

EPISODE 202

“TA: If you're in a relationship where you really want to have this conversation with someone and they don't want to have it with you, or maybe there's other aspects of your relationship that they don't want to participate in. But say they do have a conversation with you, but they don't respond in the depth that you want or as emotionally articulate as you'd like, or as you do, you have to accept that this is them. They are them. Don't bring the judge. Let them be who they are and let them be in the space. The fact that in the space with you is enough. And then obviously you want to keep having these conversations because then they can become better practiced at it. And they can explore more courageously, their vulnerability and such. But I think that's a big part of these conversations is no agenda coming to it again, like we said, like open space.”

[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 and 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've witnessed them in action or people who've directly benefited from their work.

The goal of these conversations is to expose you to as many people as possible who found their path and to humanize them. And after hearing story after story, hopefully, eventually you give yourself permission to move further in the direction of whatever feels like your path and your purpose because what you're going to see is that anyone who does that has to overcome many of the same obstacles that you might be facing right now. And this week I am in conversation with the author of 12 questions for love, Topaz Adizes, and he is perhaps the world's most prolific question asker and conversationalist. Basically after years of creating questions for more than a thousand conversations and in carefully observing the experiences that those questions produced, Topaz identified the five key components that were shared by the most effective questions that his participants asked each other. And he created a thriving YouTube channel for this platform called The Skin Deep.

Topaz is an Emmy award winning writer, director, and experienced design architect. His work has been featured at Cane and Sundance and South by Southwest. He's been featured in New

Yorker Magazine, Vanity Fair, and the New York Times. And he is the founder and executive director of The Skin Deep.

And in this episode, we talk about the profound lessons that Topaz learned from his parents divorce and his earlier ideas of success, which obviously changed as he got more life experience.

We talked about which book was the gateway book for Topaz taking a massive leap of faith and embarking upon a worldwide adventure and his unlikely motivation for becoming a master question asker in conversation starter.

We talked about how he found his true calling at the age of 37 years old and the power of names and how you can use that power of names when naming your children. We talk about how Topaz traveled around the world without money, but instead he was using the power of following signs, he's got some cool stories to share about that, and how to achieve internal fulfillment by asking this one specific question.

We discussed the genesis of The Skin Deep and the incredible leap of faith that he had to take in order to make that happen and how to navigate conflict through conversation with your partner, especially if one partner isn't responding as deeply as the other partner wants them to.

What exactly led to the publication of 12 Questions for Love? Why Topaz considered himself to be an ask whole. What advice Topaz ignored when he was starting his YouTube channel and it worked out well for him. We talk about how to pitch an idea to raise money for your platform or channel or podcast or whatever you want to do, and how Topaz overcame a scarcity mindset when it came to asking for money from investors, and the unlock that he discovered for financially supporting his channel.

We talk about where he learned to have really good conversations and what are those 12 questions that help you cultivate love and how to create the space to have those kinds of conversations.

So in other words, you're going to get a ton of value and actionable insights from my conversation with Topaz. And we're just going to get right into it because it was such a personally enriching conversation with me and I'm just so excited to share it with you.

So without further ado, here is my conversation with Mr. Topaz

[00:04:56] **LW:** Topaz Adizes, brother, thank you so much for taking the time from Uruguay to come on to my podcast and share your story. I'm super excited about diving in.

[00:05:07] **TA:** Man, I'm stoked to be here. I've been catching up on this podcast journey has been really beautiful. Interesting for me, I'm all prepped for every podcast. And I've watched a

number of your podcasts and watching your solo videos. And I didn't have a chance to read the books you've written, but I'm so stoked to be here and have a conversation. And at least from, I told you from the online persona that you express, you share, I'm like this guy resonate. I'm going to resonate with this cat for sure. So I'm just very excited to be here. Thank you.

[00:05:36] **LW:** Awesome, man. Awesome. Well, you're famous for your questions. You've got a book called 12 Questions for Love. You've got a very popular YouTube channel called The Skin Deep, and you started this platform called the and so a lot of the dot in your life. So we're going to get into that a little bit later, but I always like to start off talking about childhood. So if you can indulge me going back to pre-divorce, you're with Tria and what is it? Izaak. How do you say your dad's name?

[00:06:08] **TA:** Yeah. That is Isaac basically.

[00:06:09] **LW:** So you're growing up you and your brother earliest memories. What's your favorite toy or activity.

[00:06:19] **TA:** Ripping pages out of books? Yeah. Ripping pages out of books. I don't know. That's a memory. It's either ripping pages out of books. So we'd sit there as soon as the parents would leave we'd just open a book and just rip the paper just slowly work through the book. Just ripping the paper out of the book. Just hearing the shh.

And the other favorite activity was grabbing a toilet roll. And running through the house, leaving like a trail of the paper, just leaving the trail, just as many as you could. Those are two memories. I've actually didn't think about that until you asked the question. So thanks for asking.

[00:06:48] **LW:** Now is ripping pages those ASMR videos where.

[00:06:52] **TA:** Maybe, maybe that's what it is. I didn't even think about it.

[00:06:59] **LW:** You're a tear out of the book or is it because you have therapists for parents and they were like psychoanalyzing you and your brother.

[00:07:02] **TA:** Only my mom is a therapist. My dad's more of a, he's in the business world, but he is basically an organizational therapist. But yeah those are the two memories that I really remember before divorce, because basically my childhood was informed by the divorce. That's really what I remember.

[00:07:19] **LW:** Right. And what was the ideology in your household? Like what was a dominant philosophy? I know I've heard you say in a other interview, it was something about, what's the value of what you're doing, but maybe you can tell us a little more about that, or maybe give a little more context of what that even means.

[00:07:34] **TA:** Well, I mean, I have to give credit to my parents. I definitely give credit to my parents, because they've, they have changed a lot. So it's interesting when I talk about the past, I'm talking about parents who have changed. They're not who they are now than they were then, especially my father. My father's done a lot of incredible work on himself and explored him. He's one of the most impressive souls I've ever come across. But back then I remember my dad saying, don't be a parasite. That was the big negative word, a parasite. An entity that lives off someone else and doesn't contribute and doesn't just takes, and I just remember that was the thing, like, don't leave a mess in the room because, don't be a parasite. Don't order extra food and leave it on the table. That line, don't be a parasite, maybe is the underlying question that is how you're adding value, right? How are you contributing? Not just taking some I said that was a key one.

From my mom, was two things. One is about being a class act. And she had the line back then. I know if you remember watching a Vidal Sassoon commercials where it's like, if we don't look good, you don't look good. And my mom would tell me that when we go over to someone's house or sleepover, she's like, remember, if you don't look good, I don't look good. I was like, okay, we better behave because we got to make mama look good in terms of just being a class act.

So I think that's something that my mom definitely instilled in my mom also instilled in me because she was a therapist and worked with a lot of she still does with people who are low income or immigrants because she speaks three, four languages herself. It's about helping others. I remember you see a homeless man on the street. What can we do for him? Can we give him the banana that's in the car? Can we feed him? That was a very early memory. It's like, how can we take care of others? How can we help others and being a class act.

I think a lasting legacy from my parents into this age is my father with passion, a very passionate man for the things he loves, which is basically his work, which he doesn't call work cause he loves it. And if you're working, if you do what you love, you're not working. And for my mom, it's integrity.

[00:09:35] **LW:** Okay. So I read about this story about you dictating this contract with your dad, you kind of open your book with this. I think this does a really good job of just contextualizing how you became interested in what you're doing now. And I'd love for you to just kind of share that experience with my audience.

[00:09:54] **TA:** This was a profound kind of experience in my life memory that probably until I was 37 was the anchor of my identity, right? And that identity was that of kind of one of a victim of what was me and it's just a story that I really identified with. And it was basically, I was young, my parents got, I remember divorced as a young. My brother's 15 months younger than I. I don't know exactly when they got divorced because I'm a little, but I was preschool. And I remember fights and we were in the middle of that. As a child you're watching two giants going at it, yelling at each other, and that can be pretty terrifying. Earthshaking.

We all have our traumas. Victor Frankl says it's the question is, it's not a comparison of trauma, just how are you handling it? I'm not here suggesting, just for me, that was mine. And one day, we're playing, my brother and I, at my dad's house, and my dad came in and said, look, your mom wants to take you for this holiday coming up right now. And I don't know what to do. And I said, well, why don't you just make up a contract?

Well, what should the contract say? Well, if make a deal, if she takes us now, you get us for the next holiday, that's my memory. And he wrote down and whatnot. Now, my dad in reading, this is a little bit, man, this makes you look like an asshole or what. I'm like, dad, maybe this didn't even happen, but that's my memory, and I do. We all know memories.

Memories don't lie per se, but they shift and they change. They feed a certain narrative of whatever stage of life you're in, you're utilizing that narrative for something. That was my memory. And for a long time, the memory, then my mom shows up, and my dad's like, sign the contract. And my mom's like, no. And we basically do this merry go round. And I remember it was a misty night, car pulls up. My mom had this old yellow Oldsmobile, like from the classic 80s. Misty. I remember the mist hanging in the air and the lights reflecting on the mist and just the car engine running and then the hum of it.

And then my mom grabbing my brother's 15 months younger is probably two and a half, putting him in the baby seat. He's crying because my dad is then yelling at her not to do that. Then he goes to the car to grab my brother out while she goes to get me to put me in the car, but then my brother's out. So she goes to get my brother.

And then my dad gets me pulling us in yanking. And I'm just saying, just sign the contract, just make the deal. Let's end this. And my mom was quite a strong woman, emotionally strong woman, physically too. She didn't get emotional. My dad was really beside himself and me and my brother were tears. You have that memory as a kid of the warm tears on your face, like we don't really get that as adults as much or like the warmth of the tears, warming the cheeks up. That's a memory.

Anyways, my mom finally drove off with both of us. And when we got to the stoplight and was waiting to turn green, that's when I started to hear under my mom's breath, she was sobbing. And that's when something really hit me. It was like a clink in the armor of childhood. It was just like benchmark this moment, anchor this moment. There's something here, and I think that's where the seed was laid fundamentally for me, about searching for something more of connection. What's wrong here? What's wrong between two people who loved each other enough to have two children, but then now three years later they have a war in front of their kids and that's just an extension. Look at the world. We're just a bigger extension of what we have at home in some sense, or inability to connect and listen and find a way through.

[00:13:16] **LW:** What would you say as you became a little bit older teenager and all that, and you're looking at your mom and your dad, step mom, and what would you say your idea of success was and what you're becoming as an adult, this is teenage version for that.

[00:13:35] **TA:** Well, in my teens, I had no idea. I think I had a sense that I was special fed on by an ego because I had a cool name named, Topaz. Right? So think about every new soul you meet is like, Oh, Topaz.

So if that's your mirror reflection of every new soul you meet as a young, it's like, well, I must be special. Cool or special or something because look at the reaction I get topaz, right? It's like ooh different. Okay so I think I had an aloofness to myself. I think I like to play like a philosopher I ended up going to study philosophy and I what I wasn't very good at it per se but I enjoyed it a lot.

I think in my 20s and 30s that I attached well in my teens I don't think I knew I just won. I knew I loved soccer. It's probably when they all I was super shy. I went from a small Jewish school of 80 people in three grades to a public high school of 2,500 students.

I went from a class that had like 20, 30 kids five, a grade to 500, right, to like a homogeneous group of kids to an absolutely, Santa Monica high school, totally mixed. And I'm so glad I did that. And I didn't talk for until junior year, really.

And I remember being in Spanish class where you had to talk because she'd be like, Jose, that was my name in class. What I will say, and because it's third period, I hadn't talked, I was a clumped, like mucus. And I was like, and I'm just super shy, super shy, super introverted. I would say I didn't even come out of my shell until the end of junior year of high school.

[00:15:05] **LW:** And give us a little montage of kind of how you found your way from there until your twenties and thirties.

[00:15:11] **TA:** I want to pull what maybe relates us. Not exactly because I think you did a different time with Travel Light. And I'm not even sure exactly, because I don't have a chance to read your book yet, but just you talking about is when I graduated university at Berkeley, studying philosophy and all that.

I went to work with a good friend of mine who had a software company out of Sweden. He's still a brother of mine and he came and we're doing this business is software based knowledge, but I didn't know anything about technology. But I was like, I'm not going to go work at a consulting firm like everyone else, I'm going to work with this cat for a year and then I'm going to go traveling. I'm going to save up cash. I'm going to go travel three months in. He's like, I got to go back to Sweden because the company's falling apart and you got to stay here and run it. And then I'm there and I realized I'm three hours from Silicon Valley, which is the Mecca of this. I have no idea what I'm doing, what I'm talking about. I'm not even passionate about it. What the fuck am I doing?

A year later, they ended up selling the company for like 35 billion. Maybe I would have had three in the pocket. I always see that as a great, when it happened, I said, this is a great story, right? It wasn't meant to be, it wasn't my path. My path was I'm healthy. My parents are

healthy. I have a college education. I don't have college debt. If I fall on my ass, I can go work for my dad. This is 1999. I am 0.0001 percent of the global population who has this luxury to choose what I'm going to do with it. I am lucky. I'm so lucky, right? How am I going to make the most of this? And maybe that's the fundamental question. That is what question am I going to ask myself that I'm going to pursue for the next 20, 30 years?

Well, in order to search for the question, I'm going to go for two and a half years. So I'm 25. Okay. I'm giving myself the time to explore. Now, how am I going to explore? So there comes a beautiful story. My family had a restaurant in Santa Barbara, Bistro Met at the time. And I was managing the front of the end.

It's funny. My dad just one day called and said, Topaz, you got to go in. I'm like, well, I'm doing it. Like, no, it's like a family thing. My dad's from Macedonia and he's like, Son, you're going in right now. Don't bullshit me. The family obligations, step up. It's like, okay. And I went in and I had bartended before and I'd waited tables and bust everywhere I worked.

So I knew the restaurant and I was even interested in it. And I went in and I was working at this restaurant. And then at night we go out obviously, and we go to this place and in the club was this 45 year old guy looking like Al Green or Stevie Wonder because he had these glasses, big black dude. And he was just in his world, jamming. And I went up to him and I said in the dance floor, I was like, what do you see? What are you seeing? And he looks at me and that led off this friendship that only lasted three months, four months, but he laid seas in me about that. The reality that we see is not just what we see on the surface.

There are things underneath the surface, and I'd read, I came across like *The Alchemist* in the bookstore and I read it right there and then just because back then I would just walk through a bookstore and had a question and I had a question. I would just walk through the bookstore. And whatever book drew my attention, I'd grab it.

And one day. *The Alchemist*, I didn't even know what it was, drew my attention. I spot it. I sat there in Barnes and Noble on Thirsty Promenade and read it in three hours. And there's a part in the book where he's there and he doesn't know if he should go to Africa. The main character, he's in Southern Spain and he sits in the park and the guy reveals himself.

He's like a king and says, you should go follow your path. And this guy, his name was Bob. Became my character in my life like that, the king, and he kind of woke up for me. This thing that life is on one levels, we're doing these physical things, but it's actually a spiritual journey. And we would have one way close up the restaurant we'd have sit there for two, three hours, just chatting. And it would go by like that.

And so I bought a one way ticket to Australia. I was like, what am I gonna do? I'm going to, I'm going to go for two and a half years. And the way I'm going to live this, I'm just going to follow the signs. The signs are my intuition. And that could be kind of ridiculous because you tell your friends, you're like, what are you talking about?

This, the signs would be, you wake up in the morning and you say, okay, get on that bus. Alright, get off here. Go left. Sorry. I think I'm ranting too long, but that's the space I was in. It led me to certain places. Does it? I don't know if that resonates for you or not, but...

[00:19:18] **LW:** I mean, The Alchemist was key to my journey. Key. And one of my favorite parts is the crystal shop when he loses everything and he goes and begs the guy for a job at the crystal shop and the guy doesn't want to hire him. So he just picks up the broom and just starts sweeping and cleaning stuff. He starts to be useful. And then a little while later he gets the job and he ends up introducing this tea service because the crystal shop is at the top of this long hill that people have to climb to get to it. And that ends up being the thing that basically revives it. And it was just for me, it was like, man, you can just create abundance anywhere. And if you're doing it for the right reasons, and you're doing it to help other people and to serve. Then you're never going to be out of a job. You're always going to have everything you need. And that absolutely has been a part of my whole worldview of traveling, not making plans, just getting a one way ticket somewhere, not even speaking the language, et cetera, et cetera.

Also another book. I don't know if you read, did you read The Autobiography of a Yogi? It's the same kind of thing, when he goes on those trips with his buddy and he says, don't worry about it. We don't need money. We don't need anything.

[00:20:33] **TA:** Well, that informed, because this journey that I was on that time less left in the end of 99 ended with me at the Hale Kumbha Mela in 2001 of January, which, there's the Kumbh Mela that happens once every three years in four different cities. So it's every three years. It just rotates. So it goes back to the same city every 12. But 12 times 12 is the Hela Kumbh Mela and the last this year. But that's the Kumbh Mela. Yeah, there's like the there's, not to consider, but there's one that happens every 144. And that was the one that happened in January of 2001.

Anyhow, that experience in that space really was the breaking point for me to start making films and the dreams I had the conversations I had, and it was like the payoff of this journey, because in the West, if you say, I'm gonna walk the streets. I'm not going to make money. I'm going to follow the signs and I'm going to see how the universe holds me. They would call you a bum. They're homeless. But in India, you're a sadhu. And all you do is you walk with your saffron robe and you care a little pale to make some tea and you trust that the universe will carry you.

And families, if you choose to not be a sadhu, but be a family member, when you see a sadhu, it's your responsibility to help them. And we don't have that in the West. And when I saw that as a young man, I said, Oh, wait. So this thing I've been on kind of following the signs, it is a spiritual journey that is rooted in something longer than just me being like, this is an India, just because I wasn't raised in India. This is valid. The journey to take right, but we don't support those in the West because we're so productive oriented.

What are you doing? How are you and I'm really speaking about the time then may I think it's shifted now. But in 1999 when I was coming of age 22 and like embarking into the world that wasn't really like a valid it wasn't spoken as like it was before now, right? Because now we have the internet where there are those ideas that come to light the service you're doing.

[00:22:39] **LW:** Growing up, I was known as the question asker. I was always asking questions. A lot of times it would annoy people because I would ask questions that seemed like they had obvious answers and people would think I was asking because I knew the answer, but the reality was, I didn't know the answer. I genuinely want it to know. And I'm also famous in my friend circle for asking questions like hypothetical questions and then people will answer it and then they'll ask me the same question and I'm just I'm completely stumped. I have no idea.

[00:23:14] **TA:** Give me an example of a question.

[00:23:19] **LW:** So Light isn't my birth name. Light was a name that I took on in 2005 and it was actually born out of a conversation where I was asking my buddy, my really good friend a question. I was living in LA and you know, LA is a place, you where people change their names and they rebrand themselves all the time. And I've been meeting all these people with these unique names. And so I was in the farmer's market on Fairfax and third with my buddy. We're having lunch at the little French restaurant and I said, hey, you know, I met this guy named mother. I met this guy named truth and I just listed all these people that I met who had changed their names. And I said, if you had to change your name to a word from the dictionary, what would you change it to? And he thought about it for maybe 3 seconds and just said ocean. And he goes, what would you change your name to?

It's like, I don't know. He goes, what's the first thing that comes to mind? Nothing's coming to mind. I'm really trying here. I can't think of anything that I would want to be known as for the rest of my life. And he starts counting down, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and I just blurted out Light and that's where light came from. It came from that conversation.

But yeah, I've had several conversations like that where I will ask people things like that. Like, would you rather questions type of a thing and then not having the answer for myself, which is a bit of an oddity.

[00:24:43] **TA:** I got two questions for you. One is why do you think you were so good at asking questions? You know for me I can ask that because for me it was a search of like connection because I didn't feel it in my life, so I was asking questions because then I could feel closer to someone. I have a friend, Jeff Wetser, who has a beautiful book coming out in May called Ask. And he told me, and it's interesting, he's also a great question asker, but he said, the reason I'm good at questions is because I'm Jewish and I grew up in Connecticut where they didn't really like us, they didn't like me, and I had anti Semitism all the time. So I realized that if I ask people questions, it put the attention on them, and it was my way of hiding. I found that really interesting, right? I'm just curious why was it that you were so good at questions?

[00:25:29] **LW:** I've always been an observer. I love people watching from a very early age. In fact, I didn't win very many awards in school, but the one award that I would consistently win over and over was perfect attendance. I never miss school because I just love being there and the whole social experiment of watching people and then wondering why do they do this? Why does this person? Why do they wear that? So I would ask questions like, does anybody even pay attention to what we wear every day? And then that would lead to an experiment of what would happen if I wore the same thing every day for a week, would somebody even notice? And if they did notice, would they say anything?

So then I would run that experiment and find out that actually nobody even cares. So maybe I don't need this diversity of wardrobe. Maybe I'll just kind of create a capsule wardrobe before I even knew what that was. And yeah, just little things like that, but what I realized was that most people weren't as curious as I was.

I grew up in Alabama where we would go to church every Sunday and I'll be sitting there listening to these stories. People walking on water and people rising from the dead. And I'm just like, what, how does this happen? And nobody had any good answers for me, and why is that guy white if he's from the middle East. All these questions that people, and I found that fascinating.

So I would favor questions that I felt like would make people uncomfortable, in a way, because it was a way of kind of learning about not just the answer to the question, but really about people, I just love learning about people and where their boundaries were. So changing my name, it was never anything that I wanted to do. It was a boundary of mine. And I was like, why am I afraid to do this? What happens if I go beyond that boundary? I wonder what would not.

[00:27:27] **TA:** So let's talk about, that's the second one. Let's talk about naming things, the name of things. You change your name. They give you other permissions. It's like you put on not another costume, but by giving yourself another name gives you other opportunities. When I was 37 and I let go of this identity with the, that I had at that point in terms of my life goal, which was to tell my father's story of the world, of the Holocaust and everything. When I let that go, which was basically brooding the identity of a film director, I call myself a film director.

Then I created a new name for myself, or like who I was, which was a story breaker, gave me a new opportunities, new possibilities. So I assume like you call yourself light. It's different than what your name was before new possibilities emerge. So what we name things is so important. That's why when I named my kids, we really put a lot of thought in it because names can be maps.

[00:28:18] **LW:** Talk about that Cosmos and Lila. Why those names?

[00:28:22] **TA:** My son is Kosmos Ilan, which Ilan means tree in Hebrew, and like I have this tattoo, right? So there's a horizon, there's a horizon line, there's the roots of the tree. And

there's the cosmos, the stars. If you do Tai Chi, Qigong, you know that we human beings are these entities pulled between the cosmos and the earth. And I wanted to give my son, because, who he's going to be, that's him. I'm just here to support his journey. But what I can do is, and he can change his name, and he's totally open. I mean, when he's of age, he can do whatever he wants. I'll support it. But at least in the initial, he know where his parents came from, which was son there is an eternal truth, which is we are pulled from the cosmos, And from the earth and let's not lose our place. And then when our daughter came around we, I wanted to find another truth that we could share with her, but also that connected her name to her brother. Because I've had this beautiful experience where my father gifted me with this beautiful name.

My mother gifted me with this name Topaz. Oh, Topaz. And there's a script, Topaz. What is that? Your parents hippies? What the hell? Your brother named diamond. And like, actually Diamond is my grandmother. Oh, really? What else you got? I was like, well, my other brother's Onyx and my other brother's Sapphire.

[00:29:34] **LW:** I love it.

[00:29:35] **TA:** So every new soul that I meet sends energetic waves to my two brothers and my grandmother, regardless of whether I like them or not, or they're my grandmother passed a long time ago. But every time I have that conversation, every new soul I meet, it's like, boom, program energies to remind. And I have other siblings, but I there's no context to talk about them because they don't have the same name, the same like stone, it's not part of the story.

So I realized the power of naming things, not only map, but can connect. The truth is also is that Cosmos came because my wife, we had a miscarriage in New Zealand and a year later, my wife came home and said, if we have another kid, we should name him Cosmos. And I'm like, done because my wife is, we've been listening to the patriarchy for way too long. Now I'm serving the matriarchy and my wife is the bomb and she says, I'm like of service to that. So I contribute the Ilan because we had to balance it. Earth and the sky.

So my wife, when we found out we had a baby daughter coming, she's like Oceana, which is the feminine ocean because you say Oceano, which is Oceana. So I think, how do we ground the ocean? How do you ground? You can't ground the ocean. It's the deep, it's the biggest mass in the world. And how deep is it? So deep you can't. Then I hit me, I was like, wait, you don't, you can navigate the ocean. When do you navigate the ocean? At night, Laila. I always loved Arabic names. I was like, Laila, night ocean. So she knows, don't be scared of the dark. That's where you see the light. And you can find things in the dark that you can't find in the light. Because when you're traversing across the ocean in the daytime, I mean, I'm not a mariner, but it's at night that you know where you're going because you see the stars. And that can be a map for her.

And also, when do you see the cosmos? At night. And the earth is Ilan, the tree. And the ocean is the feminine, it's the ocean. So you have the ocean and the earth and you have the night and

so all this connection between just by the naming, but I think how this pertains to anyone listening is just what do we call ourselves? What we call ourselves gives us permission, gives us possibilities that didn't exist before.

[00:31:36] **LW:** And even more so the question, what's in a name? Is something that maybe we want to consider even for ourselves, even now, you may have had the name you have, you've had for decades, but you don't have to keep that name. You don't want it connected. If you feel like it's not aligned with who and what you are, what's emerging through you. I'm living proof. You can change your name anytime you want.

[00:32:03] **TA:** But there are things also in your name that you may not realize or recognize until you really look at them.

Example, I spent a lot, a fair amount of time in New Zealand. And I'm really moved by the Maori community, the Maori culture, and I have a good friend there named Tamahou Rowe, and we're sitting in his place in the Whanganui River, and Whanganui has legal personhood. It's one of the first countries that gives legal personhood to bodies of water.

And we're sitting there and he's talking about how his ancestors come from this land and they know, not just the name of the river, but every stream within the river, every eddy has a name. It's personified. It's a being. We need to treat it as such. He knows what walk of his line came on the boat. He knows his past, and if you know your past, then you're obviously thinking about the future because soon you'll be part of the past. And I'm sitting there and we're sun setting and I go, well, yeah, that's beautiful, but I don't really have a name that's connected to nature, and then I realized, wait, Topaz, and I'm at this point, I'm like 30, 40 years old and I go, wait a second, Topaz. I'm saying, wait, that's not true. My last name is Adizes, which is the name of a river in Italy. Adige, where you get to Pinot Grigio, Alto Adige. I'm like, I'm named after a river. God damn it. I'm named after a river and I didn't recognize it. Maybe you need to go visit the river.

[00:33:21] **LW:** Did you?

[00:33:23] **TA:** No, I mean, I've been through it because I was in Italy, but we didn't, I didn't visit the river. I didn't go sit down with my mom and my wife and we had been in Florence. We didn't make that. No, we didn't. But that's clearly something that should be done.

[00:33:28] **LW:** So tell me a little bit more about your relationship with questions. What was the question you were answering when you became a filmmaker for yourself?

[00:33:44] **TA:** At some point I was living in Sweden, I don't know, 25. After traveling and following the signs and having conversations, I always carried a camera with me. And I just would interview and talk to people with this camera and ask them questions. And then at some point I said, okay, I think this is what I wanted.

[00:34:00] **LW:** How would you approach people?

[00:34:01] **TA:** I wasn't even, people in the street when you're backpacking. I mean, I would do what you would do. I would walk into a restaurant and I see that they had one busser and the kitchen guy wasn't there and it was piled up and I just would start bussing and I'd go in the kitchen and start cleaning for my meal. And I would just start doing exactly the crystal story. I've done that so many times. And they'd be like, what are you doing? I'm like, well, I'm helping out. And then obviously they give you a meal and maybe they invite you back for a job or I was moving antique furniture. And I wouldn't meet people. And it's that I wouldn't necessarily walk up to people on the street. And I could tell you my life has been littered with beautiful signs from the universe that you'd be laughing at that point. When I show my friends a sign that led me to Uruguay, they just laugh. They're just like, of course, because they're laughing because of how obvious the sign is. It's just like, how could, this guy, like, just the science.

Now I don't always follow the science. Sometimes you get in your rhythm, you're like focused, but when you open yourself up and one of your videos, you're talking about like how you like to take a break during the day and not be focused to like, let life unveil itself. That's when you can let go and create the opening when you don't know the answer and you are have the question. But because you don't know the answer that's when the signs can come in, right? And that's how I went with my filmmaking, when you are progressing like this on an answer, you can miss the answer that you think that's the answer. That's what I'm doing. You miss the possible beautiful answers that really exist.

[00:35:26] **LW:** This flies into the face of convention, obviously, because you look around now, especially online and you get all these really wealthy people talking about how much you have to focus and you have to be one dimensional, have one direction. You have to have a plan and be efficient with your time, make the most life hacks.

[00:35:47] **TA:** My thing to that is just what's the question we're asking ourselves? And a lot of the questions that we ask ourselves are societal programming, right?

I just got off the phone with someone before this, who's this amazing astrologer. She's brilliant. People love her and she's growing fast. And she asked me, well, I want to go exponential and I want to work smarter, not harder. I'm like, well, okay, let's not talk about what you want, where you're going. Let's just talk about the question because why do you want to go exponential? Why?

Entrepreneurs, they start a company and the first thing they always talk about an exit scale to exit. Why do you want to scale to exit? People talk about changing a billion people's lives. Why do you want to change a billion people's lives? Why not change one, just one. Forget a billion. What a lot of us are, there is a side of programming that we take on and we are, and I'm not saying it's good or bad. I'm just saying we should be aware of it. So that we can ask ourselves better questions so that we can take our souls on more interesting journeys.

[00:36:39] **LW:** Jerry Seinfeld, he floats this question to himself a lot. He says, to what end? So when they talk about, Jerry, do you want to extend the Seinfeld show again? We'll give you 10 million an episode. He goes, to what end? Is this going to make me happier having another extra 10 million, 100 million, all the money in the world? Why would I do this? Is it about the quality of the experience or was it just about the outcome of the experience?

And I think that's what you're alluding to is if you're making decisions based on outcomes, then you're really setting yourself up for the wealthy rat race, because you're still going to get to a point, a hundred million dollars exit later where you're thinking, well, what's next? I still don't have enough, versus being process oriented, focusing on whatever's happening in the moment, being fully there, asking yourself those questions.

What more can I see in this moment? What more can I extract from this experience? And then in the process, cultivating fulfillment inside, in which case you get to a point where you're not asking what's next. You're asking yourself what more can I be in this moment? These are the questions.

[00:37:48] **TA:** I think one thing that I find really helpful are question loops. The most famous question loop is why, asking it six times over why, but another interesting question that I like to ask is why, what if, what will it give it, what will it give me, what if I already have it, why, what will it give me, what if I already have it, right?

So some of us are chasing after something that's going to give, you have, what, why do you want to make so much money? Money. So I have financial freedom. Okay. Do you have financial freedom now? Well, why do you want financial freedom? So I have time. Well, do you have time now? So I can impact people's lives. Are you impacting people's lives now? Are you already doing that? And it's not to give the answer. It's to find a deeper question that's worthwhile answering that can empower you that moves away from the societal programming that's on the surface.

[00:38:35] **LW:** Did you learn to approach life and questions like that just through your travels or do you read a book about questions or what?

[00:38:43] **TA:** I think it goes back to. You're a kid, you're three. I don't know. I can just tell you that as a very young person, I wanted to talk to people because I think I was, I didn't experience intimacy in the sense of, I knew there was something more. And maybe, as a young kid, you're three years old and you see these giants that you love, these gods, you see these gods, your parents are gods, right? Because they don't do anything wrong. I mean, from that perspective of a three year old, right? Fighting and you just feel like that, I have to tap into some deeper knowledge here to survive. And then I know there's a connection here. Like where is it? How do I find it? And then, yeah, I mean, I don't know. I can't tell you how, I don't know. I just think a lot, I think a lot. And I love to dance. I love like five rhythms dance. I love to get out of the head, into the body because the body obviously tells you a lot, but you can have conversations with the body, right? There's a lot that's in the body that talks, speaks to you.

[00:39:39] **LW:** Where were you when that name occurred to you? And how did you know that was the right name for it?

[00:39:46] **TA:** Well, so The Skin Deep is an experience design studio that I launched in January of 2014. A few months prior, a friend of mine reached out and he wanted to make a documentary about why good looking people get ahead in America. Like, in a world of meritocracy, why do good looking people get ahead? And he had, he wanted to put money in.

So as a filmmaker at the time, I'm like, cool. Okay, hold on. Let me get back to you. And I came back to him with the idea and he called it. The Skin Deep. So I took the name of skin deep and I said, look, what's really interesting is not my good looking people. What's really interesting is how is the emotional experience of being human shifting in lieu of digital changes that are happening. That's what's interesting. And we're going to create an experience design studio. We're not going to make a film. We're going to create experiences because if you really want to impact people, it's not through films, it's through digital content.

And he ended up taking the money that he was going to put in the company and buying a ranch instead, which was a hidden blessing and it was a really cool. We're starting on a Monday, on Saturday, he called me up. He's like Topaz. The money I was going to put in to match the funds you were raising from your friends and family, I'm going to put into ranch instead. I'm really sorry. And he was really kind about it. And okay. And I was like, night of the soul. Are you really going to go Topaz, 37 year old are you really going to do this? I said, this is, and I was scared shitless. And I said, what better story than this? Like this is a good, it's kind of like that story I told you about the software company, and a year later sold it for 30, but I would have had three. I was like, this is a great story, right? I want to be telling this story in the future.

Like two days before the guy pulls his catch, and I'm going to work with the first two hires, Page and Heron, and I'm shitting a brick. Cause I don't know what I'm doing. I don't even know what the product is. And I'm taking my friend's family money and half the money's gone. Great story. What's the question? The question is, how's the emotional experience of being human shape shifting in the shifting landscape of technology and how we're living. And then I would get my friends together and pause and just ask questions like, how is that? And uh. And then we were thinking about what's the name of the company, what's it. And I have a good friend, Nathan Phillips. He's a brilliant creator. He's one of the smartest guys, brilliant guys I've ever met. And he helped me with the launching the, cause I created the video of these conversations, triptych and everything. Right. But I went to him and June Harada, two good friends who are brilliant. And I said, stop, let's not put this on YouTube. Let's trade it a digital experience and interactive experience. And Nathan was brilliant in that. And we thought, what are we going to name it? And we'd been, we even thought about the, and for the experience design studio. And ultimately one day he says, and I'm easy with names. I don't spend a lot of time names. I'm horrible with names. I mean, as you said, everything is The Skin Deep, the, and the dig. I have a thing called grace. The window is all these things we created. So she said the end, the space between I'm like, perfect. And that's how we did it. And really the end speaks about the space between.

I always carry these magnets around and we bring magnets together. You can feel the energy between them. If you flip one over, you feel the push or the pull before they touch. You can feel that, but you don't see anything, but you feel it. That energy exists between all of us and not only us as humans, but nature. There's that energy. How can we illuminate it? And that's the endeavor of the end is by having these conversations, filming with two, always showing both faces at the same time, you could see the threads that bind us. And we can amplify humanity that way.

[00:43:06] **LW:** I know that you suspected that this was a great idea and that it would resonate with a lot of people. But at what point did you know okay, this, we've got something here.

[00:43:17] **TA:** We did an experiment where we brought people in the room and we filmed them and we just did an experiment. And then when I directed, I didn't have a monitor to see both faces at the same time just for the audience, the and is always two people in a room facing each other, asking questions that we give them. And we film it with three cameras; one's a wide shot and the other two are close ups on their faces. So you're always seeing both faces at the same time. When we first watched in, I was with Chris McNabb in the edit room, he's our editor at the time and he just lined it up and we watched a simple conversation and I looked at him, he looked at me like, Oh my God, we got gold. This is amazing. We're seeing both faces. And why is it amazing? It's 2014. Why is it amazing? Why I thought it was amazing and still do is because if you think about all the content we watch, a lot of it, whether it's a film, social media, anything, you're always seeing the person talking. You're not seeing the receiver. We are not elevating the listener. What you practice, you get good at. Are we practicing listening? As an individual, as a society, as an organization, do we practice listening?

One example of that is like, well, what's the content we watch? We're watching people talking to us. We're listening, but we don't see someone else listening. And in the end, we elevate the listener to be as important as a speaker. And therefore we're saying what's important here is their connection. What's important is your connection.

[00:44:32] **LW:** Would you give them instructions practice listening?

[00:44:36] **TA:** Oh no. The space is theirs. That's number one rule is this is your space. So if I'm showing...

[00:44:40] **LW:** Do I know the other person?

[00:44:45] **TA:** Oh yeah. So unless you're doing a blind date, you always have a connection because the, and is about the space between us about our connection. A relationship is not you or I, it's you and I. So it's the and, right? So if you're with a stranger who you don't know and there's no romantic interest, you're not really invested, right? You're not necessarily as invested if you're talking to your mom, to your brother, to your best friend, even on a blind date, you're somewhat invested because is there some kind of chemistry here, right?

So what's really important in the end is the relationship between them and that they have the opportunity to have a cathartic conversation if they so choose. And us as a viewer is because we get to see both faces. Even if they don't answer any, because the rule of the end is one of the rules is that you have to ask every question, but you do not have to answer anything you don't want.

We like to say that we create the space for humans to be humans. And part of that is you don't have to answer a question if you don't want. But let's ask the question as a viewer, you get to watch them ask the question and you're projecting that even if they don't answer, say, let's talk about at home, you are projecting what you think they would say, what they're not saying, why they're not saying what you would say in that situation, you're still having the conversation for yourself and they're having it for sure between them, even though they're not articulating it. And so what's really imperative in the end is to create space for humans to be humans and to accept that, and that goes into a relationship.

If you're in a relationship where you really want to have this conversation with someone and they don't want to have it with you, or let's say this, that's one problem, and maybe there's other aspects of your relationship that they don't want to participate in, but say they do have a conversation with you, but they don't respond in the depth that you want or as emotionally articulate as you'd like, or as you do, you have to accept that this is them. They are them. Don't bring the judge. Let them be who they are and let them. Be in the space. The fact that in the space with you is enough. And then obviously you want to keep having these conversations because then they can become better practiced at it. Right? And they can explore more courageously, their vulnerability and such. But I think that's a big part of these conversations is no agenda coming to it again, like we said, like open space.

[00:46:47] **LW:** When you and your partner looked at each other and said, we've got gold. Was that in 2000? Was that early on in the process?

00:47:01] **TA:** No, that was Chris McNabb, who was our editor when we looked at each other. He lined it up. The format and everything you knew you already had all this. You don't have to answer the question and the whole thing?

I polished the introductory, like how we welcome the people in and what I said, but the rules were pretty clear from the get go. We're not people facing each other. You can ask each other questions and that's it. We're going to let them be who they are. And then the questions, okay, how do I give them the space? Okay. And then like a bit into it, I realized, okay, I'm going to have them read out. When I do the audio count for the audio person, sound person, I'm going to ask them to go from one whispering to 10 yelling.

So we don't really need them to yell, but if you yell in the space, you start to own it. When I give feedback, I always tell the directors myself, you kneel and you look up at them. You kneel and you look up because that's giving them the authority.

What I learned from filmmaking, especially documentaries, what I learned from documentary filmmaking is that I travel the world. I mean, I made a film called Americana, where I literally traveled the world. I traveled to Cuba, and I was there for only 12 days. And I made a film and I didn't know anybody there. I found the story. I got the actors. I made the film, short film, went to Sundance. I went to Laredo, Texas, five days with another great filmmaker, Eduardo Mayen. Five days, didn't know anything. Met people, talked to people, put them in situations, made a film, went to Sundance the next year. I didn't know what I was going to make. I just knew the question was, and then open to it and go with the flow.

And I remember one of my friends in Cuba, he said, Topaz, aren't you a little hubris? You just showed up here with a camera you've never used. You've never been to Cuba before. I'm like, Oh my God, he's right. This is ridiculous, crazy, but I just had the faith and trust it. And I made a film called America Around the World. It was the year that Obama got elected. That was my contribution was make a film that explores American identity and global perspective. And what's at risk is young man's lives. We're going off to war.

So I would go, I went to Vietnam. I went to Hiroshima, Cuba, Serbia, Laredo, Texas, exploring American identity. And the core story that you always returned to was two kids in high school, senior year, graduating, going to the military, because we can all talk about what it means to be American. But at the end of the day, these two boys are going to get on the first flight in their lives, Transatlantic. Go to a country they've never been to, get a driver's license so they can drive a Humvee, so they can go and fight. That's where the rubber meets the road. And I want to make a film about that, it's called Americana. And I did that by trusting the signs and following and trusting humanity and talking to people and creating spaces where they can express themselves.

[00:49:38] **LW:** So you've openly admitted that you often have imposter syndrome. You don't know what the hell you're doing.

[00:49:44] **TA:** A lot of these situations. I love your, I checked out your Instagram. Was it yesterday? And the one that's up right now, I don't know if this is going to be released, but it says, if you don't have imposter syndrome, you're not on your edge or something. So if you're not, if you don't feel it, then go on your edge and feel it.

And I think, I mean, look, the most work I've had to do in the last six months before this book came out was to work on myself in terms of like that voice. It's like, you're a narcissist. Why do you have anything to add? Why should you go on a show? Like I've been doing this is our 10th, 11th year. This is the first time that I'm putting a face to the project because it's always been, it's not about me. It's about the conversations. It's about the participants. It's about their courage to step up and share their story. That's what it's about. But if I need to put a face to it so I can help sell a book because the book is going to help people have better conversations in their life to help listen to each other, then I'll do that because I know that the end point is better conversations, better relationships, better world for my kids to grow up in. That's what I'm about right now.

[00:50:44] **LW:** So one more question about The Skin Deep. What advice, what sage advice that you ignore when you were starting that?

[00:50:55] **TA:** Okay. When I was starting, the thing that comes to mind is not necessarily when I was starting it.

[00:50:59] **LW:** I'm sure people were telling you, hey, do you really want to scale it? Grow it? Dah, dah, dah, Dah. You need to do this. So I've heard that.

[00:51:11] **TA:** Have you heard the term ask whole? No, like not asshole, but asshole. I'm going to ask. I was an asshole and I'm hopefully not anymore, but I definitely wasn't.

[00:51:16] **LW:** You ask people for advice and then ignore it.

[00:51:17] **TA:** Exactly. That's an asshole. It's like someone who asked us, oh, what do? And then you don't do it. They're like, dude, why are you even asking? Because I'm going to give you advice and you're not going to do it. I have been very fortunate to find mentors who basically tell me what's going to happen. And I'm like no. And then it happens, so there's a lot of advice that I didn't listen to. Which one would you like to know about that?

[00:51:42] **LW:** What would you think is most valuable? Whichever one maybe worked out in your favor. You ignored it and it worked out.

[00:51:47] **TA:** Here's two things. So I told you a story about on the Saturday, the guy pulled out the money. I called my friends and investors. Now keep in mind, these are friends and family. There's about six, seven, eight of them. They're listening to the book. They've always supported me in my short films. They never saw their money back. And here I was coming in with this bigger idea. Thank God I have been fortunate enough to have people with financial agency who can support kid who had an idea. I wasn't even a kid then I was 37. I was, I was a young man. I was a man and I called them up and they said, Topaz, if you believe in this idea, I do, they pretty much all said that they're like, this is up to you. We got you like, we believe in you.

[00:52:26] **LW:** Okay so to me, that means you were able to tell them a story that they were able to buy into. So you got to talk about that. For someone out there who wants to raise money...

[00:52:40] **TA:** Okay. This is going to sound ridiculous. This is going to sound very, maybe this could sound arrogant, but when I was talking about The Skin Deep. I was showing them a proof of concept video that I had made for another project about a war photographer where I mixed documentary footage seamlessly with fiction where people would watch it and be like, what the fuck is this? This is incredible. I don't get it. What is it? Then I had to do an explainer video to explain what they were seeing.

So when I just made that to make a feature film, that I've been working on, so I had to make that to explain the idea behind the film. So then when I was launching The Skin Deep, it was around the same time, when I was launching The Skin Deep and I talked about what this thing was, people didn't get it.

So then I would point to the proof of concept and say, listen, do you remember 18 months ago when I was talking about the video that I was going to make for the script? Like, yeah. Did you understand what I was talking about then? No. When you watch this, is this not incredible? And now you get it? Yeah. Okay.

So the same thing is happening right now when I'm talking about The Skin Deep. You don't get it now, but it's going to be Epic. It's going to be value offering. So that's what you're investing. And it's not the story. It's not the pitch. It's remember I was 37, 38. These people know me. I've spent time with them, right? They are family and friends. They were investing in me. That's why when they were saying Topaz, if you believe in this and you're going to go on it, go for it. Now it wasn't tons of money. We're not talking, I'm not in the game of series ABC. I'm not, that's a different kind of pressure. This is the pressure of asking your friends and family for money. And at some point they said no, because company was planning, finding a business model. We've gone through about two or three deaths where I had to let everyone go, which is super painful and then build it up again. And you go to your friends when you need the money, otherwise the company is going to die. You have to fire people, and at some point they say no. And that's when the thought came up for me. Topaz, I'm not equating them the same, but in some sense it's being an addict. Like a gambling addict or a drug addict. You keep going to your friends, at some point they got to say no and you got to figure it out yourself. You got to figure out how to make this business model sustainable. You got to figure out how to, you got to change your behavior so that you can make this thing sustainable, resilient, make the impact, you have to learn things you don't know.

Day four or five, I'm talking to the lawyer about, do we got to create a C Corp, a B Corp, an S Corp? What are we doing? And he goes, Topaz? My rate is 250 an hour. You want to pay me to teach you that when you can go learn on Google? Okay, thank you. And I remember feeling so uncomfortable and so scared going great because at some point I won't be uncomfortable, scared because I'm gonna learn this shit. And that the whole journey for me has been from artist and artist. My artist, my kind of artist was value offering. What am I building that offers value regardless of the money to businessman who's like, okay, this needs to be sustainable. What does sustainable mean? And I did a substitution for profit, right? I used to have an issue with money. I didn't like to work for money because then it felt, well, they own me. And my therapist, when they said, well, Topaz, if they're paying you for your time, don't you own them because they're paying you for your time.

I said, okay, wait, so let me do a substitution here. Money, profit is excess energy you put energy to something you release in the world It offers value and then it comes back to you excess energy, that excess energy some people call profit. Then what does that mean that means you have more energy to build more to put more stuff out in the world to create more support to more value. Oh okay, cool. I can get that game. I can get behind that game

[00:56:03] **LW:** How did you make money? What was the business model for The Skin Deep?

[00:56:08] **TA:** It took us till it took us what, four years to figure it out. And my friend asked, what's one piece of advice that I didn't listen to? I should have. My friend, Justin Thompson, he's got a video with me on just doing the end. It was so much fun. So I did with him 16 years. I said, Justin, what should I do? He's like, sell card games. And I'm like, yeah, but we're two years before. We're not really strangers. And you go sell the card games. And I'm like, you don't understand, Justin, I'm creating interactive design, interactive 2.0, the media, this that long I tried.

Finally, 2018, after having to let people go that were on board, that are family, that are, these people are incredible souls. They're also listed in the acknowledgements of the book. The company Skin Deep would not be anything without their time commitment. Had to let them go. Me and one other guy, Nick D'Agostino doing it. He did everything. He was making content, shipping for USPS, these card games, we went e commerce style. And that's now how we make money, it's just e commerce, we sell card games.

And when I met my wife in 2018, and I came in we met her, I met her at her home, friends, it was a thing. She goes, so what do you do? Instead of a five minute diatribe of interactive media and da, it was like, I sell questions. And there's a process. I think we go, it's like, what's your core offering. Don't talk this big stuff. What's the thing?

The thing is I sell questions. That was then now I think it's evolving and I'm constantly asking myself. What is it? And how could I keep it simple? My wife, by the way, said that's sexy. She was like that. How many people do you meet? Sell. What is this guy about? Like, so that helped me get two kids, an incredible wife and a lucky man. you know?

[00:57:45] **LW:** Alright. speaking of questions, apparently everything comes down to 12 questions. What is that? What are we talking about? What are these questions? What are some sample questions of these 12 questions for love?

[00:57:57] **TA:** So the impetus of the book was a Skin Deep fan called me up, Jill. She said, Topaz, I've been watching this for a long time. What have you learned from doing this for 10 years for 1,200 pairs? What are the questions that really work if you had to dial it down? So I chose the questions I know work, but what's really important is the architecture and we can talk about the questions like on a prescriptive level. You buy this book, you're going to have an epic conversation that's going to change your relationship forever, period. And you can have that conversation over and over again because you're changing, 12 questions over and over again. There's also additional questions in the end of the book that you can replace.

But what's really fundamental on a macro level is where do we learn how to have really good conversations? My answer when I think about that is we model it in our family and maybe our friend groups, like where do we really, I'm not talking about seeing something on TV of someone else having, I'm saying, which the end offers incredibly, but how do you practice in

your own life from 10 years, 1,200 watching conversations, the 12 questions are structured in a certain way and I explore why they work. And where do you want to go with it? I mean, you want me to ask, which is my favorite question or I basically took the 12 questions and I put them in a sequence that I know I've seen work incredibly well, and they take you on a journey. It's like a five X five X structure.

There's the opening that builds a trust and respect the first three questions. They acknowledge the synergy of your relationship. The second three questions explore conflict and the growing conflict. And how do we handle it? 7th and 8th is the peak, it's the climax. 7 is what's the pain in me you wish you could heal and why?

Number 8 is what's one experience you wish I never had, we never had and why? And then we start landing the plane, 9 and 10 are about gratitude and acknowledgement. What are we learning from each other? What are we reflecting to each other? And 11 or 12 are two questions that we should always ask and talk about because the fact of the temporalness of life, right?

Number 11 is, if this were to be our last conversation, what's one thing you never want me to forget and why? Number 12 is probably the most profound question that you can really dive deep, especially after this conversation, especially since you've gone through this architecture of the journey that's set. Why do you love me?

[01:00:08] **LW:** I would ask what does love mean? What do you mean by love? When you say like, those are the kinds of questions that I like to hone in on.

[01:00:17] **TA:** Totally. Well, I think we can improve that question by saying, because one of the things that people miss out on in the questions that I've learned, what five things that makes a good question is technology connection. So I would tweak that question because if you ask me, what does love mean to me? And you ask someone else, what my wife asked me, what love means to me. And I would answer that question the same way. Love means to me this. But if you said Topaz, how do you think we feel about love the same or differently? And my wife asked me the same question and someone stranger did the answer will be different because it acknowledges who I'm talking to who's asked the question. It acknowledges the connection.

[01:00:54] **LW:** So that's what you mean by it should have a connective POV. Is that how you see all questions in general? The Gold standard is for them to have a connective POV.

[01:01:06] **TA:** Well, when I construct a question in the context of a relationship, because I always talk about a book, but to do as an individual to yourself in the context of a relationship, I found there's five things. One is don't make it binary. Don't ask questions like do you love me? Yes. No. Done. It's normal for experience to put things together that don't normally come together. How does conflict make us better? We don't often think it's conflict to make us better, right? One of this connected one is one that's often overlooked.

It's like, if you think about 36 Arthur Aaron's questions, 36 Questions for Love, I think maybe six or seven of them acknowledge the person who's in the people in conversation. The others are just, I mean, you'll answer the same, that question regardless of who's asking it. And isn't what we really want to know.

If you're meeting a stranger, maybe it's nice to ask these questions. If you really want to know and you're curious about your partner and you want to hear them talk about something has nothing to do with you, that's totally fine. But in the context of a relationship of exploring your relationship, you got to ask questions that acknowledge it, that harp on the connection.

And then there's two other things we can go into too, but I don't know if that's where you want to go.

[01:02:18] **LW:** Yeah, let's talk about that. A question that empowers and aims for a constructive result.

[01:02:19] **TA:** I mean, you're setting me up here because you know. I mean, you know, it's like let's talk about meditation for a second. One thing I feel about meditation is that it's not the art of not having a thought it's about the art of letting go of thoughts. It's about letting go right? It's like letting it go having it letting it come through let it go and when we ask ourselves questions our mind is chasing to catch onto something. An answer. Our mind is like the dog that chases the stick regardless of where you throw the stick, the dog will chase the stick.

The thing that throws the stick is the question. So if I'm going to throw the question into a muddy pond, which is like, why do we fight so much? Okay. The dog's going to get that stick, which is the mind is going to give you the answers. It's going to give you a litany of answers. Well, because we don't match because we don't respect whatever. Why do we fight so much? Okay. Done. I'm at service to the question. I'm gonna get the stick. I'm gonna give you a list of why we fight so much.

[01:03:12] **LW:** Why do you never compliment me when I come in?

[01:03:15] **TA:** What if we throw it up like, what's our biggest conflict right now and what is it teaching us? That's sending the stick to a different spot. The mind isn't the dog. The mind is now chasing that stick. That's going to be a more constructive answer. The question shapes the mind the answer, the course shapes, the race it's run on. So we are always asking ourselves questions we don't realize that you wake up and you're in a state well, because you've asked yourself a question. Stop, ask a new question. You wake up knowing you're going to have a tough conversation with someone. You are anxious about it. You don't want to do it. What if you stop and go, okay wait. What's the hidden gift in this conversation? What's the lesson in this for me so that I can become a better human. Okay. The mind is going to serve the question. The dog will chase the stick where you throw the stick. You can control. You just have to be conscientious of the question you're asking. And that's what I mean by making a constructive question.

[01:04:12] **LW:** And let it be unexpected.

[01:04:14] **TA:** Well, that's what I was saying about connecting two things that are not, like an individual, I'd say. Light. What's your favorite memory from your worst relationship? That's unexpected. Right? How much does earning money cost you?

In a context of relationship, let's make one up now. How does conflict make us better? But we can come with another one, but just connecting two ideas that don't, you don't normally put together, right? How does us being safe and comfortable make us worse? Okay. Wait, safe and comfortable make us worse. How is that possible? Wait, what?

Well, okay, let's explore that. What are we not gaining by being together? Well, shit, really? So connect in another form of that unexpected is making a question where it puts you or the other person in someone else's shoes. Light, what do you think is the hardest thing being your friend?

[01:05:05] **LW:** I love these questions, man.

[01:05:07] **TA:** Right? I mean, we have tons of them in the editions that we sell and everything.

Questions are door openers. They're keys. They're keys that if you ask, you don't even have to answer it. If you ask, it unlocks a door into a room of your emotional being in the room of your relationship, in the home of your relationship, a new room. And sometimes, like, let's explore the house.

[01:05:31] **LW:** How do you create a safe enough external space to really dive in to these questions? What do you recommend for people who are, because who may want to just ask these questions? Is there a time and place that's not suitable?

[01:05:47] **TA:** Absolutely. Two things I've learned from this whole thing is that there's two things that are required. One is the space and one is well constructed questions. We've talked about well constructed questions. Now the space.

The space does not have to be we don't have to light candles and play soft music. That's nice, you can do that, it's great, but it doesn't have to be heavy handed. All it has to do is create the intention in the space so that we understand why we're here.

I mean, one thing that happens in relation oftentimes when it builds up intention is that one person goes, we got to talk and you go, oh, shit, we got to talk. Okay. It's built up enough that one of us is in so much pain. We got to talk. Right. But that creates a space like we're going to have a certain kind of talk.

In our lives, how do we create the space to have certain kinds of conversations? Just like in the rooms of our house, there's certain things you do in the kitchen and there's different things you do in the bedroom or the bathroom. You're not going to cook in the bathroom and you're not going to sleep in the kitchen. So how do you create the space? The way you do it is set out intention. Hey, let's play a game. Hey, I got this thing. 12 Questions for Love. Hey, let's just make up a thing where we write five questions each on a piece of paper and we read them out loud and just talk about it. Hey, let's do this thing. Let's go on a road trip. Let's not play a podcast or a song. Let's actually just, and we're going to give each other permission to ask the wackiest questions. Because here's the thing, if someone comes to you and says, why do you love me? You're not wondering why you love them. You're wondering why they asked me this while I'm washing the dishes, right? You're not wondering. This permission hasn't been granted for one person to receive and one person to give. Or similarly, if you came home to your partner and you were like, My love. I love you so much because ba... and they're wondering why you're coming at them, telling them why you love them while they're watching. Where's this coming from? So they're not in a space to receive, right?

Creating the space could simply be, Hey, I'd love to have a conversation. Let's create some ground rules. Ground rules are we're going to sit here for half an hour. We're not going to look at our phones. We're going to chill and we're going to go through these five questions. And the rules are you have to ask every question, but you don't have to answer it or just create the guardrails. And the guardrails can be simple. And then in the context of this book, where I have these 12 questions, I say is don't stop in the middle. If you have to end in the middle, go to the last two questions. Because if you stop in question six, seven or eight, you're in vulnerable space and you have to run out the door because your kids called or they woke up or something happened. We got to go to a meeting. You're leaving the operation right down the floor, the surgery room, you gotta lay it up, you gotta land the plane.

So all I'd say is like, bring intention to the conversation you're having. What is this conversation for us to explore? It's for us to explore. Let's not fight to find a resolution here. It's a different kind of conversation. We're here to talk. We're here to explore where you see what we're at. We're here to learn and whatever answer you give is what you give. Even if you don't give an answer, we don't do that often enough.

There's so many nutrients in the relationships that are ironically the closest to us. But because they're close to us, we take them in some sense for granted, right? Because they're there. They're always there. Wait, what if I ask a different question to my dad? He's going to answer it in a totally different way because it's a new question. He's never thought about it. And that's going to illuminate the one of the threads that we rarely look at or feel in our connection.

And what happens after you have that conversation, man, you got so many hits of dopamine, you got so much enthusiasm for life because your life as a human being has been reflected back to you by another human being. We don't do it enough. We spend more get these quick, small dopamine hits from getting a DM or swiping, which fair enough, it's addicting. It's how it's built to do. But it's giving you small dopamine hits. Put it aside, invest, wait. And after 10

minute conversation, you get even a bigger dopamine hit that you couldn't get from scrolling through the phone. She's going to invest in it. You're going to create the space for it.

[01:09:42] **LW:** Alright. So you've got a million subs on your YouTube channel. You just relocated. You just took a leap of faith and moved to Uruguay. Where are we now? What's going on today? Are you still filming? How do people get involved? They want to participate in this. Are you going back? Are you commuting?

[01:10:01] **TA:** Oh yeah. I'm commuting back. I'm coming back to Austin. We're filming in Austin. I'm not sure when this is out, but we're filming the 13th and 14th in Austin. It looks like we're going to film in London in July for the first time, which we're really excited about. They can find TheSkinDeep.com is where you find us all our social media handles are The Skin Deep basically. We have a newsletter called The Bridge. You follow that. The two biggest questions I'm asking my life is how can I apply what we've learned in this beautiful format of the end and the work we do at The Skin Deep to have greater impact and support to people.

And the other question I ask is what environments and how can I experience this? Can I give my children so that I can raise them in a way that prepares them from a world that we really don't know what it's going to be like?

[01:10:45] **LW:** Beautiful, man.

Well, I always like to loop these conversations back around to childhood. I don't really know exactly how they connect, but I try to just go with the first thing that comes to mind. And when I think back to the little Topaz, ripping pages out of a book, it doesn't make a lot of sense, and I think that what you're doing now is you're taking something that we very much have convention around, which is conversations, question asking, and you're ripping that apart and you're restructuring it in a way that gives a lot more meaning to people's experience, and it helps them to connect more. So you're kind of helping them reattach those pages in a way that kind of suits their own experience. And I think that's beautiful. And I am excited to continue exploring your platform and your work and your book and hopefully one of these days, getting a chance to cross paths with you in person. I'm sure we'll have a lot more to talk about. So thank you again for coming on to my podcast and sharing so openly and vulnerably. And I'm grateful that you're out in the world doing the work that you do. The world needs more people like us, people who are following the thing that lights them up inside, which for you happens to be facilitating these conversations and asking these questions. So thanks for sharing your wisdom with them.

[01:12:11] **TA:** Man, thank you. Light, thank you so much. One of your books or videos talks about how, or you mentioned like you don't believe in. That's like time than your time, right? Okay. Yeah. Well, am I wrong? I'm not sure where that book is, but you mentioned that and I just said, we've already met, we've already met in just the future. We haven't experienced that meeting yet, it feels like.

[01:12:33] **LW:** That, honestly, like just even having this conversation feels like you and I are already friends. We just need to, do a Quentin Tarantino and go back to the beginning.

[01:12:40] **TA:** I just want to thank you for the platform and the space in the conversation. And the questions and your reflection. And I'm really honored. I am really honored to meet your soul and have a conversation in this context. Thank you. Thank you so much, man.

[END]

Thank you for tuning in to my interview with Topaz Adizes. You can follow Topaz on the socials at @topazadizes, which is A D I Z E S. You can also follow him @the_skindeep. So it's the underscore skin deep. And of course I'll put links to everything that Topaz and I discussed in the show notes, which you can find at lightwatkins.com/podcast.

And if you enjoyed our conversation, you found it inspiring. And you're thinking to yourself, wow, what if Light interviewed someone else that I would love to hear on his podcast, you can always shoot me an email with your guest suggestions. I am at light@lightwatkins.com.

And in addition to sending me that email, one very simple, fast and easy way that you can directly help me get that person onto my show is to go to my podcast page on Apple and leave a review. And that's one of the reasons why you always hear podcast hosts like me asking their listeners to rate and review the show. It's because that's how a lot of guests will gauge the size of a podcast and if it would be worth their time to come on to the show. So if you have 10 seconds, just go to your screen, click on the name of my show and scroll down past those first few episodes. You'll see a space with five blank stars. Just click the star on the right in order to leave me a five star rating. And if you want to go the extra mile, of course, I would really appreciate if you left a review, just one line even about what you enjoyed in this podcast, and it will go such a long way to help me get the guests that you suggest onto my show.

You can also watch these interviews on my YouTube channel. So if you want to put a face to Topaz's whole story, you can go to youtube.com and you can search The Light Watkins Show and you can get a list of all of my podcasts there. And also make sure you subscribe there as well, because a lot of these guests are checking the YouTube channels these days to see if this is a big enough show to justify their time.

And if you didn't already know, I also post the raw unedited version of each podcast in my happiness insiders online community. So today's podcast, it was just a little bit over an hour, but the actual recording time was probably an hour and 20 something minutes, which means we cut about 10 or 15 minutes of chit chat and false starts and mistakes and stuff like that.

But if you like hearing all of that, you can hear all of that for all of my episodes. If you go to thehappinessinsiders.com and you sign up for a masterclass or a challenge, and that gives you access to the community as well as to the raw unedited versions that get released actually a day earlier than the regular podcast release.

All right. Thank you so much. I look forward to hopefully seeing you back here with another story about someone just like me, just like you taking a leap of faith in the direction of their calling. 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. Thank you so much and have a great day.