

EPISODE 195

*“**JL:** There's a lot of technical things about stagecraft that you can learn over time. Those are learnable skills. There's technical structural things, like, how do you structure a good keynote. But I think the biggest thing is commit to it like you're learning a new language or learning a new instrument. You need to learn the professional skill set that goes around being effective on stage. So I would just encourage anybody to watch a bunch of tape. Practice the way you'd be practicing to learn a new instrument and use a training protocol, develop a training protocol. Instead of just thinking, oh, I'm so charismatic and everyone wants to hear my story, put your performance under the microscope, really understand it. And then test a lot of stuff, test delivering a story one way versus another way, how did it feel? How was the audience reaction? And so I think that the headline here is if you want to be a professional, treat the craft professionally.”*

[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 who 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 have found their path and to humanize them by telling their backstory. And after hearing story after story, eventually, hopefully you give yourself permission to move further in the direction of whatever feels like your path and purpose. Because what you'll see is that anyone who does that has had to overcome many of the same obstacles that you may be dealing with right now and that you may be using as reasons not to follow your path and your purpose.

Speaking of which, a path that has revealed itself to me over the last several years is doing more keynote speaking on bigger stages. And I met today's guest when I attended a keynote speaking bootcamp that he co founded many years ago called ImpactEleven. His name is Josh Linkner. And I've been a part of Josh's ImpactEleven community for about a year and a half now. And not only have I had the pleasure of working with Josh as my coach, but I've also gotten to see him in action several times, and he is indeed, one of the most dynamic speakers that I've ever witnessed.

In addition to Josh's keynote speaking expertise, I've also admired his approach to building community and I wanted to have him on the pod to do a deeper dive into his backstory as a jazz musician and a master improviser turned entrepreneur turned innovation thought leader, turned venture capitalist.

And for those of you who have dreamt of speaking on bigger stages, I wanted to let you know about this incredible community that Josh co founded in case you're like, I was a couple of years ago and you're not quite sure where to even get started as a keynote speaker.

Privately, I've recommended ImpactEleven as the perfect place for any aspiring keynote speaker, willing to do the work because they cover all of the basics for building a keynote speaking career. And now I get to sing their praises publicly through this podcast episode.

In fact, many of my past guests on this podcast are also a part of the ImpactEleven community, such as Ben Nemtin Leon Logothetis, Jordan Tarver. You may remember Ray Singleton, Jamie Hess, Nita Bushan, Greg Scheinman, Jessica Jansen, Sebastian Terry, Jesse Israel, April Dinwiddie. So the ImpactEleven community is deep on The Light Watkins Show. And all of those past guests who I named have incredible keynote speaking careers.

As you'll hear, Josh is super humble when it comes to his personal impact on the lives of keynoters. But since 2007, he's delivered over 1,300 keynotes, which adds up to something like \$40 million in keynote speaking fees. And he's also helped to launch over a hundred startups. He's created over \$1 billion in investor returns. He's positively impacted the lives of over 2 million people through his books and other work as a thought leader. And needless to say, we talk a lot about all of that, plus the roadmap to becoming a keynote speaker and how newer speakers tend to use a lot of trial and error and hope to get on the stage. And that's one of the reasons why they get stagnant results.

And to be honest, that was my experience as well. My keynote speaking had been more or less stagnant for years. I would get booked for a talk here and there, but I wasn't able to really get traction when it came to getting on stage. And when I attended one of ImpactEleven's bootcamps, I discovered that I wasn't doing nearly the amount of backend work that professional speakers do to optimize their careers. And I learned all kinds of drills and how to get representation with the Speakers Bureau as well as the best practices for establishing and growing professional relationships in the keynote speaking world.

And I know I'm not the only one out there who has a message to share and who wants to do more speaking. The ImpactEleven community is very much like taking the express lane along the path of keynote speaking. They introduce you to constantly evolving systems and connections to industry experts and thought leaders. And it's just a way to accelerate the time that you're already investing in trying to become a keynote speaker.

So we talk about what it means to become a proper thought leader. We talk about what's the best perspective to adopt as a keynote speaker of a specific subject, how to think about your

messaging and not only get the biggest economical results, but how to get the biggest impact results.

We talk about the framework for creating scaffolding in your speaking career, the importance of watching tape, how to become a better speaker over time. Josh reveals his all time favorite five talks. And we also talk about the most effective way to position yourself as a speaker.

And even if you don't have a desire to be a keynote speaker on some big stage, you may still find yourself speaking in front of your church or in your child's PTA meeting, or you may have to give a business pitch at the office. So learning about the art of speaking can only ever benefit you as it applies to just about anyone who puts themselves out there in any way.

So I think you're going to love this conversation and without further ado, I am honored to introduce you to the work of my keynote speaking coach, Mr. Josh Linkner.

[00:06:38] LW: Josh Linkner. It's a pleasure having you on my podcast, man.

[00:06:42] JL: Thanks, Light. I'm so delighted to be with you, as always.

Absolutely. Absolutely. I met you a couple of years ago, I believe at ImpactEleven, which is the speaker community that you co founded and definitely want to get into that. But before that, I always like to start with the superhero origin story. And yours, yours began in Detroit. You grew up in a single parent household. And you and I are the same age. I was down in Alabama growing up. And while I was seven, eight years old, I was an artist. I was drawing, I was creating comic books.

[00:07:24] LW: Meanwhile, up in Detroit, you were learning how to play the piano. So talk to me about how you got into the piano and just anything that was noteworthy around your earlier years, the earliest memories, your favorite activities, how did that culminate in music?

[00:07:47] JL: So I, as much as I was born in the city of Detroit, not the suburbs, my parents were divorced when I was 2 and a half. And, I was frankly bounced between them a little bit and, it wasn't like, there's a lot of people that had it worse than me. I'm not complaining, but it was kind of unstable. We didn't have a lot of resources and it was a little bit scary, frankly, and really the only way that I got attention was through achievement. Like my parents are doing their own thing. And if I got a good grade in school maybe I'd get a pat on the head and to get noticed, but then there was like achievement inflation. So I had to do something better the next time to get a little attention. So I quickly got pretty disciplined. I'm like, I got to achieve things. It's probably because that was the only way to be honest, I felt love and connection.

But as part of that I did love learning and I did like achieving things. I did get addicted to it. Not only for those reasons, which are probably negative but for some positive reasons too, I like creating stuff. And I always felt like a little bit of a misfit. I felt like if there was 20 kids in a class, there'd be 19 of them in one of me, not because I was better, actually it was the opposite. I felt

like weird and awkward and such, but I always felt like a misfit. And so I never was called to follow a traditional path. And so if someone's like, hey, go play sports. I was like, what's the opposite of sports? Like I always wanted to do the opposite.

And I did fall in love with music very early, just even as a little young as I can remember, music, just moved me I love music. I love singing along. I like rhythm. I just loved it. And so at age eight, I started playing piano and took to it very quickly. I mean, my parents were musicians. I started learning and I just loved it. And, I do like little party tricks. Like I could name the notes by ear and such. And then about a year and a half later, I switched over to guitar, which became my main instrument, and I never put it down as I was going through middle school and high school, when everybody else was going to the prom, I was practicing and playing in smoky jazz clubs and wedding bands. And I just became very immersed in music. That really has become a main through line of not only what I do, but who I am.

[00:09:42] LW: So to use your lingo, I want to double click on this a little bit more. When I started drawing all of my friends were artists. So, you know, we would sit in a room and draw together. What was your inspiration for just thinking about playing the piano at first? Did your parents play music or did you have friends who were into music?

[00:09:57] JL: I just liked music and we had like this old beaten up piano at my dad's house and nobody really played. I was like, can I have piano lessons? And I kind of had to beg for that. I just took to it pretty quickly. It sounds weird, but it's like a really organic, natural thing. It's the opposite of someone saying, come on, honey, you should learn a piano, you know, learn to play. I just wanted to learn to play. I just love music. I feel like it gave me a platform to learn and to be challenged. I was never bored again for the rest of my life because I can always be playing or practicing. It gave an outlet for creative expression. It gave me something to lean into and work toward. So it really developed a lot of skills that I found to be very helpful in other areas of life. But the truth is I just was drawn to it because it moved my heart.

[00:10:22] LW: And I've read before one of your other interviews that playing instruments helped you to obviously practice and develop discipline and experience delayed gratification in being creative. And looking back now as someone who's gone well beyond 10, 000 hours as a young person, what did it take for you to excel? How did you develop discipline or that practice or that ability to improvise?

[00:10:51] JL: What happened was, I think was probably out of fear more than anything. I really wanted to be good and I was afraid of not being good. I did learn at an early age for better for worse. If I wanted anything in life, I had to do it myself. My parents again, they were wonderful people. They both passed out. I don't mean to disrespect anybody, but they weren't like real available. They were kind of in their own thing. If I wanted a bowl of cereal, like I had to figure that out. If I wanted a toilet, I had to figure that out. And so there are some negatives but like, I also gained a really fierce sense of independence.

And so when I started learning to play music and I looked at the greats, you know, Eddie Van Halen or Wes Montgomery or whatever, I didn't think that there was going to be anyone that was going to help me get there other than me. And so I just figured like, the only thing I can do is outwork people. I probably don't have as much talent as they did. I can, but I can hustle. And so I just developed a pretty strong discipline at an early age.

I remember many nights, even in high school where my friends are going out, Hey, what's up? You want to go to a party? I'm like, no. And my party was I made a whole pot of coffee and started practicing at four in the afternoon. Play a little bit, drink a coffee, play a little more, drink a coffee and maybe two, three in the morning I'd stop playing when my fingers hurt and I fell asleep and that was it. Like I just became almost monomaniacally focused on this. And trying to get better at it and both dexterity, but ultimately then developing a voice and an outlet for creative expression.

[00:11:54] LW: Were you a bit of an introvert?

[00:11:57] JL: Yeah. I don't know what you mean by a bit, but I was a total introvert. The funny thing is I still am today. I was just talking with some friends about this last night. I love deep conversations. I can hang out with you for a week and then never get bored. And if it's the people I care about in an intimate setting, I love that. I also love being alone. I'm totally good with that. I get energized from both those things. I actually don't get energized from big crowds. I don't like schmoozing and cocktail hours. It saps my energy and I can pretend to engage with that, but it's not energizing for me. Being here in my studio and playing some music or writing or talking to you like that fills my heart.

[00:12:34] LW: And which musicians did you become obsessed with as a young person when you were learning and playing and just having that experience?

[00:12:41] JL: Well, you know, you first want to sound like I wanted to play Stairway to Heaven so I could get girls and all that. But I had a guitar teacher very early said, jazz is the most complicated, difficult, physically demanding, basically, if you can play jazz, you can play anything. And so he turned me on to jazz musicians. And then I really sought that out. I said, okay, if that's true, like, how can I learn from the most weird, crusty jazz musicians I could find, it was so deep into it. And so I started studying jazz at an early age. First, because I wanted to learn the hardest thing to get good at it. But then eventually I was like, because I loved it. And like jazz, it's just so much part of my soul, and it's such a beautiful art form. It's the one art form where you're both composing and performing simultaneously. If you're a painter, you can go back and correct a mistake, look at it again the next day. Jazz isn't. You're literally composing and performing simultaneously. But it's also pretty cool because it's not solo composition. I suppose you could play a solo instrument, but let's say you and I and three other guys went in jazz group together. Every night we're inventing, but every night is different because we're all co creating and I might come up with a little idea and then you build on it and the drummer builds on it. And every night you're, it's like this musical conversation and every night you're taking risks every night, you're making mistakes and having a course correct? You have to use active listening and situational awareness to navigate through complexity. You have

to make decisions in the face of ambiguity. To me, it's the ultimate teacher of what we do in business, certainly in most areas of life. It's thrilling. It's like this dangerous thing where, am I going to make it through the other side of it? And what's that going to be? And I just never get bored with it.

And it's such an element of expression. There are jazz songs that are touching and heartwarming. There's jazz songs that are almost angry. And so I feel like any emotion in the constant of all human emotion can be expressed certainly in music. And specifically in jazz. You can really touch nerves in a way that I think at least in other art forms, you cannot.

[00:14:31] LW: So you had a couple of experiences as a young person selling, I think, illegal fireworks when you were only 11 years old to your friends at school, and then later on working at a gas station when you were 13 and getting on stage in the evenings at jazz clubs at 13 years old, where'd you get these ideas from Josh? Like, how did you come up with the idea to resale fireworks at the risk of potentially getting thrown out of school.

[00:14:59] JL: Yeah, I guess I developed a good risk tolerance apparently, but I um, I've always like, kind of scrappy and resourceful. And, you know, I saw an opportunity that the juvenile delinquent who lived around the corner from me, I befriended and he was like, 19 and I was 11. He would take me to his basement somewhere to get illegal fireworks. And so I found out that you could buy from him like 25 cents a pack for firecrackers and I can sell them at school for a dollar. Hey, in business, like I, I found a distribution partner, I found a wholesale relationship. I found a healthy gross margin. I mean but I didn't know that language of course, I just threw fireworks in my backpack and went to school and sold them to all my friends. And it was a pretty robust business. I had a lot of repeat customers. It was pretty healthy until I ran into a regulatory problem. And actually it was quasi a banking problem because my mom found all these crumpled up 20 bills in my underwear drawer because that was my banking system. And she's like, where did you get all this money? And so the jig was up. And the worst thing, man, is like my punishment. I had to call not my friends, but I had to call their parents and I had to call people up and say, Hello Mrs. Washington. My name is Josh Linkner. I sold your son illegal fireworks.

So not only did I have no business, I had no friends for a couple of years. You ratted everybody out. That was bad. That was bad.

[00:16:08] LW: And was it intimidating getting on the stage with adults to play jazz at 13 years old?

[00:16:14] JL: Yeah, I think it was. But I just developed this sense of it's not fearlessness just to be clear. I have the same fears and anxieties. It's not that. It was just more like comfortable being uncomfortable and I felt like I didn't really have a choice to a degree. It was like, I didn't feel like I had the luxury. I'll just practice for a couple more years before I do that. I felt like this drive probably much of it maybe coming from a place of fear. But I don't have the luxury to sit

back and wait. I have to do this. I have to go try it even if I screw it up, I have to put myself in a tough situation.

And so it was almost like a survivalistic instinct that I felt not doing that even as uncomfortable as it might be. I just didn't feel like I had the luxury.

[00:16:52] LW: Okay, so sthen that prepared you to go to music school. You went to Berkeley, you came in as the highest ranking jazz guitars. How did they rank jazz guitars? I was curious about that.

[00:17:02] JL: You sit down in front of like, this board and

they do like, this whole like, audition thing and then, then like, they kind of give you like, the numerical ranking and, and because, you know, the various coursework is better for suited for someone at different levels and um, yeah, at the time I did okay. It was cool because I was finally, I felt like cut free from the typical bounds of high school and I could play music with all these people, which raised its own set of challenges and such, but it was, it's an amazing place.

[00:17:27] LW: You didn't graduate from Berkeley because you started this company. This is really interesting to me because it seems like by all metrics you discovered your life's calling to be a jazz musician, and yet you start selling computers that you assemble in your dorm room and that sort of derails you away from the jazz thing, full time to this other thing. How did you reconcile that for yourself?

[00:17:53] JL: It's going to sound weird, but this is how I really thought about it. I just kept thinking I was playing jazz. Because in jazz you're assembling things in different ways and you're figuring stuff out and you're problem solving and using inventive thinking and you're scrappy and resourceful. I'd never taken a business class, but I realized that I could buy individual components from a mail order catalog, assemble them in my college dorm and then sell them on campus at a discounted price and still make some money. And so it was almost like if imagine if I was playing guitar and I switched to piano, you'd be like, yeah, you're still playing. You're just using a different instrument. Yeah. That's kind of how I process it. I was still playing jazz. I was just using a different instrument. In this case, assembling computers instead of playing notes on an instrument. But it was the same skills. It was responsible risk taking, learning quickly, course correcting when you screw something up. And that was, I'll tell you, there's no better teacher to be an entrepreneur than to be a jazz musician.

[00:18:47] LW: And at the same time, I imagine you still like being on stage, lit you up and playing, allowed you to feel alive and present and all the things. Did you shift in your own personal identity away from primarily being a jazz musician to being an entrepreneur who plays jazz on the side? Do you remember that being like a conscious choice that you made?

[00:19:06] JL: I do, but not at that time because at that time I was playing more than ever. It was funny. I was technically in college at this time. I transferred to the University of Florida in Gainesville, but I was technically in college. I almost never went and I played music almost every night, like six, seven nights a week. I would go on the weekends and tour all over the place. I'd go to different countries and play in concerts. So I was a full time working musician and a full time entrepreneur and technically a full time student. Although I barely went to class. So I didn't make this I'm giving up one thing to do another thing. I was more like, I'm embracing two things. And I, you know, I have sort of that highly intense work ethic. And so what sounds weird to be saying that to you now, like, why would this 20 year old kid be doing all that stuff? I just felt like, again, I didn't necessarily feel like I had the option to come off the throttle. I just kept doing both.

[00:19:52] LW: And you sold the computer thing a couple of years later. Why didn't you keep that going? What was it that made you think I need to get out of this and do something else?

[00:20:00] JL: A lot of things, actually. First of all, I didn't love the business. I was okay. I learned a ton and made a ton of mistakes. But I never saw myself doing that particular business forever. I like the act of creating something new. Like in jazz, you're creating something new. The notion of playing the same song every night in the exact same way every night would be the antithesis of jazz. And so doing a company and figuring it out and just keeping it that way is like the antithesis of who I was as a human being. So it sounds weird, but like I wasn't like, Oh, I built something. I want to keep it and protect it. It was like, yeah, I want to go build something else. It wasn't a huge transaction, but I did sell the company and I got that sort of itch to okay, I can build something. I like creating things out of nothing. I like the messiness of a startup environment because it reminded me of the messiness of a jazz combo. And I like building things and then moving on to the next thing.

So give us a little montage of what you created over those next several years professionally. And how you sort of develop your core values that you now both live by. But also, I believe that you teach those to other innovators and creatives and speakers and things like the idea of the judo flip and not keeping score and these kinds of values. So talk about your business world experiences that sort of led you to that.

Yeah, so almost as quickly as I sold that company, we talked about it, graduated, started another company 11 months later, I sold that. In 1995, I started an internet company. Everyone's what's the internet? And I was like I could build you a website. They're like, what's a website? And it was this early time, but I early pioneer of that area. Sold that company in 99, started another company. which grew in size. I was the CEO, it was a company called E Prize for 11 years, grew that, hired thousands of people, opened offices all over the world, bought and sold companies. I built that one to scale. But the principles that I developed to answer your question, some of them were through experience and trial and error. And some of it were, I think, more grounded in the sense of intentionality and purpose and almost like a religious fervor, although not in the organized dogma kind of way.

But one of them, for example I still talk about a lot of start before you're ready which is that notion of, take the initiative, just get started, figure stuff out as you go, which is what I did from selling fireworks and standing on stage at 13 years old and starting a company, 20, never taking a business class. I wasn't ready for any of those things. But I think it's actually a good, it's a portable principle. It wasn't just applies to like a short guy from Detroit. It applies to universally in many other contexts. So I like concepts like that are that I may have experienced, so I have some, validity in talking about but they're more general in nature.

Another one of my core beliefs is the notion of seeking the unexpected, which is instead of gravitating to the obvious or the tried and true to challenge yourself to do the opposite, which is to like what can I do that was the opposite of what everyone else is doing?

So I've always, again, I felt like a misfit. I had that oppositional nature. And so one of the techniques you mentioned this, that I talk about a lot is this concept of a judo flip. It's a very fun, simple way to think about it, but if you're facing a problem or an opportunity, you just say okay, how have I always done this before? What's everybody else doing? What does tradition suggest? And then just ask a simple question. What's the opposite? What would it look like instead if you judo flip it? And again, that's just a little, a little tip, a technique. But the principle is seeking the unexpected instead of the obvious, that's been a core principle of mine.

And the last one you mentioned, Light, is one that's much more personal. And I try to live life this way, and I'm sure I'm not perfect, and nobody is, but it's the concept of give generously, don't keep score. And I'll just unpack that a little bit because to me, it's more than a catchphrase. First of all, it's a belief in abundance. And so if I felt like there's scarcity, that means if I give you something that I'm taking away from my family, but if you look at the world differently in a sense of there's abundance and you can create that new things, you don't have to only protect the things that exist that alone is this hugely freeing concept.

The second thing is if you say, what's my purpose here? Well, is it to just amass economic gains or is it to serve others and help the world? So the notion of give generously, don't keep score. It's more of this notion of can I contribute? Can I elevate others? Can I make a difference in people's lives in the context of abundance without saying what's in it for me? What am I going to get out of it? I'll do X because I expect Y. And so to me, it's a kind of a beautiful way to go through life.

And my wife, who is very protective and loving, Tia is awesome. And she's the love of my life. Sometimes she's like a little protective. You get taken advantage of sometimes by doing this and I said, you know what? I'd rather get taken advantage of 10 percent of the time and walk through the world being that way. I'm okay with that. That's okay, because the opposite is what I don't want to do, which is thinking scarcity and protectionism. And I said, no, I'm okay. If I get dumped, it happens. It's a choice.

[00:24:31] LW: I came across this wonderful anecdote speaking of beginning, taking advantage of about you on an airline flight and you had been upgraded and some guy that you were trying

to do a business with had also been upgraded. Can you share that anecdote just to give a real world example of what we're talking about?

[00:24:47] JL: I was trying to win a massive account for my company and my little company from Detroit and competing with too much larger competitors. And there's one very large, multinational Fortune 500 company. I was going to give a huge contract to a company in my space. I'm trying really hard to get the decision maker to agree and he was really like mean and condescending and dismissive and arrogant and he was dragging the decision process out. He kept setting a deadline to make a decision and then he blew every deadline, so we were all getting frustrated.

Anyway, I saw him and his wife at an industry conference in Arizona and at every coffee break and every meal, I'm like racing up to him, trying to get him to sign the deal. And he was like, totally dismissive. Get away from me. Stop it. Just leave me alone. And so I just felt like there's no way we're going to win this. It's over.

But I saw him and his wife at the airport. It turned out oddly, we were both on the same outbound flight. So here's what happens next. This guy gets an upgrade to first class because he's a frequent traveler and being the gentleman that he is, he takes the seat for himself and sends his wife back to coach. Just for the record, like if I tried that with Tia, there's no chance like this, I've been in the realm of the universal possibility of things.

Anyway, I also got an upgrade. So I walk on the plane and I have the seat next to him. And so our first instinct is sit down, sell, take command, all the things that any entrepreneur would be thinking. And I did something different. You might call it actually, by the way, a judo flip. If the first instinct is to sell and take that seat, what's the opposite? So I said to him, Hey, I have the seat next to you. And he's like, oh, that's right. We can chat.

Instead of like pouncing, I said, I'd love that. But I plan to catch up on some work on this flight. And I noticed that your wife is sitting in the back So how about we switch seats? You two can enjoy some family time. I'll get my work done back in coach. And he wasn't especially thankful. He was, you know, whatever, he was kind of like, whatever. And I was walking back to find his wife. And I'm shaking a little. Was that the dumbest thing I've ever done? But I did think that, first of all, I owed it to my team to try something new. And also, it just felt like the right thing to do. I really wasn't trying to game it so much, as it just felt like the right thing to do. So I found his wife, and I gave her my ticket. And she gets all excited, and she's a little teared up. Thank you so much. This means the world to me. And I was thinking like, I don't know why you even want to sit with your husband, but that's a whole different story. He seems like such a jet But anyway, so the flight takes off. I wasn't thinking about it that much. But when we land, of course we check our mobile device. And the first thing I see is an email from my office. The company signed the deal. And so what happened was that this guy, after I gave the seat away, texted into his office and said, I'm going with this company. And it was a 30 million contract won through an act of this case of generosity.

So it did come back to me. Although again, I wasn't trying to game it as much as. I just thought it was the right thing to do. But my experience in life is like that. If you try to be greedy, you seldom get what you're going for. If you give generously, don't keep score. The thing that the greedy person craves ends up falling in your lap.

Yeah. I love that lesson because like you're right. I think sometimes you will probably get taken advantage of and maybe you would lose a million dollars and people taking advantage of you. But then if you can convert that just from being a generous person and leading with that generosity of spirit, and it brings in, tens of millions of dollars and it was, it was all worth it at the end of the day. And you've raised hundreds of millions of dollars as a venture capitalist. And you've also sold your company and made really a really big nest eggs out of that. And as someone who's been surrounded by tech founders and capitalists and just been very involved in that scene, would you say that leading with that generosity of spirit is more the exception, or have you started to see that more and more in other people?

I think I'm seeing it more and more in other people. I think it's still probably, unfortunately, an exception. I don't blame anybody. I mean, we're all trying to do the best in the circumstances in that moment. I'm sure. But I think that a lot of people grew up in a scarcity world. I did too, by the way, and I didn't come from like a position of means or something. But I just looked at the world a little different. But I am seeing a bigger sense of. I think connectedness, compassion, there's a real sense of the wholeheartedness, human centric growth. So I am seeing a little shift in the right direction. I hope that continues.

[00:28:58] LW: Your mission is to unlock dormant creativity. You've become the world's foremost expert on innovation. In 2007, you started speaking on that on a large scale. So talk about that moment where you pivoted away from full time running companies to becoming a full time author and speaker. How did you know that it was time to make that transition. What were some of the internal cues that you experienced?

[00:29:30] JL: Yeah. I sort of reinvented a few different times throughout life, but it's more like different chapters almost. Earlier on, I was in this musician and eventually got to the point where I had people telling me, they're like, hey, I know it's an inverse correlation between musical reward intrinsically and economics, which was the opposite. In other words, I go play a bad gig at a wedding and I make more money and I played a great musical gig at a jazz club. And so people would often tell me other musicians, they say, just play that other junk that you hate for money, and then do the stuff you love for free. So I thought okay, if I'm going to be an artist and celebrate the art that I love, why don't I do something like this more profitable for money instead of you. singing in a wedding band. And so I did make a conscious decision not to pursue music permanently. I look back sometimes and question that decision honestly, although I do still feel like a jazz musician at my core. I still play regularly. I played a concert last week in Vegas. I'd love to tell you about that in a minute. I still play and I still get a lot of joy and passion out of it. But I made a deliberate choice.

And then as I sold different companies and I made a choice to go to the next thing, and I have been, I'm excited always about the next chapter. I don't like cling, doing something in the past.

But what happened was I started a venture capital firm in 2010. We were really on a mission to help rebuild the city of Detroit. We bachelor of non traditional entrepreneurs in inner city, Detroit gave them not just money, but coaching and supportive mentorship. And we really built this whole movement around revitalization of Detroit.

[00:30:45] LW: This was back when houses were like \$500 in Detroit, right?

[00:30:48] JL: Yeah the city went through the largest municipal bankruptcy in American history. We tried to help them get that going but simultaneously I was launching the speaking practice and I was writing books and I love my heart was just drawn to that. It felt like it was my calling. So I did both for a while, actually as you might imagine. But in 2014, my partner bought me out of our venture firm. We had a bit of a philosophical disagreement. And at the time, my speaking practice was really exploding. So it didn't feel weird. It just felt natural to move into that. And I'll tell you the way when I think about work, people ask me, hey, when are you going to retire? When are you going to slow down? And I always think about if I was doing something I hated in exchange for money, like it was a means to an end only, it would be as fast as I possibly could have the answer to that question. But I'm the opposite of that. I feel like I'm doing something that I'm called to do that. It's my life's work that I want to be remembered doing. And so when I'm working, I doesn't feel like labor. It feels like joy and play and love that every minute, there's things that go bad on given days but for the most part, and so I don't ever want to retire because that would mean that I don't have anything else to contribute.

And so what really drew me to speaking and writing is this notion that all human beings are creative period. We can express creativity in different ways. I play jazz guitar. I can't draw a stick figure. It doesn't mean I'm not creative. And so someone's creativity might show up in the way that they are a salesperson or navigate a problem or manage supply chain or whatever. You don't have to be a "creative" in a sense of painting on canvas or writing poetry, we can find ways to be creative in every job on the planet and every field and every endeavor. And so I believe this is a core belief of mine in my heart that there are 7 billion of us walking around this earth with varying levels of dormant creative capacity. Me too, by the way. And at the same time, I look at the world that's filled with challenges and problems from you name it, climate change, racial divisiveness, income inequality business challenges, et cetera.

And to me, the answer is sitting right there. It's that dormant creative capacity, all human progress at some point, like from the printing press and the wheel and fire, like it all started with human creativity. And so if there's all these problems in the world and the answers are locked inside people's heart and I can help unlock that. To me, that's like a duty and a responsibility. And to me, the world's a better place. So yeah, I make money from doing that, but that's like a secondary thing to me, if I can make the world better by unlocking people's creativity, which is better for the world.

And by the way, it's better for humans. There are very few things in life as intrinsically rewarding as the expression of creativity. Like it's better for everybody. And so I just feel like I'm on this mission to do this work. And yeah, sometimes if I'm in a bad hotel room and I don't get a good night's sleep, I'm not happy about that. But what I am happy about is that I'm doing

work that I believe matters and I'm pursuing something that I think is more of a calling than a vocation.

[00:33:30] LW: And it's apparent when you're around you like, I've been around you several times over several days watching you at work. And, you're in my mind, the guru of keynote speaking. But I want to go back to the early days. You're a collector of stories. I've read your books. They're full of wonderful stories about innovation, about creativity. And when you reflect back on those first couple of keynotes that you delivered, your ability to tell a good story translate to the stage? Were you a natural or what were some of the and you have been playing in jazz stages for a while, so did that sort of prepare you for this new calling of becoming a keynote speaker? What was that experience like?

[00:34:13] JL: I'm so glad you asked that question because sometimes when people see a performer of any type, someone on Broadway, an athlete, a musician, they just think it's natural because they make it look easy. But anytime you see someone making it look easy, that probably was because they did the work. Think about, a basketball star that practiced for hours and made countless sacrifices. Now it looks easy, and they look, oh, that's just their natural talent. And I feel like I had a little bit of musical talent, maybe, and a little bit of storytelling talent. But I attribute it more that I just did the work, man. I studied the craft, and I watch, to this day, I watch tape. And I'm thoughtful about story construction. I'm learning new skills. It's just like being a musician. I maybe have a little bit of talent, but I played to my fingers blood, man. Like I worked with metronomes until the batteries fall out of the metronomes. That's how you get good at something. And I looked at the stage no different. To me, it looks like it's just a natural thing, but there's really a craft to it. So I had to learn the craft. The answer to the question is my first, it's been terrible. I'm sure I'll look at the ones I'm doing today and several years and think they're terrible too. That's okay. But I had to learn the tools and stage mechanics. I had to learn how to tell the story. I had to learn effective communication. How do people learn? I spent a lot of years just trying to figure that stuff out and I'm sure I've gotten a little bit better, but it's an ongoing process. It's just like no musician would ever say I'm done. I've learned everything there is to know. You're always trying to discover new possibilities. And I feel the same way about keynote speaking.

[00:35:31] LW: Did you have mentors in those earlier years, or were you just having to go to the library and check out books on keynote speaking and try to figure it out for yourself? Because this is prior to apps and online communities and all of that.

[00:35:44] JL: Yeah, I had a couple, I had more like mentors that I knew a little bit, but I couldn't get together with them once a week. So Seth Godin was a mentor of mine. Sir Ken Robinson was a fabulous speaker, unfortunately passed, but a mentor of mine. But I did eventually say, I often speak at my company, I was speaking at our corporate events and I got really good feedback. So that was kind of validating. I thought to myself one time, how do I go from being like a good amateur to at least a bad professional? What would that look like? And so I did the work, like I hired a guy named Dr. Nick Morgan. I'm still friends with him. He's amazing. He lives in Boston and he was like my speaking coach. And I worked with him for six months and I flew to Boston in the middle of snowy Januaries and hung out with Nick.

And, what I said to him, as I said like, hey, just give me like the most brutal feedback you can. I said, get rid of that nice stuff. You're not gonna hurt my feelings. And so I would bring a recording with them and we'd sit for two days and we'd have a 60 minute keynote and we'd unpack that entire 60 day, the entire two days would be about that. Like I want, I take one step toward the stage. Stop. What's wrong? What'd you do with your foot? Why'd you do that? Look the way your vision is. You look like this. You see your posture. And he just ripped me to shreds, which I thought was the greatest thing ever because I'm like, sweet. I'm learning now. I know what not to do. And so he, he was like my Yoda, frankly, and helped me develop skills.

But since that time, I still have mentors. I learned from you, man, watching you and the way your presence. I learned from my friend, Ryan Estes, who's this incredible presence on stage. And not in a way of trying to emulate somebody else, but to learn different ways of human connection, human communication. So you learn patterns and ideas from others and then ultimately you develop your own voice, which is what you do in music and what you do certainly as a speaker.

[00:37:15] LW: So today you've delivered what, like 1500 keynotes around the world?

[00:37:21] JL: I think the count is a little over 1300 and running. I have one tomorrow. I'm still pretty active in it, which I just, again, I do this because I love it.

[00:37:28] LW: And what would you say just to get a little more technical on this? Because I want to talk about the community that you created in a bit, but for people who are listening to this, who may have gone up and given a couple of talks here and there and versus someone who this is what they do, they're doing a hundred talks plus a year, what would you say the biggest difference is from a technical perspective?

[00:37:49] JL: It's a good question, it's a little hard to answer because they're different routes of the same thing. It's like saying, country musician plays differently than a jazz musician. It's not that one is right or wrong. Technically, they're just, they're different. And so there are different types of speakers. An example is my dear friend is Heather McGowan and her mind is unbelievably huge, like cerebral, unbelievably smart, deeply researched a little academic almost and her stylistic approach is so different than mine It doesn't mean hers is right or wrong. Mine's not right or wrong. It's just different I think the key thing is that eventually you're bringing a part of you to the surface. One key thing is that people who are successful are sharing their you know, the term thought leader by definition. You have to lead thoughts. So I see sometimes speakers get up and they just regurgitate existing platitudes and truisms Hey, work hard.

There's nothing wrong with working hard, but we already know that. So what a thought leader does is reveal something that you don't know, a thought leader might say, we might think that the key to success is hard work, but I'm gonna show you today why that's not it at all.

Huh? I'm curious now, 'cause you're contradicting an existing belief rather than reinforcing one. So I think a lot of it has to do with one's ability to develop their own voice as not only as a performer, but an authentic human and have a perspective and a point of view that's different rather than complying with what everybody else thinks.

And then obviously stage mechanics happen in a number of ways. The way I look at it is each thing is almost like I play guitar. So I think about chords. So I might know 20 chords and with those 20 chords, I can play every Beatles song, every Rolling Stones song, most Taylor Swift songs, et cetera. But you never like I can't write any more songs because I've already used those chords. There's always a new song to be created by originally stacking those chords in different patterns.

And that's how I look at keynote speaking also, is that, you can learn different chords and phrasings, if you will, different techniques. But then you're really an artist, you're a performing artist, and it's your job to apply those in a way that drives home a point of learning and insight. And then next time you're going to apply them in a different way. And so you're always experimenting, you're always learning. One might say you're always playing a little jazz.

[00:39:44] LW: I think a lot of newer speakers as well, myself included, had have a tendency to weigh information heavier than say, a good story that can illustrate that information. And that's something that I've also read about you is that, as a venture capitalist, and you're hearing pitches from people, you're looking for the person who doesn't come in and say, hey, I want to just make a bunch of money as much money as possible. You're looking for somebody who has a little bit of a story associated with their purpose, their why. Why they have to do this project. And I think a lot of that may translate on the stage as well, when it comes to keynote speaking, just putting a little more emphasis on why you're the person that believes in this and that's taken on this mission.

[00:40:29] JL: Yeah, that's exactly right. And I think, from a venture capital pitch to a keynote, one difference maker is somebody coming at it from a selfish intent or a noble intent. So if an entrepreneur comes to me and says, hey, I just want to run over my customers and screw my employees so I can make a bunch of money and have a great outcome at the end, so I could buy a Ferrari. It's like fingernails on a blackboard bag. That's horrible. Who's going to back that person. On the other end of someone says, listen, I have this idea that's going to elevate the learning outcomes for at risk kids in an environment. And I'm really driven by solving this problem to make the world better and there's an economic opportunity to like, that's so much better. And so the mistake, the keynote speakers make is they think it's about them, or they approach it about me, me, me. And, and that just. Audiences reject that. It just feels icky. Whereas you really feel it. If someone shows up with a heart that's, hey, it's about you, not me. It's not look, what I can do is look what you could do. And if you're there at us out of service, instead of out of boastfulness or arrogance, that's what makes for a good keynote. And that's what people want to pay attention and listen.

[00:41:28] LW: Obviously, you did this on your own for a while, and then you developed this community or co founded this community ImpactEleven, which was once known as 3 Ring

Circus. Talk a little bit about some of the pain points that you experienced some of your keynote speaking colleagues experience that led to the genesis of ImpactEleven.

[00:41:47] JL: Yeah, what happened is in my speaking work, I made every mistake you could make, most of them twice. I screwed a bunch of stuff up and eventually figured it out and I got some momentum, my busiest year, I did 163 keynotes. It's real momentum and people kept asking me can you show me how to accelerate my practice or I'm new to this. I want to become a keynote speaker. And when I was getting started, there were no like high quality training options for that. If you were a lawyer, you could go to the thing, like, how do you build a law practice? But there wasn't anything like, how do you build a speaking practice? The stuff that was out there, frankly, was like this get rich quick nonsense. Like you could be a zillionaire, give you get paid big bucks to speak. And it was just like the opposite vibe and those people weren't. Professional speakers anyway, they were like snake oil salespeople. And so it was partly out of service and generosity. I want to help others. And there's plenty for everybody to get abundance mindset. I just started this thing where I was, would help other keynote speakers, and it blossomed into this, I didn't even imagine at first, but it came from a place of service and say, I want to help elevate our industry. Let's add a level of professionalism to the craft and we just show very no BS way. What are the specific things you need to do to launch and scale a speaking practice? And so what ended up happening is over time, and in COVID, I teamed up with 3 of my dearest friends, Ryan Estes, Seth Mattheson and Peter Sheehan were widely successful speakers. All of them, by the way, are better speakers than me, just to be clear. We teamed up and they said, I like what you're doing. You know, we decided to do work and business life together and we collaborated and it's now ImpactEleven.

And what we've built is it's pretty cool. It started out as more of a training thing, but it's not become this vibrant community where people can become better together. They can learn from each other, not just from someone teaching them a technique. And we all navigate life and our calling our individual callings of making an impact on the world and helping each other get there and celebrating both the victories together and picking each other up from the setbacks. And it's really become a beautiful thing. I'm deeply proud of it. And I get no credit for the vision of it. It happened more organically than that, but it's a it's pretty cool.

Yeah, I originally found out about it through Ben Nemtin, who I guess came to it back in the earliest days. Can you share Ben's story a little bit about how he got into keynote speaking?

Yeah, so Ben is a dear friend and I have so much love and respect for him. He, in early 2017 I think I started this in 2016, and so he came in 2017 to a bootcamp of ours, and he was really new to speaking, like he'd done a couple of speeches, no fee consistency, he was just really getting started. We kind of hit it off, and I tried, before he even came, I did a few coaching sessions with him to, help him organize his content, and we became dear friends. But Ben, to his credit, not mine, just to be clear really took off. He's become this wildly successful speaker, millions and millions of dollars of revenue are making a huge impact on giant stages. And his whole thing, he pursued these things that seemed impossible. It made a bucket list of possible things and really went for them. And what his talk is about isn't look what he did. Oh, look at me. I got to shoot with Obama, which is a fun thing, but it's really more like I pursued

something that was seemingly impossible and figured it out, and so can you. So his message is he helps audiences and leaders make the impossible possible. And so once again, his success isn't tied to he did cool stuff. His success is tied to helping other people achieve what they want. And so once again, it's the act of service and generosity and kindness that I think has fueled his remarkable success.

Yeah, and I attended a boot camp a couple years ago in Detroit, and it sounds like what you described with Dr. Nick Morgan, where you learn stagecraft, you learn budgeting, you learned how to talk about your fee and all the little nooks and crannies and the ins and outs of developing a business of becoming a keynote speaker, which was a lot of it was really eye opening for me, because before that I was mostly giving talks extemporaneously. You know, I didn't really have a structure that I was adhering to. And you got to see how scientific a lot of these principles can be, and if you can master the science and the art of it together, you can really experience a hockey stick growth in your speaking career.

Yeah, that's exactly right. And can you take a look at athletics? It looks like these people are just amazing and they know exactly where to go on the field, but there's actually plays that they want and there's drills that they practice. And so what looks so natural is actually, you can break it down and say, what was the methodology that allowed them to get there? It's not restricting, by the way their individuality or their ability to be creative. It's just providing a framework. And so that's what we tried to do at ImpactEleven is provide a framework that isn't so prescriptive that it's restrictive, but it's helpful in creating, some scaffolding to figure out what you need to do next and how do you accelerate your path to market? How do you ultimately deliver with the biggest possible impact? What we've tried to do is break down these weird ethereal concepts and go like kind of concrete step by step approaches.

[00:46:34] LW: Yeah, and it's growing, it's expanding, you're doing it, you're doing boot camps all over the country. There's been one in Austin, there's San Diego, there's Phoenix, et cetera. There's a whole online community component now. What's the longer term vision for what you all are creating?

[00:46:50] JL: There's a lot of thought leaders with people who have a message on their heart that want to figure out how do they get it to the world? And not only how do they commercialize it, but how do they drive the biggest possible impact? And if we can sort of become gold standard of that on a global basis and helping people achieve better economic results, but more importantly, better impact results with their message, we'll look back and that's like a life well lived. That's pretty cool. And then to be able to do it with friends that we love and respect and learn from, and we get to have the human connection that comes from that and the community that comes from it, that's what we're trying to do. We're continuing to add new ideas and content and structure and IP and all that, but the underlying thing is that we are also expanding a bit into helping corporate leaders become better on stages. So think about not someone who wants to become a paid speaker, but somebody who's speaking in front of their 2, 000 customers at the annual event, and generally isn't that good. It's not their fault, by the way. I believe that effective presentations are the most one of the most important but least trained skills in business today. And so we're taking some of our IP and helping

business leaders who again are necessary to make making a career change, but they have a direct economic benefit if they are better in those high stakes moments. And so that's another area that we're expanding into and we feel really good about because I think about eradicating the suffering of bad corporate presentations that we can all use a little bit of that.

[00:48:10] LW: You've written 3 New York Times bestselling books. Most of your books are on innovation and creativity. You have yet to write the definitive book on stage performance and keynote speaking, but for someone out there listening to this, who is wanting to get more into that, what are some of the considerations that you would suggest that they incorporate into their training protocols?

[00:48:34] JL: Really good question. And it's almost a little hard to answer. I mean, one thing is crucial, I think, is watching tape. And so, um, you know, I've learned music. I just listen to music a lot. You start to emulate, you know, how did Charlie Parker play this? How did Miles Davis play that? And you start by imitation that over time you develop your own voice. So you got to get good inputs. And so I think if someone wants to learn to speak. You should be watching speeches all the time. Watch TED Talks, Moth Storytelling Talks, watch other professional speakers, look at their demo reels, study the craft. That'd be one thing.

There's a lot of technical things about stagecraft that you can learn over time. Those are learnable skills. There's technical structural things, like, how do you structure a good keynote. Those are learnable skills. But I think the biggest thing is commit to it like you're learning a new language or learning a new instrument. It's a little weird because we speak all the time. We can communicate, you go to coffee, you can communicate. But effective keynote speaking is a little different than that, and people can confuse it. They're like, oh, I gave a great speech at my aunt's wedding, and therefore I'm ready to be a professional speaker. Doesn't mean that's not good. Speeches at weddings are awesome but you need to learn the professional skill set that goes around being effective on stage.

So I would just encourage anybody to watch a bunch of tape. Practice the way you'd be practicing to learn a new instrument and use a training protocol, develop a training protocol. Instead of just thinking, oh, I'm so charismatic and everyone wants to hear my story, but put your performance under the microscope, really understand it. And then test a lot of stuff, test delivering a story one way versus another way, how did it feel? How was the audience reaction? And so I think that the headline here is if you want to be a professional, treat the craft professionally

[00:50:06] LW: Okay. I'm going to put you on the spot just a little bit here. Let's suppose someone comes to you, Josh and says, Hey, I love this idea about watching tape. Can you recommend your top 5 TED talks or just anything online that I can find that you really love and you think that the people who are giving these talks give do an excellent job. What would they be?

[00:50:27] JL: I can, I can. The only caveat is it's saying, who are your five favorite musicians? And my five might be different than somebody else's five. And just, there's a little personal touch to this. And so I would suggest that people follow speakers that they relate to, and they kind of align with their subject matters. I'll answer your question, but there's a personal element to it. But the ones I'd recommend, my, again, previous mentor of mine, Sir Ken Robinson, he's Gave a talk, a TED talk called how schools are killing creativity. It's still the number one TED talk of all time. It was a brilliantly constructive performance. Brilliant. So that's one.

[00:50:58] LW: What's one thing you liked about his performance in that talk?

[00:51:02] JL: He used humor and storytelling to open people's hearts and minds, and then drop these wisdom bombs of serious thinking in a way that people could receive them. If he just came out and was like finger wagging and attacking and dropping all these truth bombs in people's lap, it'd be overwhelming and confronting and uncomfortable. But because he wrapped that in a way that people could feel and understand, it became beautiful. It became a piece of art.

Other favorites of mine, Adam Grant is a wonderful speaker. He's given multiple TED talks. I highly recommend that. The one I think he did on his book of rethink was very good. Oh, I also want an original. I'm sorry. He did a book. I did a TED talk for originals that I'd recommend.

I'm a huge Malcolm Gladwell fan, wonderful storyteller. He did a moth storytelling on YouTube where he talked, he actually said, It was like a tribute to a friend of his who got married and he gave like a wedding speech, but it's hysterically funny. It's 12 minutes long. It's absolutely worth watching.

Actually, by the way, the people that win the Moth Storytelling Contest, they're great. It just, here's someone telling a story about their dog as a kid, but it's like this incredible story worth listening to.

Dan Pink is a wonderful speaker. Highly recommend. Great technique, good tension and release. So I'm always looking for new speakers to learn from and grow.

My partner, Ryan Estes, I think is one of the most gifted speakers I've ever met. And so if there's anything for him worth watching.

Beautiful. And if somebody wanted to work with you all first step is to, you recommend coming to a bootcamp?

Yeah, check out impacteleven.com. There's a bunch of resources there. We're happy to chat. And usually the first step is a bootcamp. It's like this two and a half day, fairly immersive, throw you into the pond kind of experience, but people walk away with some pretty cool stuff. Like you walk away with a comprehensive view of all the moving pieces of the industry. You walk away with a playbook and like what do you need to do next? And you walk away with a group

of friends that are here to support you and do it together. And so it's a really cool thing in a business that can feel very lonely to be able to find your people who are there to support you and learn from and learn with and grow together.

I think one of the most valuable aspects of the bootcamp that I got, and I've been to a few of them now is learning how to communicate the problem that you're solving in the world and you guys give a specific formula for that, which was very confusing to me when I first heard it, but it's actually simple. It's confusing in the simplicity, if that makes sense. Because you think it needs to be more complicated than that, but it really doesn't. The broad strokes of it is you're just saying, hey, this is what I'm wanting to do. This is why I'm the person to do it, and this is what you're going to experience once I get a chance to work my magic. And so that formula that you all have sort of simplifies that something you created or is that something you've known about since working with Dr Morgan from back in the day? Or how did that come about?

No, we created it. And it was one of those things. It's cool looking back on it. It just felt natural. I wish I could say it was. But basically what you're what like described for anyone that's unfamiliar with this little thing called PCT. And PCT is an acronym that stands for problem, credibility, transformation, and I actually think it's the perfect way to pitch any professional service and certainly a keynote speaker.

Most people, you ask the question, what do you do? They describe their work in terms of the broad category of their expertise. What do you do? I'm a keynote speaker, or I'm an innovation keynote speaker, or I'm a plumber, or I'm a musician. But a better way to do it is to start by saying, what's the problem that you solve? That's the P. Then why are you the right person to solve it? That's C, credibility. And what does the world look like after the problem is solved? I've never done this. I just said the word plumber, so that'd be fun. What do you do? Oh, I'm a plumber. What do you do? I help homeowners that are deeply frustrated with leaks and they're concerned when something goes wrong, they don't know where to turn and they're overwhelmed with stress and anxiety. And they're deeply worried that if a flood occurs, it's going to create thousands of dollars of damage, wreak havoc on their family, and their whole entire world could come crashing down on them. As someone who's won seven awards in the Global Plumbers Association and developed a proprietary toolkit methodology and it's a special step by step process. Now that was a quick little thing about me.

Now the transformation. Once I work with homeowners, they can breathe a deep sigh of relief. They can know that if something starts worrying with their plumbing from a little knock on the toilet to a flood they've got a professional to call in and they no longer have to wallow in concern and grief. That's a made up one, it's a bit silly for a plumber, but you can see which is much more powerful. If you frame your expertise and first the problem that you solve, then your credibility, why you're the right person to solve it. And then finally, what does the world look like for the person once the problem is solved? I don't care if you're a doctor or a plumber or a keynote speaker or a thought leader, that formula just works. People understand it and they're willing to buy from you. So I highly recommend people. It's actually a really good thought exercise. It's to tighten up your own thoughts. And as you think about your own body of work

and your positioning. And regardless of a field of study, PCT, problem, credibility, transformation.

[00:55:48] LW: Do you think anybody can be a keynote speaker? Anybody who obviously wants to be one?

[00:55:52] JL: I think anybody who wants to be one that is willing to do the work can be a keynote speaker. There are certain things I'm a growth mindset guy. I probably could never be a professional basketball player. I'm 5'5 and a good day. Try and work as hard as I may. That's just, I'm not cut out for that. But could I be a guitar player? Yeah, I could. There's no physical limitation. I have to practice, yeah, I could. And same thing with keynote speaking. Unless there's some, physical limitation. I think anybody can develop a practice of keynote speaking. Some of it is natural talent, but most of it is not, most of it's doing the work. And by the way, I'd say doing the work. It's not just learning stage skills. It's having something to talk about. It's doing the research, having a body of work and expertise in a particular area. I think if someone is really drawn to this. It's a field that is accessible. It's accessible to people of different generations, different ethnicities, different genders. I don't think there's any barrier from someone who has a message on their heart that's willing to do the work.

[00:56:32] LW: Beautiful. And then you also have this venture fund called, is it Mudita? Mudita?

[00:56:35] JL: It is. So as mentioned, I started a venture fund in 2010 and I had a partner and we didn't philosophically agree. And a lot of venture funds are very focused on they're aggressive and they're cutthroat. I'm going to extract stuff from you. I'm going to take as much life out of you while I have my foot on your neck. I'm like, I don't want to do that. So I thought, what's the opposite? What's the judo flip? Mudita Venture Partners. And Mudita is a Sanskrit term, which means taking joy in other people's success. And I wanted to name the fund that because that's the vibe that we wanted to create. A fund of, outcome focused to be clear, but like generosity, kindness, compassion, let's lift people up instead of kick people down. And so we named the fund Mudita and I feel good about that. We also in a way, not only are trying to make money, but trying to make an impact. So we had this vibe where when we were evaluating an investment opportunity, we also say, what's the Mudita score? In other words, is the product or service can help the world or hurt the world? If it's going to hurt the world, we're just not investing in it. If there's something like, hey, there's this new tech and we can make French fries faster to help obese kids become more obese. No, I was not investing in it. No, thank you. So we try to invest in things that are both economically interesting, but also make the world a better place, drive some Mudita. And so it's this North star for us to try to do the right thing a bit and try and help others, and approach our investing and our support in that sense of generosity, and then we'll get our joy from other people's success.

[00:58:08] LW: How do you feel for ideas or potential projects?

[00:58:13] JL: So we, first of all, mainly invest in software companies. So if someone has a great idea for a new candy bar, it could be awesome, which is not in our thesis. We generally

invest in companies that are post revenue, pre growth spurt. So if a company is like just an idea on a napkin, it's too early for us. If a company already has 750 people, it's probably too big for us. A company that's doing one or 2 million a year in revenue, it's just getting rolling there. They've proven that product market fit, the tech works, that's a good spot where we can be helpful. And by the way, if anyone's looking for capital, the first thing you want to do is find out what that investor's thesis is. So if you showed up with a drug therapy and it could cure cancer, I'd be like, that's the most amazing thing. I'm so glad you did it. I can't invest in it. We just don't invest in drug therapies. And so you want to try to match what you're looking for to the investor who invests in that type of thing. And then of course you can convince them why you're the right investment. But start with that. Is that even in the wheel house?

[00:59:03] LW: Okay. So you've written several books now, Hacking Innovation, the Road to Reinvention, big Little Breakthroughs. If someone wanted to start diving into the body of work, what book would you recommend

[00:59:15] JL: they start with? I have four kids and four books, and you could never say which is your favorite kid, but I can say, which is my favorite book. So my most recent book is called Big Little Breakthroughs: How Small Everyday Innovations Drive Oversized Results. It's my best writing. It's the most research. It's the most current and relevant and really what it is. It's saying, how can we all as human beings unlock creativity, regardless of where we sit on the org chart? How can we apply it in our families? How can we apply it in our practices, our communities, our companies? And so I'm very proud of the work. It's a lot of fun storytelling, a lot of unusual stories and some really tangible, tactical things that people can do to bring that creativity that's sitting right inside of us all and bring it to the surface and put it into practice.

[00:59:45] JL: Can you share a story and maybe the proceeding principle of that story just to entice us to check it out?

[00:59:50] JL: I was sent out on this kind of crazy mission to see how the most innovative people think and act. And so I interviewed CEOs, billionaires, celebrity entrepreneurs, Grammy Award winning musicians, and everyday innovators that are less famous. And you think that these people like take these high risk mood shots all the time, like swing for the fences, and they actually do the opposite. I spent over a thousand hours in research and the best of the best do the opposite. They cultivate micro innovations on a high frequency basis, big little breakthroughs, little baby steps. And what that does is it's way less risky. It's way more accessible. Those little wins add up to big wins. You're also building skills over time. And so if you want to get good at big stuff, practice on the little stuff. So it's a much more pragmatic approach to injecting innovation and creativity and all walks of life. You don't have to be wearing a lab coat or a hoodie. You can be a customer service rep. You could be a furniture craftsman, but you can find ways to inject creativity in almost any area of life. And that's what the book is all about is helping everyday people become everyday innovators.

[01:00:59] LW: Share a story. What's one story from the book? If you don't mind.

[01:01:02] JL: Yeah no, of course not. One that comes to mind, the way I opened the book is turns out that a cigarette butt litter is a really big problem in major cities. So it actually, it's a bigger problem in the oceans than straws. It's one of those pesky problems that people keep trying to throw money at it. And it just persists like no one solves this problem.

So there's this guy that I interviewed in the book named Trewin Restorick who lived in Central London, and he was not like a big fancy dude. He didn't have 13 PhDs or fancy suits, like a normal person. But the cigarette butt issue was bothering him. And he said maybe I could do something, maybe I could do a big little breakthrough basically. So what he does is he creates these metal boxes that attached to a signpost. It's bright yellow paint, so grabs your attention. The front of it is clear so you can see inside. And there's like a divider that goes down the middle. At the top, it asks a two part question which is your favorite food, pizza or hamburgers? And there's a little receptacle there to put your cigarette butt in. So you're voting with your butt. And then the butt's dropped down. And because there's a divider and it's glass in the front, you can see like an instant bar chart. Which one is winning, hamburgers or pizza? And each week when they clear out the cigarette butts, they put a new question in there to keep it fresh. Who's your favorite football team? Or what's your favorite color or whatever? And so what this does is a very fun, playful way. It's simple. It was low tech. It didn't require regulatory approval, didn't require a billion dollars of capital for 14 PhDs, but it worked. When ballot bins are installed, they reduce cigarette litter by 80%. And he's went on to start a company. It's now in 27 countries around the world. He's making like this massive impact in the cigarette problem. And I love this story because when we see celebrity billionaires launching rockets in space, we're like, yeah, good for them. But that feels out of reach. But any one of us could have come up with a ballot bin idea. And so the book is really about that. It's like, how can we bring our own ingenuity and creative problem solving and inventive thinking to the things that matter most to us in our lives and drive impact. And you don't have to be a billionaire. You don't have to have a lab coat. You don't have to have a PhD.

[01:02:55] LW: And I would imagine that's one of the ways you define success as well, is through creating impact. It's not really as much about the bottom line as it is about making

[01:03:05] JL: a difference. It is for me, certainly, I can say that because I've had some commercial success along the way, but money, by the way, I don't mind talking about money because I just think of it as stored energy doesn't mean you have to use it foolishly. You don't have to drape yourself in gold. You can use it to fund an orphanage. There's nothing wrong with money as a concept. But I think, the real rewards are those intrinsic ones.

Someone asked me the other day, I want some entrepreneur in your ward. They're like wasn't that awesome. I wanted to talk about this award. I was like. Listen, I'm grateful for that award. I felt good in the moment, what felt better? What felt better was when a young woman walked into my office one time and she said, Josh my name is Beth. You probably don't even know me. I work in the legal department, whatever. I started here two years ago, your company. And I wanted to come and say, thank you. I'm like, thank you for what? I hear you're doing great work, like awesome. She's like, no, because my husband and I bought our house today. And in both of our families, we're the first person to ever buy a house. This is a milestone that both of

us thought would be out of reach forever. And because I had this opportunity to come to this amazing company, I just bought a house. And so I don't get credit for that. It's her work in credit, but that is way more meaningful than any reward or any check that I've ever received.

And so when you feel like you're touching people's hearts and lives and that, that feedback loop comes back to you, that is it's infinitely more powerful and rewarding than some external, moniker or piece of paper.

[01:04:16] LW: I think we can wrap up with that then just talk a little bit about purpose and in your experience, how do you know you're in your purpose? Because, as an entrepreneur, especially a lot of times, you don't know if what you're working on is going to pan out to even if you're feeling like you're implementing lots of creativity and innovation, how do you know that you're doing what you're meant to be doing?

[01:04:36] JL: That's a really good question. I think it's one of those things you look in your heart and, reflect on it a bit. But the one thing is I would advise if you feel like, okay, this is my purpose, that's such a big commitment. What if I'm wrong? Maybe instead of thinking of it as your purpose forever, you think about it as your purpose for now. And so if my purpose for now is helping to unlock creativity across the world, that might be my purpose forever, but it might not. I might have a different purpose five years from now. I might be called to do something that's different. And just the optionality that if I say that's my purpose it doesn't mean it's going to automatically be etched on my gravestone is way more freeing. So you could have a purpose for now.

Now, by the way, you could also hold multiple purposes in at one time. Part of my purpose is to be a good dad to my four kids. I probably fall short more than I ought to, but it is a calling and purpose that's equally important to my body of work. But the reason I say all that is when you say, what's your purpose is such a big question and you're so afraid to get it wrong, you might just do nothing. You might just freeze up. I'd rather people just get started on something and see how it feels right on for six months. If you feel deeply compelled to continue, awesome. If you don't try something else.

[01:05:40] LW: I love it. Look, I wanted to have you on because you've made such a positive impact on my life. In my experience is rare when you meet someone who feels like they're full bodied in their purpose and they're walking their talk. And I just want as many people who follow me to know about you and your work. And if anybody had any inkling of desire to explore keynote speaking, make your way to one of the ImpactEleven boot camps ASAP. And it's not cheap, but you have to make that investment within yourself. If you really want to get the return that I think most people envision when they see themselves having speaking gigs and flying around and doing it at a very high level, you have to treat it like you say a full time job and their startup costs and you all give so much value for those experiences. So I would highly encourage everyone to go to, is it impacteleven.com?

[01:06:35] JL: Yep, it's Impact Eleven, the word is spelled out, E L E V E N dot com, and we're happy to help, and if it's not the right fit, that's okay too, but if we can be of help and service, awesome.

[01:06:45] LW: Beautiful. Thanks again man...

[01:06:51] JL: Before we say goodbye, I just wanted to tell you one quick, if I may cause I just want to show you had a really cool impact on me recently. And so I, in my interactions with you, you talk about being grounded and present and this notion of, and I tend to be the opposite at times, unfortunately, I can be frenetic and bouncing around. And I played a jazz concert last week in Las Vegas. And I was working with incredible musicians, absolute master grade musicians who are playing six nights a week. They're in the peak of their, and I, you know, I, I, I'm out of practice. Like my chops are what they used to be. I don't play as much as. And so I had a lot of anxiety coming into that. I was nervous because I was like, Oh well, my technical prowess isn't as good. And they're going to think less of me, and the audience is going to know, and I had this imposter syndrome going on. When I showed up, I decided I had a Light Watkins moment. I said, I'm going to approach this differently. Instead of trying to show everybody my technical skills or whatever, I'm just going to be present. I'm going to be the, maybe not the best musician on the stage, but I'm going to be the best listener. I'm going to listen intently to everybody else, and I'm going to try to support them. That's my goal, not to show off during a solo. I'm going to voice a chord a certain way that makes the piano player sound better. I'm going to do a little rhythmic thing on the guitar to make the drummer feel better.

And so I just approached it in a really different way than I ever had before. And I really, I was holding you in my head when I was thinking this what if I just was deeply present and just approach it and had no, like I wasn't connected to some outcome other than service and presence. So we played this gig and it felt great. And we're like having a great time. And this never happened to me before. So I wanted to tell you this.

After the event, the drummer comes up and gives me a bear hug. Not like a, like a little, you know, Hey dude like, like a hug, like heart, heart. And he said, man, he says, I played with a lot of guitar players and they're always trying to play fast. So I've never played with someone that listened the way you did. He said, I felt like you captured the soul of the groove. So love the groove, like my mind is exploding, I'm getting all teared up. And so the other guys came over and we had this whole thing. He's like, oh, it was awesome. We just connected musically. And it was like this beautiful sense of spirit and connection that was overwhelmed into this music. And it was funny cause like my chops suck compared to theirs, just to be clear. I'm out of shape musically. And then they start saying, when are you coming back? And like, oh, I work at this jazz club and we can get us in for a gig. And they wanted to talk about playing more. And the reason I bring all that, first of all, as a nod to you, my friend, because I was trying to channel what would Light Watkins do and be present and grounded. But also it was funny because I got a better outcome, not by gripping tightly, but by releasing a little bit and your instructions to like, to let the river flow a bit. And I learned that from you and I just wanted to share that it was a really a beautiful musical moment for me. And I owe you a lot of gratitude for that.

[01:09:12] LW: Thank you, man. I received that. I really appreciate that. I did have a question. How do you get these gigs? Are you on some circuit that people call you and say, hey, we're performing in Cleveland. You want to come or

[01:09:23] JL: how does that work? I do get calls like that. I usually don't, I'm not able to do it. What happened was this one was tied to a keynote. So I did a keynote in the morning for a very large organization. And, they knew I played music and we talked, I'd done this a couple of years in a row for them, actually. And then they hired me to perform a concert at night in front of their 2000 guests. I was the band leader, if you will. So I hired the local musicians, even though they were better than me, I orchestrated the whole thing, which is, that's how I got the gig. They didn't call me. I called them.

[01:09:49] LW: Awesome, man. Well, look, thanks again for coming on.

[END]

Thank you for tuning into my interview with Josh Linkner of ImpactEleven. You can follow Josh on the socials @JoshLinkner, and you can see what he's up to at ImpactEleven by going to @impact_eleven. And if you're interested in getting some help from ImpactEleven, I highly recommend starting with one of their two day bootcamps. You can get more information about that at ImpactEleven.com. And guess what? I reached out to ImpactEleven and I had them offer my audience a discount on the bootcamp.

If you go to ImpactEleven.com and you use the promo code LIGHT500 that's all caps light L I G H T 500, you will receive a generous discount on the price of the bootcamp, but just keep that in between us.

And of course I'll put links to everything that Josh and I discussed in the show notes, which you can always find at lightwatkins.com/show. And if you enjoyed our conversation and you found it inspiring and you have some ideas about other people that you would like for me to interview on this podcast, shoot me an email with your guest suggestion. Light@lightwatkins.com is my email address.

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Alright. I look forward to hopefully seeing you back here next week with another story about someone just like you, just like me, regular person taking a leap of faith in the direction of their purpose. And until then, keep trusting your intuition, keep following your heart, keep taking those leaps of faith. And if no one's told you recently that they believe in you, I believe in you. I really do. Thank you so much. Sending you lots of love and have a great day.