

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 49: Tim Answers Your 10 Most Popular Questions

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Tim Ferriss: Why, hello ladies and germs. This is a new episode of the Tim Ferris show and it is an experimental episode. I am going to answer your questions. And there were 6,831 votes on 305 questions that you all submitted. 533 people submitted questions. And they were voted up and down, and I'm going to answer the 10 most popular.

And there are a few caveats. I may tweak some of the questions or I'll read them literally and then I'll indicate where, perhaps, I think a better question, or more precise question, or oblique question could be asked.

Now, without further ado, here we go into the questions. I'm running to get to a movie, which, for those interested, is Foxcatcher. I am a lifelong wrestler. I'm very fascinated by the entire saga, and I remember when it happened, related to Mr. Dupont and everything else. I shall not spoil the story for those of you who don't know it. But I expect it to be very, very exciting and, at the end, very sad. Okay. Now, question number one.

This is from Matt, I think it's Coughlin, in Costa Rica. "If you were to write "The 4 Hour Work Week 2.0" for 2014, what would you change or update from the original version? Are there new tools, technology, business models, or ideas that would make it more adaptable to today's realities?"

So there are a few things I would say to this. First is: yes, there are definitely tools and tactics that are new. New technologies, new sites. That could range from, say, Unbounce. I think it's just unbounce.com for quickly designing landing pages for testing things, different offers, etc. Tools like Optimizely or Visual Website Optimizer. Those are both two competitors who allow you to do very fast split testing on various different things.

I used Visual Website Optimizer for all of my most recent e-mail capture testing. Then you have things like Kickstarter. So, if you look at the shelf-like build-a-business competitions, and you can see a bunch of them just by going to shopify.com/tim, you'll notice that many of the winners used Kickstarter to fundraise, but also acquire customers very, very cheaply.

And I would give examples of people who have used Kickstarter, for instance, as opposed to traditional financing or bootstrapping. There are then sites like VHX – I think it might just be vhx.tv. If it's not that, it's vhx.net – for selling video content directly to fans, or would-be fans.

And what I've realized since "The 4 Hour Work Week" came out, is that there are many use cases and implementations I couldn't have predicted. And that ranges from Superbowl actors, I kid you not, who have used "The 4 Hour Work Week" to completely turn the rules of acting upside down, to lawyers, to hedge fund managers, to nonprofits, to families of five who are traveling around the world and making more than I could ever imagine. They're really, really incredible. So yes, the tools do change with time.

It doesn't take a lot of effort to figure out what those new tools are. I shall probably do an updated version, a 10th anniversary edition, believe it or not. Jesus. Man, I'm getting old.

And the other thing is I'm considering doing an entire book of case studies. Basically a choose-your-own-adventure guide to real-world examples of people doing amazing things after reading "The 4 Hour Work Week". If you have a fun story to tell, if you have a company you've built, a muse you've built, and you would like me to consider it for the book, please go to fourhourworkweek.com/success. Okay? So fourhourworkweek.com, all spelled out, forward slash success.

There's a forum; you can submit stuff. I don't know exactly what the timeline is on this, but it's very likely that I'm going to do a book. So bonus points to people who submit soon.

Now, as a second side note, I would just say, "The 4 Hour Work Week" is really about timeless principles. It's not about the shiniest, latest gadget or testing mechanism.

It is about first principles. And 99 percent of it is the same today as it was in 2007, when it was originally written, as it would have been, say, close to the birth of Christ with Seneca and the Stoics in Roman times.

The principles of effective behavior really do not change all that much. So there you have it.

Alright, next question. "What is the main communication technique that you use to network with people of higher status? Especially before you had success." And unfortunately this gentleman's name was cut off by the printer. I apologize for that.

The answer is volunteering and writing. So when I first moved to Silicon Valley, I volunteered with a group called The Silicon Valley Association of Startup Entrepreneurs: svase.org. And volunteered. And it's amazing to me how many people who volunteer do a shitty job because they're not getting paid.

And that is not how you have good opportunities presented to you. I arrived here, didn't know a soul. I was driving a hand-me-down minivan that the seats had been stolen out of, at least the back seats. It was really ridiculous and embarrassing. But that is to say, I was starting from ground zero, just like everybody does. And I volunteered. I worked at the front desk. I did way more than I was asked to do.

And as a result, I was given more responsibility. I was viewed as more responsible and therefore became more important to the organization. And over time, and this didn't take a very long time at all, they did weekly events, practically. Over the span of two or three months, I got to the point where I was able to volunteer to run an entire major event.

And what that meant was, I was able to reach out. I was able to decide on the subject matter for a panel and invite all of the people I dreamed of meeting. So that included everyone from Jack Canfield, co-creator of Chicken Soup for the Soul, who, of course, later became very influential and helped me to find my book agent, who then sold "The 4 Hour Work Week".

And I'm still in touch with Jack after all these years. To Ed Bird, Mr. Creatine. He helped to develop creatine. The creator of the pet rock. The founder of Cliff Bar, who wasn't able to come, I think for health reasons and sent someone in his place. Trip Hawkins, co-founder of Electronic Arts. And I was the point person. I got to communicate with all of these people and I am still in touch with many of them. Alright? So volunteering is a lateral move that can allow you to really get in touch with people way above your pay grade.

And the other is writing. Alright? So if you're a good writer, you can do interviews for respectable publications and use that as a foot in the door to have contact with people who you aspire to get to know or emulate in some fashion. Pro tip: don't ask them for a favor right after interviewing them, or something like that. Develop a real, human relationship with them and take your time.

Play the long game. That is advice I would give you Gary Vaynerchuck would give you, many others would. Don't try to hump their leg on the first date. Okay.

Next question. And I might not make it to 10, but I'll make it to as many as I can before I have to grab an Uber and scoot out the door. Alright.

Next question. This is Ryan Fisk. And the question is, "Roughly, what technique do you use to focus on one idea long enough to bring it to fruition? Or, if you prefer, what techniques do you use to avoid distraction while working on an idea?"

Really, it comes down to a handful of things. And I could tell you, "Here is a tactic." Again, I want to focus on principles whenever possible because they're flexible and adaptable and they don't change. The latest techniques, websites, etc., they're constantly shifting and it's a war of attrition against yourself. It's very fatiguing.

But there are certain approaches, like the Pomodoro technique, where you focus for, say, 45 minutes, I like to do it for even shorter, like 22 or 23 minutes, and then take a 5-minute break.

So it's a 20-some-odd-minute sprint with a 5-minute break. I like to use that. I could also point to morning rituals. I think that really specking out the first 60 minutes of your day,

and basically having it so that it is scripted. Someone else could take your morning routine and execute it, like an actor who's winning an Oscar imitating you, to a T. Alright?

You should not burn any calories making decisions of what you're going to have for breakfast, about what you're going to do 10, 15 minutes after you wake up. It should be scripted to optimize your mental state for the rest of the day. And you want to conserve your decision-making.

So "The 5-Minute Journal": this is actually a muse. It was created by a few folks who read "The 4 Hour Work Week". But "The 5-Minute Journal", it's a hardcover book, and you do a few types of journaling first thing in the morning, for five minutes or less, identifying your priorities, what you're grateful for, and a handful of other things.

It's very, very fast. And that helps to re-clarify your priority, not multiple priorities ideally, for the day.

And last but not least, I think this is the most important: Why do people get distracted? Why do they jump from project to project to project and quit thing after thing after thing? I think it's because, primarily, they try to be realistic, and I talk about this in "The 4 Hour Work Week", but they aim for base hits. So let's say they're making \$50,000 a year. They're like, "Alright, I'm going to aim to make \$60,000 a year." And you're not going to move mountains for that type of incremental change.

But if the goal instead is, and it's ideally not totally financial, but is to create a company that makes – again, I'm just using numbers because it's easy – a million dollars a year. It's hard to fail completely, and that's something I think Larry Page says.

When you aim high enough, it's hard to fail completely, and you need a goal that will keep you enthusiastic and excited through all of the trials and tribulations and obstacles that pop up.

And whether your goal is small or your goal is huge, you will face obstacles. And if your dream is uninspiring, you will quit. And I think, primarily, that is the cause that I would point to for people repeatedly quitting things, is that their things aren't interesting enough.

So there's a great book called "The Magic of Thinking Big" by David Schwartz. It was recommended to me by one of the top product inventors in the United States. He's made millions of dollars. That book was recommended to him by Fortune 500 CEOs. Grab "The Magic of Thinking Big", read it, and choose sexy, exciting goals or you will quit forever.

Alright, next question. "Regardless of industry, what is a trend you see developing that you think most people are missing?"

I'll try to keep this short. This is from Malcom in DC. The trend that I think a lot of people miss, and this is speculation on my part, but I think it's informed speculation, is the contraction and contamination of cycles. What does that mean?

Well, if we look at even the stock market, I think that what we will see, and there are inevitable short and long term cycles whether it be with energy and therefore influencing commodity trading, or equity cycles of various types, and you could talk to all sorts of people who get into Fibonacci sequences and so on and so forth, but I think that the impact of social media and instantaneous dissemination, and in a way viral passing of information is underestimated for its impact on contracting cycles.

So if you have, say, a historically seven-year cycle, because both exuberant, irrational optimism, euphoria, can spread around the world at the snap of the fingers for some crazy dog video, it's also true with misinformation or information related to, say, stocks at IPO, whether Alibaba or anything else, right?

And I'm not saying Alibaba is overpriced. Actually I hold Alibaba, but I think that those seven-year cycles could become five or even three-year cycles or less. And similarly, it could turn out that the recovery periods are shorter.

Now, there are many, many, many factors that go into this, but I think that there are people out there, macro hedge fund managers and so on, who are really good at considering many, many, many, many different factors that contribute to shifts in the markets. But one that is, I think, understudied and undervalued is the contraction, the acceleration of the ups and downs due to social media and other technologies of that type.

And when I say the contamination of the cycles, I mean that if things were interrelated before and there were unintended consequences of events, whether it's a terrorist blowing up an oil field in Nigeria, or quantitative easing, or sovereign debt crisis in Europe, the impact of those events that might seem removed from your life, your day-to-day life, is, I think, going to be – I think the world increasingly represents a house of cards.

And previously you could have pulled out one of those cards and the entire thing would have held together, but, again, because of the contamination of these cycles and how pervasive and promiscuous information is, I think that is increasingly less so. Okay.

Long enough. Next one. "What is the one thing you have to absolutely do every day, no matter what your schedule is? This is Vic Dulot, Toronto, Canada. A couple of things.

Meditate in the morning. I try to do that as soon as I wake up, or I'm not going to do it. Trends in All Meditations is what I use, but you can check out Guided Meditations by a woman named Tara Brach. I think that's how you say her last name. So it's Tara, B R A C H. And my interview that I did with Maria Popova, Brain Pickings, goes into this. If you want to hear more about that you could, but Guided Meditations is a good place to start.

And then at the end of the night – and I try to bookend my day with activities in the beginning and at the end. So in the beginning it's to set the state for the rest of the day: a calm efficiency and effectiveness. And at the end, it's to wind down and de-stress and decompress from the day. So I tend to do very hot baths with Epsom salts, and I'll read something, oftentimes in the bath, that is not nonfiction.

So I'm actually reading, I think it's Naomi Shihab Nye, N Y E. Poetry, and I am not a poetry reader, but I'm reading this specifically to shut down my problem-solving mechanism in my head, so that I don't have insomnia.

Alright. Here we go. Next question. This Ronald Yao from New York City. "What routines or hacks do you perform to be in a state of flow?" Alright. This is a good question. Now, I will say, I've thought about this a lot recently, and I don't really like the phrase state of flow or the term flow. I think it's very overused right now, and as a result under-defined. It's lost a lot of meaning, so I would like to change the phrasing of the question to: "What routines or hacks do you perform to achieve effortless output?"

So flow to me means effortless output, whether it's when you're drawing and suddenly before you this amazing piece of art is created that seemingly comes from outside of you.

It is an effortless output. Or, in writing. Or in negotiating flawlessly. Effortless output. Alright. I'll come back to routine. The first 60 minutes of your day should be robotic. It should be slow, it should be unrushed, and it should be scripted. Alright? So decide what the sequence of events is.

If you had to give someone a Word document to imitate your day perfectly, the first 60 minutes: what would it look like? And there are other things that contribute biochemically. For instance, intravenous glutathione, or even liposomal glutathione, for me, kind of lights me up a little bit. And there are different types of tea, like your bromonte with three different stimulants or so with different pharmacokinetic profiles. Blah, blah, blah, blah.

The last thing, which is not the last in importance, is exercise. Alright, so, very simply, and this is also the answer to either Julia or Julio from the Netherlands who asked, "How do you kick yourself in the butt out of a lazy, half-depressive mindset into a productive and positive mindset?"

Exercise, exercise, exercise. The brain is an organ, alright? So don't separate mind and body. If you want to improve your mental performance, including neurogenesis and increasing brain drive, neurotrophic factor, and all of these very physical, biochemical, or even physiological changes, exercise.

So jump on a rower or a bike, it can be a stationary bike, for 10 to 20 minutes. That's plenty. When I'm in a funk, one of the first things I'll do is jump into my garage. I have a Concept 2 Rower and I'll jump onto it, and I will literally only row for 500 meters. It's nothing. But it is enough to provide me with an injection of neurotransmitters and also

vasodilatation in large muscle groups like the legs. It's enough to click me out of that funk. So that is also an important part of flow.

I'm experimenting with motion.

Repetitive motion that is lateral, so whether that's skiing or surfing, something that gives me lateral awareness, and this is true. Steven Kotler talked about this in "The Rise of Superman" in his experience with surfing, very similarly, which contributed to his recovery from Lyme disease, which I'm very interested in.

Okay. So, let's keep going. The next one is, "If you ever get mentally overwhelmed by things you want to do, how do you get to say, 'Okay, this year I want to concentrate on X, this month I want to focus on Y,' without feeling you're missing out on something else."

Okay. This is a good question. This is from Stephano in Italy slash the UK. So, alright. How do you choose something to do and focus on it without feeling you're missing out on something else? I think the easiest way to address this is to recognize that you are missing out on something else, always, when you make a decision.

And in fact, if you at the etymology – I always mix this up; entomology, I think, is insects, etymology – because look at the etymology of the word decision.

It's related to incision. Decision is to cut away. You're removing other options. And that's not a bad thing, and I think if you think of it as the Heath brothers who wrote "Made to Stick", who wrote in of their more recent books, "It's not about thinking outside of the box. You want to look for the right box, the right set of constraints that will facilitate you achieving your different objectives."

The point being there's always an opportunity cost. You choose to do anything, there are other things you are, therefore, not simultaneously doing. Okay? And you have to be okay with that and you should be okay because that's reality. Until you learn how to clone yourself and teleport and so on, that's the case. So it's okay. You don't have to do everything. And you can do anything, but you want to choose the lead domino. This is how I think of my projects.

So, for instance, if I can work on a television show, executive producing a television show, or – which I did, which was a very difficult process – or I could focus on a book, or a I could focus on, say, collecting e-mails, or I can focus on continually writing blog posts, which do return dividends, or I can focus on investing in startups.

Which of those will facilitate all of the others? So if each of those by themselves takes 10 units of energy and a year of time, I'm just making that up, but 10 units of energy and a year of time, which one can I choose as the lead domino so that when I knock it over, all of the other ones take less energy and less time. Does that make sense?

And for me, that was television. I focused on television and co-produced and hosted this show called The Tim Ferriss Experiment. And many of you know that the division that produced that at Turner Broadcasting got shut down, so it's sitting on a shelf.

So, here's the point: I chose to go after that lead domino and it didn't work out, as of now. I'm working on solving that problem.

But do I regret having made that decision? No. And this is another important thing, is that you shouldn't judge your success based on outcomes by themselves. Because you can, for instance, go into the stock market, behave very, very badly, and dangerously, and have a fluke outcome that's really good. And you don't want to reward that, you don't want to think that you're suddenly a stock market genius because you got lucky.

You want to focus on good process, whether or not you have good outcomes or bad outcomes because there are things outside of your control. So for me, I don't regret having done the TV, even though I spent a year, year and a half, almost exclusively on it, and there were a lot of opportunity costs. That cost me millions of dollars not to focus on other things. And I don't regret it because it was the right lead domino.

Another way to think about it is which of these problems are really problems? In other words, if you're sitting in a car, metaphorically, and you have a flat tire or a rapidly deflating tire, let's pretend it's the winter, the defroster doesn't work so the windshield is fogging up, and you have a broken driver-side mirror. Okay. What should you focus on? If you're very constrained with time, you're in a rush, you don't have a lot of resources, you're by yourself: what should you focus on?

Well, what I would say is: "Do you need to fix the mirror? Do you need to fix the defroster? Do you need to fix the flat tire?" Because keep in mind, the problem isn't that the defroster is broken, the problem is that the windshield is fogging up. So yes, you can fix that. You can open up the windows, for instance.

Broken mirror on the left: is that the problem? No. Spotting other cars and so on behind you is the goal. Can you achieve that another way? Sure.

You can tweak the remaining mirrors in the car to pull that off or you can do the grandparent thing and look behind yourself and glance out the window. You can do that. Alright. So that's a solvable problem. The most terminable problem if not addressed is the flat tire, so that's where you should focus your time.

Alright. Next one: "What elements from "The 4 Hour Body" are still important to your daily regimen? What does your workout currently look like?" Alright, so right now I'm recovering from Lyme disease. I have ligament tears in my elbows, my hips, my knees. It's fucking terrible.

But there are a few things I'm focusing on. Repopulating my microbiome, and I talk about this in "The 4 Hour Body" quite extensively, and that means I'm avoiding things

like Splenda that disrupt gut bacteria, for instance, and artificial sweeteners. I am also doing micronutrient testing as outlined in “The 4 Hour Body”.

So I’ve identified that I have a very low vitamin D, which can be thought of as a hormone in a lot of ways. I have low levels of a few B vitamins, so I’m consuming N-Acetyl Cysteine with L-methylfolate because I’m genetically predisposed to being a bad methyl-ater.

Don’t have time right now to go into what that means. And I’m consuming the fermented cod liver and grass-fed butter pills that I recommend in “The 4 Hour Body” as well.

So, there’s really nothing that comes to mind that I would change, necessarily, in “The 4 Hour Body”, other than putting in case studies for every chapter because readers have outperformed me and outdone me in every single chapter in the book. It’s been awesome. Because my goal is to create readers who are better than I am at everything I discuss.

Otherwise, what’s the point? You’re just making the world worse over time. So I’m trying to create students who surpass their teacher as quickly as possible. I want to make myself obsolete as quickly as possible, which is why I don’t like the term guru, when the media uses that to apply to be because...barf.

Last thing I want is people to be dependent on me. That would be antithesis of what I’m going for.

So there are the supplements. As for exercise, I’m focusing on mobility primarily because I cannot focus on a high degree of strength training, with heavy weights, for instance, or even sub-maximal weights. Because my elbows are so painful at the moment, and I have such tendinopathy and neuropathy that I can’t really bend my arms. I can’t experience flexion at the elbow while holding onto weights.

It sucks really badly. But doing swimming, calisthenics, you can think of yoga without all the mystical woo-woo stuff, and breathing exercises while I’m doing these calisthenics, which tend to focus on thoracic spine mobility and hips. So, squatting motions, hip hinges, without a kettle bell though, so I’m just doing dead-lifting like hip-hinging.

Okay. That’s that. And then the last question that I’m going to have time to answer is: “How do you balance your desire to challenge and improve yourself with enjoying indulgences provided by a successful life?” I think that’s it. And I apologize; the name got cut off in this one as well.

For me, it’s pretty simple. I’ve realized that money is currency and you can use it as wampum, to trade for possessions or experiences, and all things equal it’s better to have more money than less, of course. But I have a very low burn rate in my life, and I think that’s correlated to a high degree of control over my time.

When you have more control over your time, you don't have to compete with the Jones's, with your friends who are investment bankers or management consultants, to buy the nice car. Because with time, you can produce experiences that have the benefit of allowing you to learn things that also provide you a huge advantage over possessions. And that is the anticipation of experiences.

So, for instance, I'm taking my entire family on an international trip for Christmas. And the anticipation has made this gift incredibly valuable and exciting in the months preceding the actual delivery of said experience. Right? So, I've realized since I don't have to compete in, say, my off hours on the weekend to show my friends my new toys because I'm otherwise consumed with 80-hour work weeks doing something I dislike.

And as a result, I still drive a used Volkswagen Golf that I bought in 2004 and the antenna was ripped off by a homeless guy and I don't care because I don't listen to the radio much anyway. Whatever. And that's not to say that I'm a holier-than-thou ascetic. I do enjoy certain things. So I don't have a ton of expensive habits, but, for instance, I love Japan.

I'm a Japan-a-pholic, I've spent a ton of time there. So I have Japanese armor in my house. I have a couple of Japanese saddles from the 1800s or even, perhaps, earlier, 1700s probably, that are worth more than my car because I have a history with something called Yabusame, Japanese horse-back archery. And if you search my name and Yabusame, Y A B U S A M E, you can see a video of me learning to do horse-back archery. It is really dangerous and insane, and I don't recommend it.

So, luxury to me is not owning a lot of stuff. Luxury to me is feeling unrushed. It is designing a life that allows you to do what you want with high leverage, with many options, feeling unrushed.

So I will end on that. I'm going to go head the movie. Speaking of being unrushed. I do have to kind of shimmy or I'm going to get chastised by my friends. So, I'll let you get going. Let me know what you think of this format, if you like these questions, me answering your questions. If you enjoyed this, please let me know and I'll do more of it. On Twitter @TFerriss, T F E R R I S S. Or let me know on the blog. And thank you so much for listening.