I can handle that textbook. And then you can, with a textbook, you can start to use this mathematical mapping type strategies where you're like, okay, these questions are from chapter four. So I'm just going to go look at chapter four and I'm going to go find the answers in chapter four. So it's it felt very deterministic and systematized. Whereas it's not going to be like, read this whole book and start commenting on all these things that you pulled out of the book. So that was one coping mechanism.

[00:14:55] **LW:** Would you describe yourself as a hard worker, or did you have to just work hard to be able to satisfy whatever requirements there were, but you didn't really love it. Some people work hard and they just love working hard, with things that they're passionate about, obviously, has that been a trait of yours? Or did you have to develop that?

[00:15:14] **CB:** I think it's both. I think I am a hard worker just by nature because I like to do a good job on things, but also I had to work hard and that part wasn't pleasant when I had to work. If I had to work hard because of some challenge, let's say that I I just had to read a book to write some big essay on it, because of course I had to take like English class at UC Berkeley in order to graduate, even though I was an economics major, I had to fulfill some basic requirements and I had to take English, which involved reading quite a few books and and so I would have to work really hard to just get through those books and try to figure out how to survive that class and still get a good grade. And and in that case, I would work hard to do it, but also it would be unpleasant.

[00:15:55] **LW:** So your standard for yourself would be like, an A, because like, for me, I wasn't really into school, honestly. And if I got a B, I would be perfectly happy with that. Like, I didn't need to get an A, but some people, their standard is I need to get an A. So I'm going to work as hard as I need to work in order to get that highest.

[00:16:12] **CB:** Yeah, I was one of those people. I was all about getting all A's. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And I don't know, just once it became, I think it actually all started in ninth grade when I I made friends with this other kid and he was getting straight A's and that's it, once I realized he's getting straight A's, maybe it's a sort of slightly competitive or I'm not sure what it is, but it was more like if he's going to get straight A's, I'm going to get straight A's, and that was it.

[00:16:35] **LW:** You're in management consulting after school for several years. Did you feel like, okay, this is what I'm going to be doing this. I've found my path in life or was it a placeholder until you discovered what you truly wanted to do looking back now.

[00:16:51] **CB:** At the time I very specifically chose management consulting. It wasn't a placeholder. It was like the beginning of my career. It was a, it didn't mean that I thought I was gonna be a management consultant for life but coming right out of college, I had determined through careful analysis that it was Absolutely. The number one thing I wanted to do. And I think...

[00:17:13] **LW:** That was like tech start. That was like the same category as a tech founder back in those days. I had been interviewed for Goldman Sachs and a few other management because that's what everybody wanted to do. That's how you can make a lot of money and have a big impact.

[00:17:25] **CB:** Yeah, it was for people that were coming, especially if they wanted to go into the business world. So that, and I fell in that category because there's so many different routes you can go after college. Are you going to. Are you going to be a creative journalist, or are you going to be a scientist? But if you choose business as your route, which is what I wanted to do, or something in business world, then coming out of college.

I guess there's three different, to super simplify it, there'd be three categories of jobs you could go after in general. And this is a super generalization. And those three categories would be like, I'll just call it companies and all the different roles you can, business-y type roles you can do in companies.

For example, you could join as a very junior marketing person. And then you had investment banking, all the finance world investment making and other finance type jobs. So the world of Oh, do you want to be an accountant or an investment banker or a commercial banker, you know, all these sort of financing type jobs.

And then the third one was management consulting, which was, it was a category, although it's small, if you took the total number of people that went into that.

[00:18:27] **CB:** It was a relatively small number compared to how many people are graduating from college. So it's very competitive. And I just liked that one the most because what I liked about it compared to the other two is that you've got a huge amount of diversity of experiences because you've worked on all these projects. So if you joined in marketing at Procter Gamble, you're basically going to just be focused on some product and marketing that product and so on whereas like in management consulting, you might do that for three months and then help Procter Gamble for three months. But now we're going to go help this whatever, astronaut company or rocket company for three months. And then it's gambling company and started gambling. The reason I mentioned gambling is because I did gambling machines was one client that I had in management consulting. The gambling machines you find in pubs. So that's something that exists in England because my first job was actually in England. My first management consulting job. So in pubs there, in bars, you find these gambling machines.

But anyway yeah, the diversity and then it was a little less money oriented than investment banking. I think investment banking and so on was so it was all about just how much money can you make? Whereas managed consulting was a little bit more what strategic advice can you provide? And also I think I was attracted by the fact that it was just hard. It was hard to get into like, it was known for being very competitive. And again, it was really hard to secure a job offer from one of these companies. And so that made me want it even more.

[00:19:46] **LW:** And you caught the entrepreneurial bug at a certain point. I believe it was when you were getting your MBA. Can you tell us a little bit about how that happened?

[00:19:55] **CB:** Yeah. See I think I think that's two, in a way there's sort of two influential aspects to that. One is that my dad started a business, a consulting business when I was in my teenage years. And I think often when your parents are entrepreneurs, from what I've read, and I believe this to be true, that it does have an influence on you because you see them being entrepreneurs and being their own boss and it's really inspirational for your own career.

So that was 1 kind of early influence, but the pivotal moment for me was when I went to do my MBA at Berkeley. And I hadn't decided to be an entrepreneur then. I was just doing my MBA.

But I was in a computer lab and I was chatting with someone sitting next to me who was a year ahead of me in the two year MBA and I said, what are you working on?

And he said, I'm working on my own startup. And I just, I thought, wow you're here doing an MBA and you're gonna start a company. That's really amazing. Hadn't crossed my mind to do that.

And it was an air force pilot, right? So it's like that jump going from this thing to this other thing.

You heard that story. Yeah, exactly. I said, what did you do before? And he said, I was an air force pilot. And I just thought, wow, if you can transition from being an air force pilot to starting a company, that's just so empowering to hear that. So I want to do the same. And so then I embarked on this kind of journey to try to start a company.

[00:21:17] **LW:** Alright. So you bring together 2 friends of yours, right? And then there's you, and you all are just going to start brainstorming for ideas. Now, why those 2 guys, what did they have that you thought? Okay, they would be great to do business with because, for anybody who's been in a partnership, it's like being married. So, not just about their skill set, it's also about personality. It's about motivation, what motivates people. Are they motivated by money? Are they motivated by status? Are they motivated by just doing cool things? Did you think about all that when you brought these 2 guys together? Or is it just I don't want to do this alone.

[00:21:57] **CB:** No, I definitely thought very carefully about a lot of those things basically, I think I think it comes down to shared values and a connection, a personal connection, really, if I were to generalize it. I guess the 3rd thing is. Is, fund a fundamental desire and passion and skill set to start a company because clearly you could have shared values and a personal connection with someone who really is not going to add any value as a co founder of a company or has no interest in starting a company. That was important as well, but definitely shared values is extremely important. So there are people that just fundamentally high integrity people that I really trusted and I felt like the way they thought of the world was similar to me. So in terms of those values being kind and thoughtful and considerate and loyal and yeah, just high integrity, really high integrity, which is just so fundamentally important.

Secondly, there was this partial connection. So they were both friends. One was a friend from business school. I'd been taking a lot of classes with him. And then the other one was a friend from outside of business school, but been my circle of friends. And I had spent a huge amount of time hanging out with him during the summer right before starting Shazam. For that summer, I had gone to London to do my summer business school internship at Microsoft. And he wasn't at Microsoft, but he was just living in London and we hung out. A lot. And so yeah, so I really enjoyed being with both of them hanging out and I've done many personal trips with them that has nothing to do with Shazam. They're good friends. So I've gone all over the world with them and had lots of fun adventures with them. Because if you're going to start a company with someone, you really want to make sure it's someone you're gonna have fun with in general,

right? Because you have to remember that the majority of companies fail. The most likely scenario the future is that your company fail, but hopefully at least you had a great experience, trying to do the company and that's going to be a function of who you're doing it with.

[00:23:46] **LW:** Was there a buy in component to be a part of this upstart of what you didn't even know what it was going to be yet. But were you thinking that as well? Oh, this guy, he's probably got 10, 000 dollars. You can put into this or this other person has 5, 000 bucks. He can contribute to get things rolling while we get a pitch deck and all this other stuff.

[00:24:02] **CB:** No, there was no buy in and none of us contributed any cash. We just contributed our time. Yeah, we eventually raised money. They call it sweat equity, is what you call it, which basically means that you're contributing your time. That's what you're doing to try to get this thing off the ground.

[00:24:16] **LW:** So talk about the genesis of the idea. How long did it take? From the moment you guys had your 1st meeting to, hey, that's a good idea. And were there any other ideas that were close to you? You guys were so close to maybe pursuing this 1 or was it just such a big gap in the Shazam idea?

[00:24:35] **CB:** There was a brainstorming period where we kind of the 3 of us and by the way, there's a 4th co founder that eventually joined to invent technology. But at this time, it's 3 of us. And and there was a period of time where we were just saying, let's brainstorm different ideas. And during that time, I would meet with one of my co founders, Dheeraj, in London, and we would just meet at a cafe and just sit there and just brainstorm ideas and write them down and talk about them.

But also I did a lot of brainstorming on my own as they did, and yeah, there were a couple of ideas I had that I thought about a little bit and tried to pitch to them, and they were really bad ideas in retrospect. Actually, no, one of them would have been a good idea as a business, but I wouldn't have enjoyed building it as much that, that wouldn't be the contact lens. That one became a very viable, highly successful business now known as 1,800 contacts where you can get contact lens stuff on the internet. And I spotted that this is before that, and I thought, oh, that seems like a big opportunity and yeah, it would have been a great business, but it wouldn't have as fun and exciting as creating Shazam.

[00:25:39] **LW:** I remember you said you didn't want to wake up and you didn't think you'd be excited about. Contact lenses morning, and that's that was a criteria for you. You had to feel like you were excited about something.

[00:26:03] **CB:** Yeah, you have to wake up in the morning and go after it every day for a very long period of time as an entrepreneur. If you're not just so excited about it, then that's going to make it hard. And so there's nothing wrong with contact lenses on the Internet, and I'm sure for some people that would be just the thing that they really want to do. But if it didn't resonate with you, if it doesn't resonate with you, and for me, it was like, I thought okay, it seems like a

good business opportunity, but do I see myself changing the world in some way, or doing something different? And I didn't, and it was like, okay, really, I'm just, making a nice streamlined way to buy contact lenses on the internet. I can't get that excited about that. I just decided not to pursue that one.

[00:26:19] **LW:** And what was the moment, the epiphany for the music, recognition?

[00:26:24] **CB:** It's interesting. Many people say, Oh, wow. So you came up with the idea of what's that song, and I often say, no, actually that's not, you probably heard the term, the aha moment. People think, Oh, so what the aha moment of Shazam or the aha moment they assume is, Oh, what if you could figure out what that song is? But and this is what I talk about. My keynote is actually in a way that you could say there's sort of two aha moments, but it's the second one. That's the really breakthrough one. The first one is Oh yeah, wouldn't it be great if you could use a mobile phone and find out what song is playing.

But the thing is, we started the original idea that I had was the same as what one that six other companies had as well, which is that you do it using technology that existed that tells you what's playing on the radio. So there's technologies that monitored thousands of radio stations, and in real time, it knew what was playing on the radio, and that's a relatively easy music recognition problem because the signals are clean. There's no noise, and it's a small database of songs. So that was the original idea. You could argue that's the first aha moment because it's still, it was enough that six companies did it right. They all built that. And so it was enough of an aha idea that people were going to do that.

Of course, it would have been a very limited user experience because you can't use it in a movie theater or a bar club anywhere, it's not radio which is many places, grocery stores. Think of all the places you use Shazam today. And then also in the cases where it is radio, you have to know which radio station it is so you can type that radio station in and it would tell you what song is playing.

So you have to know the radio station and then you have to type it in, which is clunky, right? Imagine if every time you use Shazam, you have to type a 3 or 4 digit number in. And that was the first aha, aha idea, but the real big aha was when I was thinking about what could someone do that would make this sort of irrelevant? That's when I came up with the idea of, oh my gosh, what if you didn't even need to know it was playing on the radio? What if you didn't even rely on that technology? What if you could just do it, and this is the aha moment. I was like laying in bed in central London. And just thinking about my idea. And I thought, Oh, my gosh, what if you could do it from just the sound in the air coming to the microphone of the phone? And then you identified it that way. Of course, there'd be lots of challenges like, if you were in a bar, there might be people talking in the background or whatever with noises, but I thought if you could do it that way, then you wouldn't even need to know what's playing on the radio. You wouldn't have to type in the radio station number, and you wouldn't be limited to doing it only where it's radio. You'd be able to use it. In many places bars, clubs, cafes, movie theaters, grocery stores. And so that was the real aha moment. Of course it did require inventing this technology, which we learned was extremely hard to do cause it didn't exist, but that was the aha moment.

[00:28:54] **LW:** Also, we're talking about Nokia's. We're talking about razors, right? So we're not talking about smartphones. We're talking about very basic phones here. So you mentioned taking this strategic innovation class and business school, which I find to be a sort of a pivotal part of that story because it kind of encouraged you to think outside of the box when it came to these ideas, right? Like you were intentionally doing that.

[00:29:22] **CB:** Yes. Yeah, there was a class I was taking called strategic innovation taught by Costas Markides. He was very much encouraging you to think just to really step away. That's part of the art implementing strategic thinking is to not just simply think in a linear way, but really kind of step outside and look at it your problems and your solutions and your approaches from a different lens, from different lenses and from different angles so that you might come up with a different perspective.

That concept of thinking that way, I was actually consciously implementing that when I came up with this idea, because if you think about what I was really doing is I was, I was questioning myself, right? So I had this idea of identify songs that are being played on the radio, which, as I said, 6 other companies did as well. And then I sit there and I push myself, right? And I thought what could someone do that would. Leapfrogged me. What could someone do that would make me irrelevant? So I'm really pushing, I'm really questioning my own idea right there.

We could all do that for almost any idea, right? You could question almost anything you do right now. You could say, what, right now I live in Northern California, but what would happen if I didn't live in Northern California, you know? I mean, it's like, right? I mean, You could question anything. It's an interesting way to approach life to always keep an open mind about whatever you're doing so that you can always be evaluating, what might be an interesting new experience.

[00:30:41] **LW:** What's also interesting is that none of you all were tech guys, you didn't know anything about technology. So you're literally on Google in the earliest days of Google, right? Looking for pattern recognition and seeing what websites come up and you learn about audio signal processing. What is that? What does that mean? Audio signal processing.

[00:31:00] **CB:** Basically it falls within the kind of academic field that you're probably familiar with electrical engineering. So that's it, you can study electrical engineering in the university, obviously. And then within electrical engineering, you've got all these things you can design circuits, and you can do computer software programming and all these things that there's many things sub areas within electrical engineering but one of them is the behavior of audio. And audio is a signal, right? It can be an analog or digital signal. There's all these applications of the behavior of audio. You could analyze audio, right? You could think of all the different use cases. For example, with a professor we found at Stanford, he had invented algorithms used in the Yamaha synthesizers. So in that case, he's taking, taking electronics and getting electronics to sound to create a sound that sounds like a piano, right? Or other instruments. So that's 1 problem you could tackle. Another 1 he had done is detecting submarines under the water using the sound of them. So you're literally listening under the water which are all the sounds you can capture and then trying to see if you can hear the sounds of a submarine on

that. That was something he did for the military. So there's many things you can do in audio. And so that's audio signal processing is this field of everything related to the analysis of audio essentially.

[00:32:19] **LW:** Okay, so this professor ended up becoming 1 of your advisors and I'm wondering, I'm sure you would have been excited talking to this professor about the different possibilities. Why didn't you make him a partner? Why did you or did he not want to be a partner? And help to develop this technology was he pretty adamant? You got to go to a PhD student or how did you come up with that?

[00:32:40] **CB:** There's a lot of gut instinct things as an entrepreneur, but my gut instinct told me that this is such a hard problem that I need someone who's a full time focused on this, you know, and we were right.

I mean, It had to be someone that joined the company. And then stayed with the company for years and and that is what it turned out to be because it's not like you just solve it and go, okay, that one's done. Move on. It's we got this guy, Avery Wang, who has been a student under this professor and Avery has a PhD, four degrees from Stanford in mathematics, statistics, electrical engineering. So he joined as the fourth co founder of Shazam. And he was like working on the groundbreaking invention for Shazam so that we could launch, but also then improving it over time to make that algorithm even more robust, even more scalable, work in more noisy environments across bigger databases of songs and so on.

It's an ongoing challenge, just like Google search gets better over many years, music recognition got better and better over many years. Definitely in my heart, I knew it's not just go find some person to. I mean, we did consider it, by the way, hiring someone to consult and just tell us how to do this. And then we, that's it. We're ready. Now we can move on. But really, I think when something is so core to your business, one big learning for tech companies is when something is really core to your business it needs to be an in house full time competency, right? It's not a good idea to outsource and just get some advice from someone on something that's so core to your business.

Getting some advice from a professor as a solution was not a solution. We needed a full time person. So the professor at Stanford was not an option to get him. I guess if he was willing to leave Stanford, it didn't even occur to me, as an entrepreneur, to ask him, will you leave Stanford as a professor and join us as a co founder. But I guess could have offered that up if he was interested in it. But he did consult. He was an advisor to Shazam. And he so he did have a formal relationship with the company. And he also is a consultant to Shazam. So we paid him as a consultant. So both he was an advisor and a consultant, and he was involved in the process of coming up with the first breakthrough of the invention that are my fourth co founder was the lead of I'm doing Avery.

[00:34:42] **LW:** But initially most people said it was impossible, right? Including Avery what did you think about that?

[00:34:48] **CB:** This is what's interesting is that most people, so most tech companies. You come up with an idea and then you simply just get engineers to build it, right? So if you think about like snapchat or Facebook, right? You're basically okay, let's build an app and then the message disappears, right? That's not an invention. It's not like they had thought that's impossible, right? I mean, They just got engineers to build that capability, right? Or Facebook let's make a website where you can find your friends.

Again, you're just building that you're not inventing it. But in the case of Shazam, this wasn't just simply build. It wasn't simply oh, yeah, any PhD in signal processing can build this you know that no problem. It was it was actually an invention. We had to invent it. And because it had not been invented. They didn't know how to do it. It was impossible. Like there was no technology in the world. There was no way to do this music recognition in a noisy environment at scale. That was the problem that we had. As I said, there was music recognition for clean, nice, clean signals coming in on radio play. That existed, but there was no one none that could work with background noises and against millions of songs in a database. It was a really hard pattern recognition problem, just like voice recognition was at one point. No one knew how to do it. So we had to essentially invent it. And when you invent something, you don't know how you're going to do it, because that's by definition, you're going to invent it.

So when Avery and Julia started working on this, they didn't know how to do it. And for months, they couldn't come up with a solution. And there was a time when Avery told me he was going to have to come back to me and say, Chris, I have really bad news, but your startup that you have that I'm now of the fourth co founder of it's not going to get off the ground because I can't come up with a way of doing this music recognition and a noisy environment against a scale database.

[00:36:26] **LW:** There are the legendary moments of, the first telegram that was ever sent said this and the 1st phone call, they said that and, did you have that moment? The 1st time it did work, you guys figured it out. Do you remember that?

[00:36:39] **CB:** I remember the moment that you figured it out without doubt. It was around June of 2000, I believe. And I remember that he finally came up with a unique way of doing it. It also had to be scalable, right? You can't use brute force. You had to be able to like, build a computer system that could accommodate all these people recognizing songs. And it required a hundred computers for each person, then simply that's not going to work, is it? So yeah, I was actually on a vacation. I had gone on a little sailing holiday in Croatia. And was just listening to a voicemail while I was on this. Because you're out on a boat, right? Most of the time. But I was back in port and checking my voicemail and I heard Avery leave a voicemail saying, Chris, we figured it out. We cracked the code. We came up with a way to do this, you know, and they hadn't come up with this any method before. That was the moment. We didn't immediately have a demo. We had to then build a demo. I think our original way of demonstrating it was using this software that's called Matt lab, which is that's how we ran a lot of the tests. So it kind of academic type software to try out different things that are mathematical and signal processing.

Originally, we would just look at it, submit a little sample of music and then run a search, and they would find the matching song in the database. So that was the original demo. But then later, of course, it was an actual phone that you were doing it with.

[00:37:57] **LW:** Yeah, I didn't realize this until I researched it for this conversation but Shazam has its own independent database. And in the early days, you guys had 18 year olds uploading digital copies of songs, CDs, 24 hours a day. And it's like a lot of work and effort because I thought that the tech, I don't know anything about this, but I thought the technology was, you just, it just somehow recognized whatever the song was based on, the, I don't know the signal in the air and somehow it just magically came up with the name. But it links it to the database. So there's a very more songs than Spotify.

[00:38:37] **CB:** Yeah, we have a huge amount of music. Because remember Spotify, they can only put the songs that they have licenses to play and they have licenses to play most music, but there's a lot of, there's always some more music out there that they may not have licensed yet. Whereas like Shazam, you don't know, people might identify it. They might want to identify anything. It could be some obscure DJ that has just is up and coming and he's not on any record label. He's has his own little label and he maybe his music is getting popular on SoundCloud or something. And, I mean, Of course, it's really hard to get everything, but we try to get as much as we possibly can. So that people can identify that as well. So Shazam's database is huge. Today, I think it's over 100 million songs because, of course, it's everything that Apple has, and Apple has a lot, right? Because Apple owns Shazam today, ever since 2018. But uh, when we first launched, we had to create a database to start from. Just like Google, for Google to search the Internet, they have to have all the websites to look at. And so for us to search, we're essentially building a search engine, right? It's a search engine of music. Google had a search engine of websites. We were creating a search engine of music. And if you have a search engine, you need to have somebody to search. And so what we're searching is the music itself. So we had to create that database. And the reason we had to create it is because today these things exist, right?

You have Apple Music you have Spotify, you have these giant databases of music. But when we were launching Shazam they didn't exist. There wasn't even iTunes, right? We launched Shazam in 2002. So that's before iTunes was launched. We had to create it from scratch, this database of music by, by, as you said, we hired 18 year olds, I think about 30 of them and they worked in eight hour shifts, three eight hour, eight hour shifts per day, 24 hours a day putting CDs into computers. So they're running software that we had custom built to create this database.

And what was the initial marketing plan? You had the idea now, you had proof of concept. How were you going to get it out to the world?

Yeah, the initial marketing plan, because back then when Shazam launched, it was not an app. We launched 2002. So that's the app store launched in 2008. So it's six years before apps. So we essentially had created an app, right? Many years before apps existed. And so the way Shazam worked back then, it was a phone call. You would dial a phone number a four digit

phone number 'cause we got this four digits number from the mobile phone company. So that, like 4 1 1, right? Or 9 1 1. Except we had a four digit 2, 5, 8, 0, which is the only four digits in a straight line on your mobile phone. And if you dialed 2, 5, 6, 0, it initiated a voice phone call into our interactive voice response system. We recorded 15 seconds of sound and then in within seconds we sent back a text message to your phone with the name of the song and uh, I got the call, of course, and that was Shazam. But of course, that was such a, it was really cool. If you saw it, you were like back then you could only make phone calls and send text messages with phones. So you're like, whoa, I can dial a phone number and I get a text message with the name of the song. It would knock people's socks off because they, they didn't even have apps. But you still have to educate them about it.

[00:41:36] **LW:** It costs no 80 cents, right? Yeah, it was 50.

[00:41:49] **CB:** Actually, it was the UK, so 50 pence there. But yeah, 50 pence charged to your mobile phone each time you used it. If it worked, if it identified the song successfully.

One big learning I have to say for all entrepreneurs it's changing user behavior is a very hard thing to do. It's really hard. So even though this thing was incredibly delightful and useful and valuable and people loved it, you still, there was no app store and people didn't understand the idea of apps and discovery of apps. And so it was just like, they just had phones. So we had to get this message out, like dial this number, pay 50 pence, and then get the name of the song. And so we had a whole, we hired a head of marketing who's very experienced and built a marketing team and spend a bunch of money on marketing to try to get that message out. And we had billboards and radio ads, and we even hired people to walk into bars and tell people in the bar and get the message out. And it was we had to get this message out so that this is all in the U. K. or in the U. S. as well. This is the U. K. because our first market that we launched in with the United Kingdom.

Yeah. So this is all over the U. K. So, So when we launched everyone in the United Kingdom could use our service. About what is it? About 60 million people or so. So everyone with a mobile phone. But it was, it was tough because it turns out that in marketing, as many entrepreneurs know, it's got to work. The economics have to work, right? Return on investment. So if you spend a dollar, hopefully you make more than a dollar back. Otherwise that's not a good marketing experience. And we're making very little money. Per Shazam room, right? Per time they use Shazam, it's 50 pence charge, but we share that with a mobile phone company. So let's say we end up with 30 pence. And of course, there's a little bit of costs and not a lot of money. Right?

[00:43:14] **LW:** And what would an average day look like in the early days? How many of these 50 pence charges would come through? I mean, Not many, you know, that kind of thing.

[00:43:26] **CB:** From launch and then going into the first year, two, three years. We were into the thousands, tens of thousands of users, maybe gotten to the hundreds of thousands at some point but not millions. Definitely. And so it's thousands to tens of thousands of shazams,

but it's not enough to make a lot of money. It didn't pay the bills basically. And we are not profitable. And we struggled for a long time. We struggled for a very long, we struggled all the way until the app store launched basically.

[00:43:50] **LW:** As the CEO, you have to part of your job is keeping people inspired and keeping the morale up. And you're also probably questioning it for yourself. You end up leaving after 4 years? So just talk about that the internal. Experience that you were going through as the leader of this little gang of people who were trying to make this cool. Interesting thing happened.

[00:44:11] **CB:** I think look, so many startups, it's like a common thing, right? A startup struggle for so long. Before they hit that hockey stick of success. And by the way, it's no guarantee you're gonna hit the hockey stick of success. But even if you dig into the startups that did hit the hockey stick of success, they had a period where they're like barely surviving. Ours just happened to be very long period, six, six years after launch. I think the people who joined Shazam, they were believers, right? They're believers. It's like a vision, and the vision is, This is a way to find out what's playing. I mean, you know, before Shazam, the way people would learn about music, there were surveys done record companies would survey and say, okay, you own these albums, right? Maybe you used to own CDs, remember? And then people would say how did you learn about these? Because of course they wanted to learn how to market their CDs. And people learn from the radio and from friends and from music magazines, predominantly. So there was no solution to learn about music if you just heard it, which is the most logical thing, right? Because you go through life hearing music in different places, but there was really no way to then find out what it was. Most of the time, unless it was a really famous song. Obviously, it's a really famous your friends know what it is. They all go oh, yeah, that's Coldplay or whatever. So then you just knew, but for all that, for that really long tail of all that music that was not like the mainstream big hits, most people would not know what it was and so therefore you couldn't find out what it was and you couldn't do anything about it. And so I think we all share this vision of we're going to solve that because everyone carries a mobile phone with them everywhere they go. And so now they're going to be able to get the answer. We're going to change the way they discover music and that's what we've done right now today.

And I think that the employees of Shazam all they all bought into that vision, they believed in it, but they also realized that we're going to get there, the opportunity is there. It just turns out that getting there is really hard, and there's always but there was always this glimmer of hope is like, Oh, we're gonna get a partnership with Motorola. We're gonna get a partnership with Samsung. We're gonna get a partnership with some big mobile phone company, you know, and of course, these things would happen in milestones over the years where we would get these partnerships and then was like, Oh, now we're gonna launch in Germany, with Vodafone, which is the biggest mobile phone company there.

And so there are always these things that just felt like, Okay, once we get there, that will be the next stepping stone. So it wasn't instant financial success, but it was that, people were there for the passion of being part of a vision of doing something that was in the world of music, by

the way. And a lot of people are passionate about music. And we were doing something related to music and we're solving a new problem, the discovery of music that you hear, and they bought into that and they liked being part of that. A lot of the engineers that joined Shazam had turned down job offers from big banks that would pay way more money than we could afford to pay. And they'd walked away from a bigger paycheck because they thought, no, I want to spend my time building cool software for a company that has a vision in changing the world for music as opposed to working for a bank and making more money, but get working on something that I was not that excited about.

[00:47:05] **LW:** I saw this Netflix documentary on planets exoplanets. And they interviewed this planetary scientist who it was the 1st person to discover an exoplanet, and he didn't discover his 1st, 1 for 11 years. So literally every day, he would wake up, get dressed. Go to the observatory or wherever the hell he worked, look through telescopes, examine the footage, the photographs galaxies and whatnot. And every day, he would come home not having found the thing that he was going to work to look for 11 years. And you can imagine that after maybe 5 years, he would start questioning his choices of life and. After 10 years questioning insanity, and then eventually found 1 and then he becomes the world's foremost expert and how to find a planet. But it took him a very long time. And you guys, it seems like you had a stroke of luck with the app store that got created, but I'm wondering if the app store hadn't been created. Did you think something is something's gotta happen? That's gotta get this thing to catch on. I just, I believe it deep down in my core. Or were you having to wake up every morning like that scientists and convince yourself that it's all going to pay off at some point. I don't know how it's going to happen. But I'm just going to keep going to the observatory.

[00:48:16] **CB:** There were all these sort of stepping stones of it might, there people don't realize this, but they're predecessors to the App Store. There were sort of early versions of the App Store before the iPhone that never took off because their experiences were not good enough. But there was some Nokia had something called Symbian and Qualcomm had something called Brew, B R E W, and then there were things called Java apps. So there were apps, basically. And Shazam was in an app form before the iPhone app store existed. There were some kind of prehistoric looking apps. But they worked. It was on a screen and you could see on the screen Shazam or whatever, and then you could identify a song but to get these apps to people was hard. You'd have to do it. And we did this. We do a deal like AT& T wireless, for example, and then they would preload this job app on their phones. And that worked. And so we made some traction there. We actually created what. White, what's called white labeled. So in the brand of another company, so we created a one called Moto ID for Motorola and they put on their Motorola phones again in the days before smartphones. And then we were in some early app stores. Again, these apps first were nowhere near the success of iPhone, there was, as I said, Qualcomm had one called brew that were on only worked on certain mobile phone handsets. And again, the experiences were very rudimentary, simple experiences.

So we were making progress and I always felt like this is getting us closer and closer to realizing this idealistic vision that we had for the user experience and getting more users and revenue. So it didn't feel like it wasn't complete despair. It's just took a long time

[00:49:58] **LW:** I saw the Blackberry movie. I don't know if you've seen that before.

[00:50:03] **CB:** You know, I've noticed a lot of people are mentioning that movie to me lately. Yeah, it must be taking off. Did you like it?

[00:50:09] **LW:** You know, It's interesting like, I had no idea the struggles that were behind the scenes on that, but it sounds like there are a lot of parallels to what you all were experiencing because the iPhone actually is the way they portrayed it in the movie. The iPhone is what made the BlackBerry irrelevant and they just had a hard time selling after that because of things like the app store and whatnot. And there was also, they had to bring on the engineer who could figure out how to do the push notification thing, which was like, their secret sauce. So you have your secret sauce. Were there any other companies that came about that? We're trying to solve for this problem that you all had. We're a little bit further along with that, that you became aware of.

[00:50:51] **CB:** Other companies that we competed with?

[00:50:53] **LW:** Yeah, that were that heard about what you guys are doing, or maybe they were initially, I guess you said those several companies are trying to do radio song recognition. Yeah, but obviously they would hear about what you all were doing and probably thought, okay let's shift and start trying to compete against these guys.

[00:51:10] **CB:** Yeah. Oh, yeah. So first, there were the six companies that did radio only, and they're defunct. But yeah, we got fierce competition from, when you come up with an idea, if people think it's good, you will get copycats, right?

And out there, it just happens. Even if your technology is hard to build, eventually, people will crack that code. Just the way that the world works. And yeah, we had a variety of companies. We had Phillips was the first one. You probably heard of the European company Phillips, right? So they had some R and D department that came up with their own version of media recognition that they, then they created a sort of an audio music recognition as well. They didn't have the type of DNA as a company to build a full branded experience like Shazam cause this is more than just the music recognition. You've got to build the database and you've got to think about the brand and you have to do all these things to bring it together and make it into like this. Beautiful experience and a product, you have to build the product and they didn't want to do all that.

They just invented the technology. So then they tried to license it to people and they just said, oh we have a music recognition technology and we'll license it out. And and there was some company, I think there's some companies that licensed it. There were eventually that technology got bought by another company called grace note. And then the grace note got bought by Sony. So obviously a huge company. And then Sony did build a direct competitor to Shazam, an app. And it was out there. I think it was called track ID by Sony. It never got, and they did preload it by the way, on all their phones. And they sell a lot of mobile phones, right?

And even in the days of smartphones, they were preloading it. Track id, but it just never took off. It just never took off. They, it didn't, they didn't have an entire, they probably had a team of people within Sony working on it, but it wasn't comparable to Shazam. It was a whole company just based, focused on this one problem. So it never took off. There's people out there that have used Sony Track id, I'm sure, but it, in the end, they just they, they shut it all down. They, in fact, when they shut it down, they approached us and said, can we just hand. Handle the users over to Shazam. So I think there was actually a we came up with a partnership where they just basically said to all the track ID users, okay, we're giving up here. You can use Shazam for now on. That was a nice finale against when you're battling against a giant company like Sony. And then also there was, Google itself. And that was scary. I was actually working at Google at that time. I was on the border of Shazam and they built their own music recognition and they have incredible distribution power, of course, because of Android.

So they then started putting this into all the Android phones. Now it was there buried in there somewhere. And it wasn't really like a separate app. It was weird, strangely built into the search and I People didn't use it and it didn't have all the richness of the Shazam experience, you know So there's many features and capabilities.

It didn't have It's still there today, but it never really took off I don't know if you've heard of people identifying songs using Google music recognition, but most people haven't So luckily, you know despite a company with massive Financial resources and massive distribution power. We were able to win that battle as well.

There was another startup called sound hound, which also built their own app. And they were probably our most fierce competition in terms of actually getting traction because they were also what they. They started off in doing something different. They started off by doing humming recognition.

So that was their first thing, was, so you could hum into your phone and they built an app where it would identify sometimes what you were humming, although that's a very hard problem, and so the success rate was low. And then they realized, oh, the Shazam thing is taking off, and they had a lot of great, smart PhDs, and so they also built their own music recognition, and then they were head to head competitors with Shazam.

Now, they were always much smaller. Shazam was always a multiple of the size in terms of number of users, but they were I think of them as the main competition on our heels that kept us, it's good to have competition, by the way, keeps you on your toes, keeps you like thinking, okay, you got to stay ahead of competition.

Sometimes you get lazy if you don't have competition and you don't innovate. And they eventually have really fallen by the wayside now, but they went in a different direction, focused on voice recognition now. But they may have made the most traction out of competitors.

[00:55:15] **LW:** Yeah, I have a question, but someone's listening to this. They have an idea, right? They think it's the next Shazam or the next whatever, right? What is your thought on telling people about your idea? And being afraid that someone's going to knock it off, before you even start putting the work into it. When do you introduce if you even do that? Is that a problem you want to have that? So many people are interested in this idea that now, it's a good idea. Like, how do you think about that for a new for sort of a newer entrepreneur?

[00:55:46] **CB:** Yeah, I mean, I think an entrepreneur who doesn't want to tell anyone his idea.

They're, in my opinion, they're dead in the water because you can't make progress without sharing your idea. You're going to have to hire people. You have to raise money. You're going to have to get partnerships. You can't, you're going to have to get feedback. And if you didn't share your idea with anyone.

How are you going to do that? So you got to share your idea and then people think, oh, I'll do it with a nondisclosure agreement. Good luck with that. Because, no, no venture capitalist is going to sign a nondisclosure agreement. Basically most people are not going to bother, taking some kind of legal steps just to share the idea with you when you're just, it's just you and you're an entrepreneur with just an idea.

So that's not really viable. So yeah you have to get, you have to come to terms with just sharing your idea, but the reality is that I think that, it's just sharing. I mean, There's a balance. Clearly, you don't want to go share your idea with Google and Facebook, right? It's Hey, here's my idea.

I'm working on because they might think it's a good idea and they might do it. You got to be selective with who you're sharing it. And I like to think that sometimes entrepreneurs, I always like to say there's an idea and then there's an insight. So I think they can share the idea, but they don't have to share the insight.

And then the insight is often the secret sauce. The inside of the secret sauce, this is something that I'm convinced is true for many startups. And so you can keep the insights yourself and just share the idea. I'll give you an example of an idea and an insight. So Airbnb, the idea is like, oh, a website, where you can just stay at someone's house, right? And or they can rent out their room. That's the idea, right? But a lot of people thought that idea was bad, by the way, because they're like, no one's gonna want to stay at some random person's house. And no one's gonna want random people staying at their house.

But then their insight was that can all be solved with really excellent user reviews, an excellent review system so that you can build trust. And they have the most, in my opinion, the most advanced valuable ratings review system that exists, granular, should we say granular ratings, not just simply five stars, but, five stars across all these criteria and so on.

Yeah, so often there's the insight for Dropbox. There's the idea of oh, a folder with your files, but then there's the insight of oh, we've got to make the synchronization work just perfectly. Otherwise, sometimes it will fail. And then. You'll have corrupt files, then people will lose their files, and if they lose their files, they're never gonna want to use it again.

And that's the insight. The insight is often something that people don't realize. PayPal, it was security in the early days. They cracked the code of security so that hackers couldn't, because hackers will go after all financial transactions. But, and that often makes the cost of fraud become so high that you become unviable.

But PayPal really conquered anti fraud in a way that hadn't been done by other companies. So that was their kind of insight. So again, is the idea of PayPal of like pay for things, right? And then there's the insight. And so I think as an entrepreneur, yeah, that's your secret is you got to think just still what's your idea and then what's your insight.

And then you can share your idea. Share the idea and go out there and share the idea of like, how, so that you can get employees to join you, investors to invest in you and so on. But you don't necessarily have to share the insight because they don't need to know that.

[00:58:52] **LW:** And speaking of that idea versus insight, legend has it you pitch this idea, hundreds of times in order to get the funding. If you could go back and consult your earlier self, who is first starting to pitch this? What would you say? Like, What mistakes did you make in your pitching of this idea that you corrected through? Experience through the reps of just getting in front of people, talking about it, and maybe not talking about this part of it, but focusing on that part of it, et cetera, maybe storytelling. I don't know.

[00:59:23] **CB:** What I learned is that many people have different opinions and perspectives. And. So what's interesting is if you pitched to we pitched over a hundred venture capitalists, but the doubt, the core doubt that might prevent them from wanting to invest would be different for each one.

For one, it might be like, oh, I don't think people will keep using this. And for another one, it'll be like, oh, I don't think that technology will work very well. And for another one, it would be like, oh I don't think mobile phone companies are going to partner with you to give you a four digit number. you know, So they each have their own thing. And what I ended up doing is figuring, I use their doubt to build more arguments because whatever their doubt was, I would actually focus in on like, what's your doubt? What's your biggest doubt? What's your biggest concern? And then really make sure I could understand that. And then I would really go back and think about how can I address that doubt? And I'd really I'd actually create a whole slide just to address that doubt. And I ended up with this humongous appendix. So the core presentation that we'd show to Venture Capitalists. It might be, say, 25 slides or so, but then the appendix grew to the point where it was like Almost 100 slides or something. you know, And it got to the point where we'd show the 25 slides, the main story, but and then I'd say,

what's your biggest doubt? And then I go to slide number 87. I already had an answer for them. It was so funny, but, because I've heard that one before

[01:00:43] **LW:** Were they impressed to see that you had all these rebuttals already locked and loaded?

[01:00:48] **CB:** Yeah, I think they were impressed that they could see we had done our thinking, right? It's nice to see when when you're an investor, you want to see that the entrepreneur has is really open to that feedback and thinking through those different risks and how they're going to address them.

[01:01:00] **LW:** Beautiful man. Well, Look, you guys exited 401 million. Why was it 401? What is that? Is that like some kind of.

[01:01:07] **CB:** You know, that 401, I never, it's the first time I'd seen that number because most of the places first of all, the number was never released. It was a confidential many acquisitions are confidential. Some numbers, some acquisitions are, So when a public company like Apple buys a company, if certain acquisitions are required by the SEC to disclose what the price was, and so for those, the number gets skipped out there but for most of them unless it's massively substantial relative to the value of the company, and since Apple's worth trillions of dollars, Even a 400 million acquisition is not substantial then they're not required to release a number. So it was never released. The actual number was never released. So the press jumped on had speculated the 400 million number. And I won't go into the details, but I'll just say it isn't that far off of the real number. And then all the press I've seen out there has said 400 million, but there's this one, I think it was CNN that for some reason said 401 million. And I have no idea how they came up with that. You never, you have no idea how the press come up with things sometimes. So maybe it made it, maybe it made them appear even like they had even better information, like we, we know it's 401, you know?

[01:02:12] **LW:** All right. So now you're working on Guard. And that's your anti drowning solution. So is that something that's you're still working on that? Correct?

[01:02:21] **CB:** I am, I am. I have to admit it's not like it's a whole company, right? It's not like, it's like raised millions of dollars and has a bunch of employees. So it's really me bootstrapping and I slowly do things as I go, and I'm trying to find, in fact, one of the things I've been working on lately is how do I find some funding for it? So I want it to be very capital efficient. So how do I get money for it? In a very unique, innovative way, shall we say, so that we can conquer some more milestones? And just fund because things cost money, of course, to do. And then I have ideas of what specific milestones I want to conquer and so on. So, So it's really like, I would say it's, it's at this very sort of precede stage of like things like, Oh what's the technical approach? It's feasibility analysis, right? What algorithms can we use to identify drowning? What patents can we file? hardware configurations are going to make the most sense? It's thinking things when you build a heart piece of hardware, and this is a piece of hardware. If you go the wrong direction, it's, If any company goes the wrong direction, it's costly. If a hardware

company goes the wrong direction it's a death blow. Because hardware is very, it's not like software where you can just reprogram it in a different way. It's like you literally have architected this piece of hardware and invested all this capital to manufacture it. And uh, it's very, very hard to, to re steer and change directions. So the importance of the feasibility part up front is vital. So anyway, that's the kind of stuff guard is doing now. It's just it's this very early stage bootstrapped feasibility analysis.

And as an entrepreneur, I think about how can I get a bit of money for guard to spend in a way that is scalable and makes sense.

[01:03:58] **LW:** And does that mean you're now working with what's it motion pattern recognition technology? Are you having to develop this stuff yourself?

[01:04:07] **CB:** It's known as computer vision as the general category computer vision as the, and the computer vision encapsulates basically artificial intelligence applied specifically to vision and vision is basically whenever you are analyzing the world around us, which you can do through different methods. So sensors, the obvious sensor is the camera, but there's other types of sensors as well, like infrared and light are and so on. So you're analyzing it and then you're trying to make decisions. The most famous example is a self driving car, right? A self driving car is basically using these sensors, predominantly cameras, but also LiDAR and radar and so on to see the world and then make decisions like, oh, is there a tree there? Is there, is the light turn red or green, and can I turn here? Are there other cars? Think of all the things that are, and so that's that's called computer vision. And that's what guard uses. It's computer vision.

[01:04:59] **LW:** Yeah, I heard you say something about how most people think when someone's drowning, they're yelling help and help. And that's not usually what happens. It's usually a quiet event.

[01:05:08] **CB:** That's correct. Yeah. Yeah. What actually happens is they go into water and then eventually become unconscious. There's no sound warning to people. So this device would create a warning to people of an audible warning, but it's not the person. It's the device that's doing it.

[01:05:22] **LW:** I love it, man. Last question for you. How do you think about the concept of purpose?

[01:05:26] **CB:** I think purpose is one of the most fundamental things that we as human beings can benefit from, but also need fundamentally for happiness. I think purpose is, if you look at the core ingredients of happiness it would just be a handful of things and purpose is one of them. When I say happiness, maybe happiness is not the perfect word because I don't believe that happiness is, we're not just always happy. We like the idea of always being happy, but having a positive experience in life which I think largely comes from. I think purpose is an extremely important ingredient to that. It's what gives us the sense of meaning and it gives us

something to aim for. And it gives us a feedback loop as we get towards our goals. And it's something that, it's deep in the heart and it's so powerful, right? It's as a motivator when you have this purpose. It gives you far more superpowers of motivation than any kind of reward of like financial reward or anything. And I think it's foundational and we should always be keeping in mind, what purpose do we feel like what you're resonating with us? Because you can't manufacture it. It's got to be true to who you are. It's more like you feel it, you identify it and you feel it rather than you manufacture it. And so what do you identify? And what do you feel as feeling like your sense of purpose? And how you have some type of impact? I do think it ties to the word impact, right? Because by purpose, almost by definition, you have this purpose and the purpose is to have impact. And then I think being. Conscious of it is very valuable for people.

[01:06:55] **LW:** Beautiful man. Thank you so much for coming on. Just wanna acknowledge you for your example, your inspiration your stick, to it, sticktoitiveness, , and we're gonna look out for Guard and prepare to be wowed by that technology that you're creating right now.

[01:07:10] **CB:** Cool. Thanks for having me Light.

[END]

Thank you for tuning into my interview with Chris Barton. To get more information about Chris, I suggest following him on the socials @chrisjbarton. And of course, if you haven't yet downloaded Shazam, you want to do that immediately so you can start discovering new music all around you. And of course, I'll put links to everything that Chris and I discussed in the show notes, which you can always find at lightwatkins.com/podcast.

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