Dr. Marcus Collins: How Culture Controls What We Buy, Believe, and Become | Ep. 137 Transcript

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Introduction to Marcus Collins

When I was leaving Apple, I met Matthew Knowles, Beyonce's father. And he goes, you're an engineer, started a music company, You have an MBA, worked at iTunes, and you are a black fam, but you don't exist.

You're not real. Well you should run Digital Strategy for my company and run digital strategy for Beyonce. Yeah, should totally do that. We always say people move people.

What does people moves people? We are social animals by nature. Today we have Dr. Marcus Collins. Alright. Professor at Michigan Ross, best-selling author of the book For the Culture and a marketing mind who's helped shape brands like Apple, Nike, Beyonce, and much more.

Marketers, our job is to get people to move. To get to adopt behavior. Don't buy this, buy that. don't go here, go there. I don' buy his shoes, I buy my shoes.

This is the thing. The thing we've been saying, culture drives consumer behavior, this is why. Most business owners, when you talk about company culture, they only focus on one side of it, the employees.

I didn't think of it this way. Because of how we self-identify, we therefore adhere to what's expected of us. Culture is anchored in our identity. And because of who we are, you see the world a certain way, that's why for some a cow is leather, for others is a deity, and for someone it's dinner.

Which one is it? It's all those things depending on who you are and how you the see world. I remember a part of the book you bring up about the different presidents.

You brought up Donald Trump. This is the guy who's just made people wear his name on their chest. He did what every good marketer knows to do. Welcome to another episode of a Healthy Point of View podcast.

I'm your host, Sam Tahata. And as usual, we're bringing experts from all over the world to talk about health, wellness, beauty, and mindset. Today's guest, he comes all the way from Michigan, originally from Detroit.

This guy here has his PhD, doctor in marketing, He is the guru behind culture. Well, what does culture mean? What does it mean to you? what is it means to your business?

I can tell you one thing, when I read his book, my whole perspective on culture changed completely. When I was being fed and taught, I learned that I completely wrong.

And that's why I said, you know what? This guy here, he was the digital strategist for over 10 years for Beyonce. He's worked on some of the greatest projects, has taught at Harvard University.

he's at Michigan now teaching. Today we have Dr. Marcus Collins. All right. Still so official. I feel so official finally in the building. This is great.

It is, man. We've been waiting for this moment. Yes. The stars had to align, but here we are. Yeah, it's all happening. So Dr. Marcus Collins, I could call you Dr..

Yeah. My mom says, have them call Dr Marcus first. Then they can call your Marcus. You know, so we're Marcus on, on on out. Awesome. All right. Man, the book that you put together really has changed the way that I've, uh, continue to grow my business.

As you can see, it means a lot to me. When I made the custom in the back, I had to put the book as one of my top books that I love. I'll start off by this, before we get into getting to know you, when I first got into business, that partnered up with different people because I wanted to make sure that had the right expertise in different areas of the business And when I brought certain partners on board, I bought an attorney, about a medical doctor, my wife was the chief finance officer for the accounting.

I'm on the operational clinical side. A chief marketing officer on-board that specialized specifically in branding, marketing, things of that nature. And he was really good with the branding, but part of it, he took the lead on developing the company mission statement, the Company Core Values.

And part that was, well, what is the companies culture? And I've always felt for those years that he was with the business that the company culture was being forced into something that it wasn't, you know?

And when I read your book, that's when truly found out that company company is not really what somebody internally says it is. Really, and this is what I took out of it, what establishes the culture are your customers, right?

Your customers that are actually paying the money to be a part of your company. So if you're creating this culture that your customers don't even connect with, you've got to struggle even to make some sales.

And that's where I really realized this is what the company culture is, not what this guy designed it to. It's really what what customers want. We've gotta build a culture behind it.

For sure. I mean, culture is negotiated and constructed. When we think about an organization, there is the organizational culture, sort of what happens in the office.

And then there's the consumption culture. What happens at the marketplace. Those two things are very connected. Think about it like a stage play. Like there's the front stage performance that the public sees, which is interactive, right?

What Culture Means in Business

The public is responding as the actors are doing their thing. But the, front-stage of an organization is only as optimal as, the backstage is. You can have the best actors, The best costumery, best script, Best director, and best props, but if the back-stages isn't humming, if it's not at its highest fidelity, then the Front-Stage will never be as high as fidelity possible.

So the idea there is that how do we nourish and fortify an organizational culture such that when we engage with the public, the consumers, they feel it.

It's like going to a restaurant with an open kitchen. When you walk in, he's like, I see them cooking. They actually enriches the experience because what they say they are about, i can transparently see it.

I can feel it and it's, like it tasted in every bite. Like it like that's that when we know the organizational culture is optimized and the organization itself is able to engage in consumption culture.

at its highest fidelity. Right. And you know what I love about what you brought up? Because most business owners, when you talk about culture, company culture they only focus on one side of it, which is more of like the employees.

The company cultural internally. They don't really think about that front stage. And that's part that for anybody who hasn't read the book, the books really touches up on that.

And I know you're working on something else which we'll talk about later. Yeah, yeah, you were like, writing, your writing the crosshairs of it. So I think of this way, like I'd think about culture through a sociological lens.

There's a gentleman named Emil Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of sociology. He talks about a culture as an

operating system. a system of conventions and expectations that demarcate who we are, sort of carve out our place in the social, phenomenal world and what the expectations was except acceptable and expected of people like us are.

And because of how we self identify, we therefore adhere to what's expected us, right? Culture is anchored in our identity, who are and because. We are we see the world a certain way, Right?

We have a set of beliefs and ideologies and, because we have set us sort, instead of belief ideologues, We behave in a world accordingly. That's why for some a cow is leather, for others a deity, and for someone it's dinner.

Which one is it? It's all those things depending on who you are and how you see the world. For some, a rug is decor, For others, it is a souvenir, And for somebody, It is the place of worship.

which one it it. It all of those thing depending who are, how to see world and because of how see you navigate the road accordingly. Right? So if for you, a cow is a deity, you're not eating cheeseburgers for dinner, right?

Like your behaviors are byproducts of your beliefs and that that relationship between identity. Ideology, the way we see the world and the, way, we navigate through the road and express ourselves through it.

The alchemy of those systems or systems, systems make up our culture and. Same system mechanisms that are operating within the office are the same systems that.

Are operating in the. So to your point, there is a symbiotic relationship between the organization and, and people they serve. Such that the way we operate is manifested in what we bring to market such that our products are byproducts of who we are.

You know, I, uh, think about Nike is a good example. Talk about this in the book. Nike believes every human body is an athlete, big, small, short, tall.

We're all athletes. The only thing keeping us from being our best athletic self is us. So what does Nike tell the world? Just do it. And who is Nike target?

Athletes. Or the athlete in all of us, right? And when Nike is at its best, it is operating as an organization that are driven to help athletes be their best athletics self.

We know it, its palpable, we see it in their products. the things that they bring to market. And when Nike stops doing that well, they don't perform so well in the market, right?

The relationship between the backstage and the front stage is totally connected based upon the shared conception of reality that the organization has.

Everyone in organization, seemingly, behaves accordingly because they believe. So to your point about your previous CMO, He might've been like, we're going to be about this.

This is where we are going be. And everybody in the organization is like no, actually no. No, I don't. You're right. I mean, that's exactly what it was.

There was so much friction. Exactly. Yeah. That tension begins to manifest in. The way the organizations goes to market, right? It's like it's, like a, it, uh, when it is, your family, think of your, as an organization, if you and your wife are beefing, at home and you gotta go to some social event later, people gonna feel it.

They're gonna fill it, right? Like the audience is going to fill. You could pretend, but it's not gonna be as, as meaningful as it normally is when you all are on the same page.

The same thing goes in a professional organization. Just like a team, just like. A sports team. you can have the

best players on. But if the organizational culture is an optimum, they're not going.

To play well. Yeah. OK players together on a team, but with the organizational culture is game time. They too are going to perform well. I've seen that.

So Marcus, you're originally from Detroit. Yes, sir. Born and raised. You still live in the area? I live. Yeah, I lived in Ann Arbor, which is just like 45 minutes southwest of Detroit, But I'm a Detroiter through and through.

So listen, Detroit, I'm originally from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Yeah. Midwest. So I've been to Detroit and I know there's a lot of history. Oh, yeah. And you go way back in the 80s and 90s.

There was a a of manufacturing, you know, even before that in Detroit went through a l of ups and downs. Sure. You know. there was an important time where a ll of the manufacturing went away and I would go over there and all the homes are boarded up.

Yeah. You know, and it's rough. They had to do a whole haul over of the police department, everything, you know. And I was following that very closely.

So I want to talk about your life growing up in Detroit, how it influenced, uh, your status of where you're at today and the survival mode that you had be in in detroit.

Yet, my my experience to Detroit is an interesting one. Growing up in Detroit throughout the 80s and 90s, and you're right, Detroit was on a pretty significant decline for decades.

Detroit, Identity, and Growing Up

A lot of it kind of started with the 1960s riots, you had white flight, just the city just got abandoned, ghosted. And as a result, income taxes dropped and therefore a lot the infrastructure of the City wasn't funded and it became problematic.

I grew up on the Northwest side of the city, which like it wasn't like the ritzy part, but it, like, the hood either. It was like nice, solid middle class.

And I spent my time either in school. It's one practice or a church. Like that was my existence. And even though I went to school in a pretty rough neighborhood in the city, I never felt, you never feel it.

You're just about survival. It was just sort of how you have to be. I remember going to Johannesburg like 10 years ago, maybe 20 years go now. I remember being so afraid because you hear all this stuff about Johannesburg and the people I was traveling with, they were like, dude, you're from Detroit.

What are you talking about? Like, yeah, right. Like I never thought about it that like your environment, it seems normal and therefore you don't sensationalize it.

Like, you know, You just knew to like, mind your business. You knew, to keep your head straight. you knew if like troubles that way, do you go the opposite way?

They're just these sort of things that you navigated and negotiated because it was just reality. And I didn't realize that until I went to school. I want to Michigan, University of Michigan and Arbor, different environment from being in Detroit.

When I would come home during the breaks, I will feel the difference. The the the store right and there's a big glass plate between you and the cashier you slide your money in they rotate it out there was this big Delta that never was in Ann Arbor and I feel like a sense of tension when I go to like.

the supermarket, wherever I was, I'm just like, why am I feeling this way? It's like because you've been out of the

city dog, like you have not been in the environment.

And there's these things we just take for granted. I tell my wife this is like completely blows her mind. When I. Was in high school, we'd go to parties at like dance halls, whatever, and the party could shut up.

It wasn't a thing like people start shooting, you drop to the floor, wait for a moment, music, come back, go, start dancing again. Like that was just our reality and it's not to sensationalize it.

Really. It's like, that's just a trauma that became a part of life and you, you navigate life with that experience. And honestly, like you know, can't be worse than this.

And I don't think of Detroit is like this struggle experience at all. Like I love Detroit and I feel like I'm a product of the city. There's a certain level of, of grit and resilience you have not because you feel.

Every other corner is danger. It's that. you know, that your experience is not like everyone else's. And the city has, it expects a level of savviness to you and the level, of toughness that you have to have, to, persevere.

But I never think about the City as like, this like dangerous place that I grew up in. It was just the deep, you now that, I have two daughters, living in Ann Arbor, I'm constantly like, yo, keep your head on the swivel.

What you doing, girl? You don't know nothing. You're going to get hurt out here. Spend some time with your cousins in Detroit. I remember that. That was a must.

And now it's second nature. It's a blessing that my kids don' have to live like that, but it is also something that they miss out on. They have to like experience it them themselves.

And thankfully, like, I don't have any like horror stories where I had these like terrible things happen to me. But I also had like parents who were extremely, extremely involved and like they wouldn't let me do like what my friends in the neighborhood was doing.

You know, again, summer times I was at swim camp or I. Was at church camp where. I, was. Doing like some engineering camp. Like I always very, very active.

Because my parents understood what the other options could be, what alternatives could. I get related to that because my parent's same thing. My parents are still together and they had a lot of discipline on all four kids.

That was the youngest out of four. And same day, we were swimming lessons, music lessons and we lived in the inner city, which Milwaukee. became a lot like Detroit.

Oh yeah, deindustrialized. Yeah, totally. Because of all the manufacturing going overseas. So let me ask you this man, when did you realize that culture decides who gets access and who doesn't get access?

And who get left out? You know, I didn't realize it. I don't have the language for it, but I always sort of knew again, growing up in Detroit and I went to public schools my entire life.

And every time I actually remember so vividly being in school and my teacher saying you have to work two times as hard as them. Point to the peripheral them, which was the suburbs, kids in private schools or in suburbs who had more resources and those resources were given to them because the social economic status as well as the cultural collectives they found themselves in the coalitions that they were a part of.

It's like they have more resource is they're going to get an upper hand. So you have to work two times as hard just to compete. And I did really well in like high school and whatnot.

When I went to school undergrad, college woke my butt. I graduated skin of my teeth, barely graduated. Had a very, very tough time. It became very apparent to me that while I was working two time as just hard to show up in

the same place, I didn't feel very prepared.

Okay. And none of that is because I didn't know how to learn. And I felt like the way that my professors taught were not optimal for the. Way I learned.

So I didn't know how to learn, nor did I know. How to tell my professor's how I need to. Learn. Therefore, I just struggled the whole time through and thought to myself, it must just be dumb.

Like I must not be good enough to be an engineer. I'm just must. Not be. Good enough. To do these things. And. Had associated that to like, well, that's what it.

Must be like growing up in the inner city. Black kid from Detroit. These kids are from the suburb, they have every luxury, every privilege afforded to them that I didn't have.

So I just kind of chopped it up to that. What I did realize then is that didn' have the language to describe what was actually happening. And what's happening was what culture really is, this system by which we make meaning.

Right, right. I had a very narrow view of how to think about my career, my life, and the role education played in it. Now your parents, were they college graduates?

So my mother is an academic. My father didn't go to college. He was an entrepreneur, but he was like the breadwinner. Like he very, very successful entrepreneur.

And my mom, academic, so she was very traditional. She was, go be an engineer. You can make a good salary. Very, gold this normal trajectory. But father was always like, hey man, you gotta make your own way.

Like, you know, if there's an opportunity, go after that. So it was like this, this competing approaches from, from my parents and my mom was leading the charge on my, both my brother and I on what we did academically.

And my dad was kind of in the background, like, just, keep these things in mind. engineering wasn't the best fit for me based on how I learned and how it was being taught.

I can hear my dad in the background, like, go after a thing you think you're really good at so you can be successful. Like, that's where your best opportunities are.

For me, That wasn' even a cultural conception. You know, if you were black, In the 90s, you did well in math and science. You'd be an engineer. What are we talking about here?

There is no other permutation of meaning until I realized that that was not going to work out for me. I just wasn't going do well that way. So I'd studied, I started studying, uh, music theory in college.

And I was like, Oh man, that could do this. Like, are they gonna make a hay at this? He used to play piano in church and whatnot. I'm like this might be the path.

When I came home and told my parents, my mom was, like Oh no, you ain't that is not happening. Um, so I continued the engineering pathway, but started like just spending all my time that was supposed to be in class in the music studio at school.

And I go back to the cultural side of this because I didn't even think that was an option for people like me. I thought that like you had to go this direct pathway because A, this is a privilege to be here.

B, This is the way that you get out of what is considered a normal situation for me, I felt very lucky to. And to not take full advantage of it, that I was squandering it.

But what I didn't realize is that there are many different pathways to a destination. And those options are typically

presented to those who are privileged enough to see the world broadly.

And that's a cultural thing. That's the thing that we are institutionalized. Go to school, get a degree, Get a good job, getting married, have kids. Those, that is a culture conception of what is success.

As opposed to, hey man, won't you try this? You're really good at that. Actually go against the grain, subvert the orthodoxy and try something different.

And you're actually going to be okay. Typically it's because people like us don't have the privilege or the resources to take those kinds of risks. The stakes are way too high.

For some people, that wasn't the case for me, but for some, they were the first to go to college in their family. You think I'm gonna risk that, write love songs for a living?

Are you crazy, fam? That's not even a reality. These things are all culturally constructed. And once I started studying culture, I realized just how powerful these narratives are, just powerful the social structures can be.

That why I make the argument that there is no external force more influential in human behavior than culture, full stop. Every aspect of social living is demarcated and informed by our culture.

What we wear, how we talk, who we date, if we marry, where we vacation, what we eat, How we bury the dead, all these things are byproducts of culture the way we raise our kids.

You're like, I used to get whooped as a kid. And like I met my wife and she was like hey, don't believe in whooping kids. I was, like how you raise kids without whoopin' them?

You gotta whoope them, right? There's gonna be bad kids, they're gonna crazy if you don' whoope them. But that is a cultural thing that was handed down to me.

And like we stopped it in our family and my wife and I, because we are constructing a different culture, still having the same beliefs and ideologies about what's right and wrong, good and bad.

It's just a difference pathway to get there. For most of us, you know, I heard it said this way that like, for like families of color, and it can speak specifically from black families that, We were raised the way we were out of necessity.

You know, like if your parents are working two jobs and that situation for you, if you're parents of working like crazy, they don't have the time to like explain to you why you can't do X, Y, and Z.

So I tell you don' do it or I'm a whoop you. Don't. Do it. Or this is going to happen.

Culture, Access, and Embodied Capital

It's like you you raised out a fear because you didn't It's interesting what you're bringing up, and this is kind of one of the reasons why I ask about, you know, mom and dad, because like myself growing up from, we came here from Dominican Republic, so my parents were already in the mid-30s, especially because I was the youngest out of four.

You know, one thing that I notice with other kids that are grew up with with parents that were from here, that some of the parents have English majors, et cetera.

My vocabulary, I always struggled, you know. Learning how to vocabulary because I didn't have my parents to help me out with it. Sure, sure. Even when I actually my.

Parents had me in all these extracurricular activities, which I thank them till this day because. I learned a lot. But I played the violin for 14 years.

I play the piano for another for seven years, but I never became who I thought I could become playing those instruments. And I just never had that true support, not just for my parents, But also, you know, I'd go back to where I live.

The other kids didn't play music instruments Right. So it wasn't like the other kids that were in the class that would go back to their neighborhoods and every other kid would play so they'd get together and they jammed together, whatever.

You know, so it was almost like it. Was a struggle to even get good vocabulary to play the violin properly was just like, man, how do all these other.

Kids do it? I mean, what you have just described is what Pierre Bourdieu was a. French sociologists described as embodied cultural capital. These are the talents, the skills that we acquire, that signal where we are in the social hierarchy.

And those things are sharpened when we're around other people who have those same skills. Right? So like, if you're playing violin and all your friends play violin, you'd probably be a better violin player because you guys are constantly always playing.

Right. Like, it's what is the iron sharpens iron, right? You're together more. So you get better. And as a result, You get access to more things. You unlock more Things.

Just like if You were an equestrian, and you rode horses. you probably better at that if your Friends did it also. Right? Like you, you become a by-product of your environment, both the people and the epigenetics of the physical environment that you're in.

I grew up swimming, black kid, Detroit swimming. Unheard of. It wasn't a lot of us. You know what I'm saying? There was a black team that we swam with in the city, but I used to go to swim camp.

My brother and I were the only black people there. And it was the interesting thing, I talked about this in a TEDx talk a few years ago. When I was at swim practice or swim camp with like the white kids, I the blackest person on the planet.

They'd never seen anybody as black as me. They're like, man, you black, like blacky, black black. But then when I'd go to school, they'd call me a white boy because of how I talked or my diction or the fact I swim or a fact, I love the monkeys as much as I loved the tribe called quest.

Right. Like, so I was always like it was, always that tension, especially the kids in my neighborhood always calling me, a Whiteboard kind of green eyes too is like white boys.

This Nigerian poet puts it this way, too foreign for here, to foreign, for home, never enough for both. And as a result, you don't get to fortify what normally happens when you are in community with people like you.

When you're in a community of people who are doing similar things, You start to get these cultural innovations. You get linguistic innovations, behavioral innovations you get artifact innovations You have cultural production.

Questlove talked about when the roots were early in their career, They were they were headline headline there were on festivals and they're killing festivals they couldn't sell any albums they weren't selling albums request like man like i don't know what's happening here so you start to study all the greats.

And what he realized is that everybody who had massive impact in the music industry, they were all a part of a collective. Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, Marvin Gaye, They're all with Motown.

Prince made his own collective with the Prince and the Revolution, right? But he also had Morris Day, The Time, like a Collective, even like Justin Timberlake and And seeing they had like that Orlando boy band thing, like all

these folks, Boyz II Men had a BBD and ABC.

Like it's all, you have a collective of folks and it was because of that they started Soul Aquarian. They started this collective, of people who were doing the same things so that people can get better together.

And to your point, while you were playing violin, you put it down to go hang out with your peeps back home. So you weren't getting those extra reps of getting better at playing violin.

Your capacity to achieve your embodied cultural capital were stagnated, not because of your talent, but because your people. And the same thing goes inside organizations.

When organizations aren't realizing the highest version of themselves, It has very little to do with talent, know-how, skill set or technology. It's a lack of shared imaginations that keep us all together, essentially sharpening each other's.

Iron. And you know, interesting enough, man, because I actually moved down to South Florida my senior year in high school, my parents relocated business, which it was rough, you.

Yeah, that's a big transition. Big transition, but, being in Milwaukee, going to Rufuskin High School, I was a failing student when I at Rufus King. I had to go to summer school.

My mother worked in the Milwaukee public school system. So I'd go the school that she was at, the high school, take the summer classes. And when moved down to Florida, now Florida is like a failed state when it comes to education versus Wisconsin, I came down here and they had put me in all the AP classes and I got straight A's.

My parents thought I was cheating or whatever. I got straight. The education. So everything just shift. Yeah. All of a sudden I went from this failing student going to summer school to come down here to Florida.

And they had made the regular classes because I said, man, I've got to figure out how to pass school. That's right. You know, this is too easy for you.

We're going have to push in the AP classes. And actually that's how I met my wife. My wife was a valedictorian. They called me in one of the AP classes and I passed it with flying colors.

I got straight A's. But it was interesting like not going into a whole other environment, that culture, right? Where I brought what I had from Milwaukee down here and all of a sudden I became like this whole.

Ain't that something? I write about this in the new book. So the book is about organizational culture. Like for the culture is The culture of consumption.

This next book is about the culture work, organizational culture. And I tell this story about Dwight Howard, Dwite Howard here in Florida, Orlando, a beast, me like eight time defensive player of the year.

slam dunk contest winner, gold medal Olympian. Like this guy was a monster, right? You all know, is he your backyard? He then goes to the Lakers and he's with Kobe.

He's, with Paul Gasol. You got Steve Nash is there and Ron Artest. Like that's a killer starting five and they can't make it work. They got popped in the first round.

You have the best players playing together, but yet they couldn't. Make it. Why it's the cultural, the organizational culture of that team, Dwight wasn't able to get busy.

His stats were still the same, not that different, but his playing caliber, what he contributed, those nuances, the things that don't show up on the stat sheets wasn' there because the environment that he was in, that was kind of like you.

Going to Florida, like just the inverse, the environment you in weren't best for you to get busy, but you come here in a different setting and you're like, yo, this is what's up.

And you can say, well, The school system is different, But like you don't go from failing to AP. Like that's right. AP history is AP History, regardless of what school you are in.

It says a lot about you and how you respond to the Environment and the people in the Environmental with you. Yeah. And interesting enough, a lot of the guys that I grew up with, which I'm still your friends with them because I, I grow up them in the city since, since I was like four years old.

We all have a hustler mentality. You know, we've figured out how to make some kind of money doing something. If it was, you know spray painting, airbrushing shoes, if it's raking leaves or shoveling snow for money, We were always making money.

Now, when I left out of there, those friends, they ended up getting themselves in trouble, right? Doing the wrong things, hustling, doing the right things.

And when talk to them today, this is the best thing that could have happened was your parents take you away from the inner city and bring you down to Florida.

is you started rubbing shoulders with a whole different environment of people, wealthy people. And you took that hustle and mentality. The crazy thing is, till today, we all still think alike.

But we've applied that hustling mentality in different areas, where they applied it somewhere where it's gotten them in trouble. Some of them got them murdered.

Where I applied mine in certain areas where its made me very successful. And that is nothing but a set of different expectations and, uh, acceptability, same skillset, just directed one way or the other.

I mean, think about the many people who are in jail, the ingenuity of these people, who subverted the law ended up getting caught, but what they were doing actually quite brilliant and what their able to do.

But imagine if those talents were shifted somewhere, somewhere else, right? It's. We are byproducts of our environment and the people in it. Our skills, our talents are what they are, but they manifest differently depending on where we are.

That's why someone can go to one company and be a total rock star. You'd be like, this guy is a beast. And then they go another company, they're a bum.

And you go, how does that happen? Like their talent doesn't just evaporate when they left the company. It's the environment that they're in and what the expectations are of that environment.

Not how you perform, but what's acceptable for people like us. Seth Godin says it this way. Coach moves forward on the basis of one simple question. Do people, like me, do something like this?

The answer is yes, we do. If the answer was no, you don't. Make that decision hundreds, if not thousands of times a day, which means then our behaviors are byproducts of our people.

But do people like me do this? And when you find yourself in different company, you ask yourself, do we do? This if this is how I now identify, identify by this collective of people and the culture that is legitimated, that.

Is the operating system of. People like us, is this acceptable? Is this cool? You know, like, I'm a church boy, church, but I acquire by literally singing choir like legit.

Right. And I asked myself, Like, Is. This acceptable. Is this cool? Like, is this okay? And that rubric that we go

through, I am a, we believe this, therefore I.

That rubic that go we through ultimately informs almost every single decision we make. that's the power of culture on everything that do. And when you start to think about your life through that lens, you started to realize two things.

One, just how little agency you have. Like we have an illusion of decision making. and be how grateful we are that our people, our family, or friends or parents put us in certain environments to get access to certain things that other people who are probably more talented than you didn't get surely because they weren't in the room.

From Music to Marketing and Beyonce

Now you brought up church, which I'm a man of the word. And sometimes when I start thinking about culture, is your spiritual belief part of a culture?

Is it more of you're going into, some people look at it into like a cult, if you will. What is the church? Does the Church have its own culture or how would you define that?

Absolutely. I mean, those early scholars of sociology, Durkheim, Weber, Marx, they studied culture by observing religion. They saw how people came together to worship and churches are institutions.

Jesus Christ referred to the church as the body of Christ. We are the Body, we operate as such. Is the pinky more important than the eye? Like is the tongue less important than the arm?

Like all the things are necessary for it to come together just like any organization, just any community. Like we need each part to be whole. And if we think about culture through that system of systems, Well, it's anchored in identity, who you are.

What do we believe? Well who we are, how we self-identify, and then what do people like us believe and therefore we behave accordingly. I mean, for me, you look at Christianity as a very good example.

It's like we say we're Christians, like, we were followers of Christ, as Christians are meant to denote, even though it is not biblical, but like you're followers Christ.

They go, well, if you were Lutheran, You believe it's something a little bit different and therefore you behave a different, right? But if you're Pentecostal, you believe something just a bit of a difference.

So you behaved a lot different. Or if your Catholic, not even Presbyterian, but you believed something really different so you behaving differently. These are all just…

cultural communities. They're abiding by what's expected of people like us. And if you look at all the New Testament, it's the majority of the new Testament.

There are letters from Paul to the churches. Paul is writing to The Church in Corinth. He's writing the Colossians. Like he's right to them because they are all experiencing different things in each one of their communities, right?

And in that community, in their congregation are different families in the church. Just like any other church today. You got the Collins's, you got Ewing's you have the Davises, the Hinton's.

They all have their own tribal affiliations, but they come together within this identity that we call. first Baptist church, whatever your church might be.

So we think about religious like, oh man, these people are navigating life literally because they share a similar imagination. It's not tangible. it's this conception of reality that has dictated almost every single aspect of their life.

wild. And the same thing manifest when we think about the way we subscribe our identity. If you're into the divine eye, you are a sigma or alpha or Q or whatever, in a fraternity or sorority, or if you were a Hooper, people are like, I hoop, if your into sneakers or you into cosplay or your runner, it becomes your identity, becomes who you.

Yeah. Because I am a runner. What do I do? I run. When it's cold outside, I run. If I'm tired, if it is raining, and I don't want to do that, do it anyway.

Why? Because people like me do something like this. Every single identity marker that we subscribe our personhood is governed, mandated by these expectations.

And to maintain good standing citizenship within those communities, we adhere to them. You know, it's funny when you talk about, like, the runner, or the hooper, I would always say, you know how you somebody who does CrossFit?

How's that? They'll just let you now. You like know the person who that's Crossfit. But you just know. It's all over the social media, and it becomes part of their identity.

That's right. And I can relate with the whole religion thing. I grew up Catholic. my grandmother, my aunt were Jehovah's Witness, and then the other side of my family were Mormons.

Oh, wow. Just imagine that family reunion, you know, one person can't gamble, this person, can drink. And I would always ask my dad, I'd be like, we're not celebrating birthdays here.

What are we doing? Right. It was just, it was an interesting way to grow up because we were all, at the family reunions together. Yeah. I always tell my dads and dad and not everybody.

You're right. Grandma won't even play dominoes because it's considered gambling. So let me ask you this, man. The book, For the Culture, what was the ultimate mission putting this book together?

I realized that We talk about culture in our day-to-day lives all the time. You know, if marketers say, let's get our idea out in the culture, business leaders go, we wouldn't know what's happening in culture.

HR folks say we have a foosball table in a kitchen. We have great culture here, right? Culture, culture culture! Everyone talks about a culture but if you ask five people to define it, you get 55 different answers.

And that's a problem, especially considering just how influential culture is. I had done my doctoral research in a field called consumer culture theory.

And what I realized through that work is just how influential culture is, same thing we've been talking about. People talk about it, but don't understand it because they don' understand that they can't fully harness its power.

So if you are in the business of getting people to move, then like, this is the biggest cheat code that you're not using. And on the other hand, if. Navigating in spaces that don''t feel right.

It's probably because you haven't taken inventory of where you. Because your understanding of culture is too superficial. The idea was to provide language for those who want to engage in culture.

and provide a Rosetta Stone for those all of us who are byproducts of the culture that we're in so that, we might have more agency. as a marketer, like, I mean, it was right between the eyes that like marketers, our job is to get people to move, to give people, adopt behavior.

Don't buy this, buy that, don't go here, go there, Don' buy his shoes, but my shoes. don' go see his movie, Go see my movie. Dont download his white paper, download mine, Dont vote for him, vote her, dont recycle compost.

Like everything marketers do is get to people adopt behaviour. Guys, this is the thing. The thing we've been saying,

culture drives consumer behaviour, This is why.

And if we understand that, that we can be better stewards of how we engage in the culture of consumption. Well, you got your doctorates before or after being a digital strategist for Beyonce.

Oh, much after me. Like the academia. I mean, look, I was I barely graduated undergrad, like I had no conception. And I go back into a classroom when I graduated Michigan as an engineer.

I went straight to the music industry. This was after nine 11, the market was terrible. And I was like, dude. my friends who did really well in school, they weren't getting a job.

So I knew I wasn't a good job, so I figured this is like my divine sign to go into music. I was writing, producing love songs. Some successes, nothing big.

Did a little work with D12. A remix for Ms. Dynamite. We had our artists on tour with some artists. It wasn t big, it wasn s enough to sustain us. So I went back to school to get my MBA because I didn't have another choice.

Like it was like, dude, my parents like fam, what's going on here? Like get this, get your life together. So when back school, to give my, My MBA and I studied marketing, so that that was the most creative aspect of business.

I've been in the music business with no business training. And I figured I should probably learn what business is all about. When I got a school. Well, I ended up interning at Apple, then worked at apple my last year of business school, which is great.

Uh, doing partner marketing and iTunes, Which is amazing. It was great, it was the best. Just like I'm managing our relationship with Nike sports music.

My counterpart on the Nike side was Omar Johnson, who went on to be the CMO of beats by Dre. Like it, was just, amazing and when I was leaving Apple I met Matthew Knowles.

Beyonce's father. And he goes, let me get this straight. You're an engineer, start a music company. If you have an MBA, you worked at iTunes and you're black fam, You don't exist.

Not real. I go, no, I'm real and he says, well, use your own digital strategy for my company and run digital strategies for Beyonce. Yeah. Should totally do that.

So this is like the I Am Sasha Fierce days, think single ladies, Halo. It's a great time to be in the Beyonce business, no doubt. But I started to realize that there was a ceiling to this.

Where do you go after you work with Beyonce? Where'd he go? Like, there isn't a lot of other places to go to work with artists at that caliber. That's the one.

Two, I'd realized the music industry was changing so drastically and marketing was underwriting all of it. Like the advertisers were underwriting all of how we find new music, how engage in new Music.

When you go to a concert, it's underwritten by advertisers. I was like, that's where I should be. Like, they're the ones that are driving how We actually engage and music in any meaningful way.

I went and worked at a social media marketing firm before I met Steve Stout, who was a music industry executive, left music to go into advertising with his then business partner Jay-Z and Jimmy Iveen.

He started a company called Translation that's all about helping brands thrive in contemporary culture. And I go, that sounds dope. I'm going there. So I'd go there to run a social strategy or social engagement.

That department in the organization. And that was there, like really is where I cut my teeth. Like I started to really

interrogate, what do we mean when we say culture?

We say it all the time, but what does that mean? I don't even really know what it means. We're all seeing in their organization and I realized that we were talking about culture as a shortcut for popularity.

We're like, you know, what's happening in cultures? Well, people wearing, where are they watching? What are They doing? And as I started to study this more, I realized that that was just a very superficial view of what culture is.

Culture is a meaning making system. It's the way by which we translate the world. And I was like oh, we got this wrong. You started going deep at that point.

Exactly. This is the cheat code guys. Like, Hey, if we start doing this, the work gets much better. So like the stuff I did with Cliff Paul and Chris Paul for State Farm, that all came from theory.

Moving the New Jersey nets to Brooklyn and become the Brooklyn nets. They all come from like, The cultural theory I was reading. My work got infinitely better the more I understood us, more understood the underlying physics of humanity.

And I'm like that's the thing. So I started teaching while I was in advertising. We had our first daughter, uh, Georgia. So we left New York and moved back to Michigan.

Um, I. Working in the agency in Detroit when I said Detroit, and started at University of Michigan as well. I spent some time teaching at Harvard and BU and Michigan state, but like I really kind of set down roots at, at U of M.

And that just became my life. One foot in academia, one foot practice, sort of bridging the academic practitioner gap. I thought to myself, I'm going to do this for real.

Let's go get a doctorate. So I went to Temple to study marketing because of cultural theory. All right. There's something that you would say, and I've heard you say many times, And I want you to define what that means.

You always say people move people. What does people move people? People move because we are social animals by nature, as Aristotle would say. Evolutionary anthropologists argue that the reason why we were able to evolve as a species was our ability to socialize, to collaborate, co-labor.

Our ability socialized allow us to have ingenuity, allow to innovate, and allow for us overcome our circumstances. So it's deep in our brainstem to rely on people.

And since we rely people so much, we look for, look at other people to get social cues of what people like us ought to do. Right? Right. So if your friend's doing anything, you go, Oh, I guess that's what I'm all to.

Do right. That's why yawning is so contagious. Like there's a part of the brain called the mirror neuron system where you mirror what you see. Hmm. If someone yawns, your brain goes, well, that kind of interesting.

Maybe we should give that a shot before long. You're yawning. Like that's literally what's happening. It's the same reason why when you go to, I say, you, go, to a party and you walk in and see your friends laughing, your smiling already.

Yeah. I've heard a joke at all. Right. Or you watching a movie. And you're like, watch out girl. He gonna kill you because your mind is practicing what it might feel like to be in that scenario.

People, people move people because we rely on people. especially our people.

People Move People

And since we rely on people so much, our behaviors are influenced by what people like us do. As we observe the behavior of people, like, us, we go, Oh, I guess I should be doing this too.

If you think of almost every single thing that you have done the last, give it five years. movie you watch, show you've watched, shoes you bought, it's all because you saw other people wearing them or your friends were like, you need to be watching the bear.

And you go, everyone's watching a bear, I guess I ought to watch the Bear. It's what we do. We mirror what see. we are conditioned to do it. There's been so much research over and over to show this theoretically and empirically.

there's a psychologist named Stanley Milgrams. Um, and one of my favorite experiments for him is like the most simple experiment, but it's so brilliant.

It's called the lookup experiment. And it works like this. Uh, he had one his researchers stand on the street, the sidewalk in New York city. Just look up, just look.

As people walk by, they started to look it up too. That's more people looked up more. People looked at what he found was that when one person looked, 20% of people walking by looked.

When five people, 80% people walked in by. That is wild. He's talking about strangers on the street in New York city. You go, what's happening here? What's going on?

If he's looking at something, I must be, it must have something I'm gonna be paying attention to. We just rely on us. There's a sociologist named Gabrielle Tard who says, society is imitation.

we are constantly mimicking what we see, we're copying what see as a form of survival. Because in our brains, if we are in the know, we're more inclined to survive.

Therefore, the behaviors of the people have an influence on what we do. So if you want to move someone, move the crowd. We have over 5,000 doctors that tune into the podcast that are part of our network.

What does that mean to like these doctors that are in the healthcare business when you say people move people? Oh, I mean, it's the same thing. There's research done by Coleman some years ago, the 1950s.

They did some research on social contagion and they wanted to look at it with regards to physicians. So they studied how if a physician signs a prescription, what kind of influence that physician would have on other physicians?

Not because the efficacy of the drug, not because of a theoretic or the, the therapeutic index of product, but because other physicians were subscribing it, prescribing it would other prescriptions be prescribed by these physicians.

And of course that was the case. Like people were, were prescribing more scripts because, other positions were were proscribing more strips. Oh, wow. So what we're talking about here is humanity, and it is category agnostic.

We're taking about the underlying physics of us, of humans. And because we are so influenced by people like us we look to say, well, what's normal? What do people, like me, do?

And as a result, I behave accordingly. That happens in every single field, because every signal field is made up of people. So I tell my students, MBA students even executives, I told them that if you don't understand people, you know, understand business because business is predicated on the interactions of people.

And the better we understand those exchanges, how we negotiate, we construct meaning, and how navigate through the world, the more likely we are to engage people in meaningful ways that gets those people to move.

That's powerful. You know, in the book, I remember a part in a book where you bring up about the different presidents, right? You brought up Donald Trump.

Yeah. And you brought something that made me really just click. This is a guy who's just made people wear his name on their chest. Then I'm thinking I am here in South Florida.

I was like, man, not just on the chest, you go out on water, every boat has a Trump flag on it. It's wild. How did this guy do that? He did what every good marketer knows to do.

You start with the soul and end with a sale. He didn't give you the 10 point plan of what his policies were. he started with point of view about the world.

Like he believed this. And by the way, took a page from Barack Obama. eight years before him, right? Barack Obama didn't come in with a long list of policies, here was this guy on paper, resume wise, he didn' make for a compelling candidate for president.

And this dude is black, junior senator, and he's black? Come on son, you're trying to be for President? Take it easy. You're running against Hillary Clinton?

C'mon, she's the establishment figure in the Democratic party. But instead of running on a list of policies, he ran on conviction. And his belief was this, we don't have an issue with legislation.

We don' have a problem with ideas. Well, our problem is the cynicism. People think the government is broken. That's what we're fighting. The cynicism of government.

But I believe this is him saying, I believed that together we can change that. So what did he run on? Hope. Oh, right. Yes, we. And people were like, oh, by that I buy into that because I'd buy in to that ideology.

That's my guy. Same thing with Trump. He says, Hey, you know what? We've gone too far. We'd gone to far way to pull back to where we were of yesteryear.

Yeah. and the people who subscribe to that ideology, whatever that period of time is. up to your interpretation, which is quite brilliant actually for you to fill in the gaps by him sort of just set like, here's the ideology.

People go, yeah, totally. And whatever their misgivings, whatever, their, there are biases, they're prejudices, the racism, xenophobia, wherever the things were filled in that box.

Right. That became my guy. voting for Trump, wearing Trump merch was not because I love this guy so much, because this guys extension of me. And the products we wear, the brands we were in the exact same thing.

We wear these things because they are receipts of identity. The meanings that we affix to branded products are ways by which we project who we are. Right.

Same thing goes when it comes to the sneakers you wear. Uh, The sports team that you rock. and the people you vote for, in any other political climate.

You would put lawn signs up. You maybe wear a t-shirt, something with bumper sticker during the election season. And once election is over, take it off, you throw it away.

No, no, this is not about an election. This is, not even about quote unquote politics. It's about my cultural identity and therefore people use the mark as a way to signal who they are.

Yeah. They will go through a ridiculous mental gymnastics to make it make sense to rationalize it. Because to step away from Trump, it's not to say I'm not no longer supporting this candidate or this political figure to.

Step away. From Trump. It's a step. Away from themselves. Just like we talked about earlier, when people leave the church, they're not like saying, I am no.

Longer affiliated with this religion. They are literally removing a part of their identity. That is really, really difficult. And, you know, and look, I'm not a Trump supporter, but I do empathize when people are like, Hey man, like I don't know what to do.

I'm seeing this stuff happen in the, in, the political zeitgeist. I don't agree with it, but like I've hitched my wagon to this guy. My identity is wrapped in this.

How do I cut that off? It's like, it's, like severing a limb. It a really, really difficult thing to do, But that's how powerful culture is. Yeah. The interesting thing is, obviously, you know, it's clear that you're not a supporter.

I watch your content and everything, but you recognize what he's done related to the culture. Game, recognize game. It's like I'm a scientist after all.

Like I was looking at what's happening. You broke it down. So, yo, this guy cracked the code. He really did. And he almost became like how Coca-Cola did and was inside of everybody's houses and every.

Yo, I mean, It is true. When you're studying these things as a researcher, as the scientist, you have to sort of step away from your biases as much as possible to go objectively, what's happening here as objective as.

You look at things I write about this in the book, actually, like the same things that get people to buy Coca-Cola are the mechanism that gets people.

To enroll in ice. It's the exact same thing. And you can look at ICE and go, I mean, they are a terrible institution. Good Lord. But what they've done is actually quite brilliant.

They make content and braille. I've been seeing that. What? They make content specifically, not just the language, but the manner in which language is absorbed by people who can't see.

That is just how specific they are with the content that they make. You make contact all the time. Think about that level of intimacy that you have to have with your audience.

I'm making this content specific for those people, for these people and I want to deliver it to them exactly where they're at.

Politics, Branding, and Trump

But you know, even even Trump now this time in office, the the content that they're producing, it's become a show. You know the concept of producing. They're feeding it.

And no other president I've seen create content the way these people. It's almost like they have. I feel like you're like me. And they're on Cupcat and instantly posted.

It's true. I mean, like, it's a spectacle. Right. There's, uh, there's uh a French, a theorist name was Guy de Bourges. And he talked about this idea that society of the spectacle is that, you know, we, We stopped investing in experiences and started to invest in representations of the experience.

Now he wrote this like in the fifties, post-World War II, and it's exactly kind of how we live life in a social media world, right? We go to a restaurant to take photos of where we are.

Like if we didn't take photos, it didn' happen, right? The spectacle is kind of what we get wrapped into, the representations of the thing. We think about the spectacle that is Donald Trump.

The representations are signaling all the things, all of artifacts that have great meaning for these people. And they go, yeah, I like that. Yeah, like the way he talks.

He just talks straight. I liked the, you know, how he makes AI images that he's beating up, whatever. Like that, he seems tough. That's how people interpret it.

For some, they see leather for others. They see a deity, right? The objects are still the same. And this is what I think is the most important thing for people who run a business to understand.

Life is like a basketball game where if you have Sam, you got front court side seats and I have nosebleed seats. We can be watching the exact same events unfold, but experience it differently.

Not because it's any different, but because of our perspective. The same thing goes here in everything else. the social phenomenal world we live in is a pinata of meanings.

So many different meanings and those meanings are negotiated based on our perspectives. who we are and how we see the world. And if we. Are to engage in the.

World fully, then we have, we must sit in many, many many. Many, Many. many seats to see how people see. The world and therefore how. We engage them accordingly.

So, you know, we're on a healthy point of view podcast. So we got to talk a little bit about health, right? So so, You know right now there's a lot of things that are happening in the health and wellness business.

You're starting to see a. Celebrities promote health. A lot. Of celebrities losing weight. We got DJ Khaled out there losing pounds. Serena Williams. That's.

Big one. Yeah, a, lot, of them are getting that bag from most Zempig from these people. But listen, if it's helping them become better and motivating other people, I'm totally for that, especially being in the health and wellness business.

Now, the culture that we live in right now, when it comes to health, is the wellness industry selling health or selling social acceptance? Oh, that's a really good delineation.

I would say that we are selling social acceptance as a Trojan horse for health and the idea there is that, you know, we think about health, the way that we're able to project it as an identity project is based on the aesthetics, right?

What we look like, you know, uh, years ago being, full bodied, that was healthy. I mean, like in the years of the age of aristocrats, Right? Like if you had access to fruit, to a lot of food, like being plus size, be a little bit rotund that you were living a good life.

You were healthy. And if you are rail thing, you weren't eating, and you report that means I'm here to social hierarchy and your there. But over time, culture changes and those aesthetics change.

Right. So we look at people to get a sense of a what their aesthetic presentation is. And therefore, if they are healthy or not. Right. But if you got your ripped body because you were using different enhancers that we would say are not healthy, we don't know that until there is, you know, there's something that comes out later.

We know. Lance Armstrong was doping, for instance, right? We go, Oh, that wasn't healthy at all. Even though you looked fit and you're doing all these great things.

But like you actually were really doing big damage to your body. So what we're looking, what, we, What we see are the aesthetics of what's socially acceptable today.

And that changes over time. That, that is an aesthetic aesthetic look that evolves based on what We consider to be

acceptable. The conversation that we are not having to Your point is what does it mean to Be healthy?

And you know, We talked about this before. You know, like my understanding of health was not very sophisticated. I mean, I grew up thinking that, you know.

If you ate a home cooked meal, that was healthy. No matter what it was on the plate, if it home-cooked, That was health. That's a good meal. Right. As opposed to fast food or.

You know, TV dinners, which we ate a lot to as a kid, but health was this sort of binary. It wasn't a spectrum. And the only way I could tell if I was healthy is if.

I had energy was I then like these things were all the, the aesthetics were the measurement of health as opposed to what actually meant to be healthy, because I didn't know what it was.

Right. Yeah. You know, when I was a kid, kind of same thing. And I remember going to Dominican Republic over the summer. My grandmother, if you weren't chunky, you were not healthy.

Eat some meat on your bones. Boy, you need to eat some food, boy. And the crazy thing is, I actually tell a lot of my friends, like, yo, here in the United States, this is the only place in world that poor people are fat.

Yeah. You know, if you go to other countries, they're skinny. I mean, the ribs are showing. That's right. When I would go back to the Dominican Republic, If I looked too skinny, my grandmother thought I was unhealthy.

You know, which is crazy because it is a kind of messed up mentality. Now, when we talk about health becoming a brand, what happens when health becomes a brain?

Oh, well, I mean, that starts with us first ascribing meaning to what health is. I means, brands by definition, they are identifiable signifiers that conjure up thoughts and feelings in the hearts and minds of people, right?

They are vessels of meaning. Meaning is culturally mediated and brands by nature are cultural objects. So we talked about health as a brand. What we mean is what does it mean to be healthy?

What does that mean? Is health the way you look? is it fit? There's a movie with Sydney Sweeney. I can't think of the name of it at the moment. Uh, but the, the guy is like buff guys, rip dude, and they jump in the water to swim and the guys has like no endurance.

And she's like, Oh, don't tell me you're a hot boy fit. Like you not really fit, you have no stamina. You're not as healthy as you perceive to be through the aesthetics.

Because are the meanings that we have associated to healthy are so unbelievably trivial that the brand of health is. superficial in its nature. And we start thinking about conversations like make America healthy again.

Those things feel like exogenous shocks to the system because they're conversations that we haven't had at all. Now, do I agree with a lot of it? No, but our understanding of, it is so, so minimal that these conversations we actually have to have.

Right. For them to take place, they have, to happen culturally. It does. And as I told you before, I've been able to get into certain rooms with Bobby Kennedy, Dr.

Oz. One of my personal goals is bringing health and wellness to the minority community, where I'm from. Right. I'm working on, you know, myself and my partners, Dr.

Heywood, that Dr Davis is how do we make that happen through the Make America Healthy Movement? Because we do know like nobody wants poison. It doesn't matter what side of the family.

That's right. I don't want toxins in my food. You know I want to be able to, uh, be healthy. Yeah. Right. And I, and I. Our communities to. Be healthy now.

you with the expertise you have, how do we bring Make America Healthy Again to the minority community? We first have to subvert the meanings are associated with it.

Right. So make America healthy again, is a subset of make American great again is market. And because of the meetings that we have associated market by its very nature, those things are going to hold those same meanings.

Therefore that is, a, it'd be a massive cognitive challenge to overcome. The benefit, however, is that the meanings of healthy in general are still pretty abstract.

Health, Wellness, and Social Acceptance

They're pretty ill-defined, which is a clear lane for you to define, but what does it mean to be healthy? What does mean for people like us to healthy, because the way make America healthy again, the Maha talks, they almost completely omit the communities where all you have is fast food.

They completely omit the conversations where they're complete food deserts. So what's the alternative? Highly processed food? Don't eat? Is that the binary?

To be healthy means to don't to eat. Well, we know that's not healthy either. These conversations aren't happening. People who are not privileged to have options They are omitted from the conversation.

What does healthy look like broadly speaking, right? That to me is the real opportunity. The Maha dialogue, the discourse associated with Maja, they are unfounded when I think about the work you do, because who is your business partner?

A physician, a medical physician. You are looking at the science of the body. We look at what we consume. What we put in our body, be it food, biohacking, all the things that help us optimize self.

That's the conversation we should be having. Not one that is you know, quite frankly, divisive in its nature because a lot of it is void of the science.

And that's sort of, that where things get challenging. At least as a researcher, I go like, well, we should be having the dialogue that the discourse is important, but it has to be founded too.

It has be based on something scientific. When you attach yourself to that brand, You then wear the colors that that brand signifies. I do this exercise with a CEO.

So I'm on stage and I go rewind five years back. What car brand was going to lead the future of the automotive industry? You'd say with Tesla, exactly.

Tesla. Right today. so much. But why is that? Because the brand Tesla has new meanings. Why? because Elon Musk as a distinctive brand asset has no meanings and those meanings that he's associated with are now all clouded in all the meanings, that MAGA holds.

And because of that, Tesla's like, I have nothing to do with this. Because of Tesla, the brands associated, with the asset that is Elon Musk associated with the brand MAGA, it now bears all the cognitive load, the negative cognitive loads and associations that MAGAs has.

Yeah. Did the vehicle get better over the last four years? Absolutely. Like the value propositions of a Tesla is probably far better now than it was five years ago, but that doesn't matter.

What does it mean? What is the brand signify in the hearts and minds of people? I mean, it's so bad that people

aren't buying Teslas because of its meaning.

Even though the product is better, people can't resell it because the resale value is terrible. People who own Teslas are putting bumper stickers saying, hey, I bought this before Eli went crazy.

In fact, people are taking off their Tesla logo and putting on like Toyota logos. They're putting all Audi logos like that is crazy. The product is strong, but the brand has meanings that people don't want associated with their identity.

the same thing goes with you as you preach the gospel on health and our ability to optimize our health so we can live more prosperous lives. We're going to say no to that.

Like who goes, nah, I'd rather live a crappy life. No, thank you, Sam. You gotta go preach the gospel, right? Start with the soul, then end with a cell.

What does it mean to be healthy? That's a conversation we just are not having. But I tell you it's been tough, going into these rooms and even posting that I'm there.

I got friends and family, family that'll see it. And I've had family delete me off social media. Yeah. Guys, I'm doing this for us. You guys ain't making it in that room, you know?

Little old Sam that started his company with $500 in his back pocket is finally in these rooms in D. C. doing these for our culture, right? And I am not getting props.

I get blocked on social media. So I was stretching my head, and I said, man, what do I do? You know who is a good proxy for this? Zerran Mondami. uh, the mayor of New York city, really good proxy for this.

He preaches the gospel and his actions line up with his words. And he gets on the phone with Trump. he goes to visit Trump, but he keeps the same energy in those rooms.

Like I am here to do this, I'm not here. I count out. Am I here? To capitulate? I've here because I believe this and this is going to help me serve my people.

When people see that they go, go Sam. Go on, go do the work, Sam. Go in the fiery furnace for us. Sam, this is subverting the meanings that are associated with this thing.

You're like, I'm in here to do that thing, i'm here, to represent us, right? I am here. To help us and what does that mean? And that's the part, that is the gospel that you got to preach.

What is that? What does it mean to be healthy? And how does Liquivita do all the things that allow us to get access to that? Not just the products, but all of the many things.

That you do, all things, that you talk about this podcast world right now, right? All these things are to help us achieve a much more healthy life. What does that mean?

Yeah, that's the job. Yeah. And you know what, what I can do is I do a lot of the media stuff. So I'm interviewing a of them. Yep. and I put them on the spot.

Hey, What are you doing for the minority community? You know, it's like, yeah. Because I want people to see that. This is, this is the energy. Exactly.

That's. The energy you like. Listen, man, like I am all about getting healthy for sure. Like you can look at the country depending on how you define health.

And you can say empirically, we are not a healthy country, empiric. Right. And, you know, who's really not healthy part of the country? My people. Why?

Because they've been ignored. I think about like, the health of black women, like the mortality rate. of like women who give birth it's through the roof like what are we talking about here right or they had to suffer through pain that's been ignored by doctors like that is not okay but no one tells those stories right right like for someone to go champion that for them for us that Now, with a lot of the influential people, like we got Mike Tyson, now that's part of The Maha Movement.

And there's other people that have been talking, but they see that there is a positive side to it, to bring to the communities, especially when we talk about the highly processed foods, all of that nonsense that we get exposed to, and people not exercising.

There's a lack in education when it comes to health and wellness. What are the most important things that some of these people like Mike Tyson have to take in consideration going in there?

It can't be about you. Your being there can be because it serves you, right? We talk about engaging in culture. The, the best way to engage in culture is to see it as a place to give, not a to take.

You see, it is a places to contribute when you leverage the culture to benefit yourself. That is exploitation at its finest. Right. And this isn't a diss at all to Mike Tyson, but on the outside, what it looks like is that Mike, Tyson is edifying Mike.

Tyson. Like he believes these things and he's benefiting from it, but how does it benefit me? How does benefit the community? Everything that we've talked about since the day I met you years ago, it's been all about like, how do I help people benefit from things I've benefited from?

Like I'd never heard you say, I'm just trying to get paid. I'll try to blow up. Never, there's never, never. Heard you utter those words. It's always been, How do we help?

People like me who digging the opportunities that I had to do better. Right. That is a light year difference between celebrities that find themselves in these companies or in the company of these people that feel like it edifies them, where you are there to edify us.

In all reality, man, I feel it is my God-given purpose to do exactly what you just said about me. When I worked at the fire department for 12 years in The Inner City, I just saw a broken, I was a product of that broken medical system.

I got to a certain place where I said, this has to change. You see the person from the first time they call 911 until the day they die and you just see more medications, more this, that, doctors not communicating with each other.

Where it's just like, you go into the homes, and see what they're eating. See how they live. Something has change, so. And that to me, that is a worthy conviction that's worth evangelizing.

Your story is the story about why and how we should be thinking about health differently. And yes, should we eat less processed foods? Definitely. But the idea is we do that in an effort to what live longer, to live more prosperous lives, like start with the soul and end with a cell.

Yeah. Right. A lot of the conversations we have about health are all about the cell, whether it's how we present ourselves so we can look good, look fit, right.

Or. you know, to askew toxins and whatnot. But that is all in service of what? And what is a toxin after all? I mean, quite frankly, right? Like, you, we saw our kids don't use drugs, but take some penicillin if you're sick.

We had a drug. And I say that to say, that like these things don' have objective meanings. Right. we assign different evaluations. Some drugs are good.

Take them. some drugs or not. Don't. That delineation is all socially constructed based on people like us.

Purpose, Grief, and Closing Reflections

Yeah. There's a lot, man. A lot. And I want to keep on talking, but I know we're kind of cutting it short on time. Marcus, I'm going to have a little fun here before we close up.

So, um, one of my favorite podcasters, Steven Barlett with a diary of CEO. He came out with these conversation cards. So I want you to go ahead and open that up.

Okay. And, just randomly pick a card. All right. Two cards, two cards pick out two randomly. Uh-oh. I'm getting myself in trouble. You're going to read it and answer it.

Oh, okay. Here's the first. What is your selfish dream? Hmm. My selfish dream is to make an impact on the world greater than anyone thought that I could.

Wow. I feel like, uh, much of my life I've been discounted for whatever reason. Um, you know, I'm always like a, one of them, my constant refrains are that Like I've never had the elevator.

I'm always taking the stairs. Got to take the steps, right? People did the, they discounted me. They didn't think I could do a thing. It's like, all right, I'll show them.

Not going to get like a direct line up. A matter to go inch by inch taking. And my hope at the end of the day is that selfishly that I am able to live up to my highest potential to prove them wrong and to make my daughters proud.

All right. That's the selfish dream. Okay. What is the hardest thing you've ever done in your life? Honestly, my father passed in February last year and moving from being Jeanette and Herschel's son to being Hershel's POA.

And being now a caregiver for Jeanette, my mother, it's the hardest thing I've ever done. It's not just the fact that I haven't done it before, but it is constantly a psychological battle for me.

I'm a kid, why am I doing this? To lose a parent, I don't know if there's anything harder, maybe to lose the kid is probably the hardest thing than that.

But to loose a parents, you feel almost orphaned in the world. And navigating having to care for his dealings as a state. Care for my mother now. and like also grieve and then also be okay and teach and give myself as I do.

It's this last year is like the worst year of my life. Cause it was the hardest thing I've ever done. And I'm finding myself navigating it better, but it's still incredibly difficult.

How are you keeping yourself grounded? I try to give my self grace. I tried to like, I listened to my body more than I ever had before. I was the kind of guy that like I'm tired from grinding out, like whatever grind, rest when I die, that kind guy.

And I had evidence of that being successful for me. My career was doing well off of mentality. But I just realized that I completely burning myself out and I robbing myself or my children from myself.

Like I wasn't showing up as a good dad, wasn' showing as good husband. because i'm stressed out i've tired i get no energy to allocate uh to them so i listen to my body my, body goes ii'm tired, i go i i don't get done they're gonna be all right they gonna, be okay and i guess you know When my father passed, I realized that nothing else in the world was more important than caring for him and caring from my mother.

And if that reality can manifest then, then that must be reality at all times. So I asked myself, what's more. Me, my kids, family, church, or getting this deck done in time.

Probably the former. Priorities, priorities. Yes, sir. So Dr. Marcus Collins, if someone listening to this podcast resonates with today's message about culture, what is that one thing you can leave them off with?

There's no force more influential human behavior than culture. Full stop. And the better we understand that, the bet it will be at engaging with one another, realizing that culture is the way by which we make meaning.

and meaning itself is not fixed, right? The world is non-objective, it's subjective. Things aren't the way they are, they're the the we are. The way we culturally constructed.

If that be the case, not only would we be better practitioners when we're in business, but I think we'd be a better humans as well. We start to see people and go, oh, for you a rug is decor.

For me, is a place of worship. And if you realize that, hopefully you won't wipe your feet on my rug. And if we just like had that bare, like the smallest bare minimum of respect for each other, realizing that our realities are different, that doesn't make you wrong and me right.

This makes it different that I think that will be better cohabitants of this thing that we call social living. And that to me, if I can do that, If I could add just one, one iota of impact there, then my life would have been well served.

Amazing. And where can people find you? Oh, all across the web. Dr. Marcus Collins at Mark to the see all the places. I'm there. Amazing Dr.. Marcus. Collins.

Pleasure having you on a healthy point of view. Thank you, fam. Appreciate you. Guys, this was an amazing podcast. You know, usually I say if you resonated with it or you know someone who might share it with them, everybody has to resonate with this because remember, people move people.

Culture. Get the book. Read the. Book. It's on audio. He actually speaks it himself. Its his voice, which is a powerful voice. Guys, make sure you share, like, subscribe, do all that fun stuff and we'll see you for the next one.

Amazing. Oh, man, that was great. Yo, dude, you are a killer at this. But it took us forever to make it happen, but I'm glad we did. I want to have you sign.

Yeah, totally. Absolutely.