

Hi, I'm Mauro Porcini. PepsiCo's chief design officer. Join me for our new series, where we dive into the minds of the greatest innovators of our time with the goal of finding what drives them in their professional journey and in their personal life, trying to uncover the universal truths that unite anyone attempting to have a meaningful impact in the world. This is In Your Shoes.

I was always told to stay between the lines. So I do drew my own. I'm quoting our guest of today, who is an acclaimed interior designer and star on the Netflix sensation Queer Eye, which has won three Emmy awards and be nominated for multiple people choice award. As the resident designer on the show and a member of the fab five, he helps bring change to people's lives, starting within their home and teaching them that the happy home can mean also a happy life. He grew up in the Midwest and eventually settled in New York where he worked his way up in companies like Bed Bath and Beyond and the Testoration Hardware. And finally, as creative director for Portico in 2006, he started his own company and opened his first showroom in lower Manhattan the following year. In 2015 he launch, his full service bespoke interior design practice for residential, commercial and hospitality clientele. In its fifth season his show Queer Eye is now one of the most popular shows on Netflix and is aired in more than 100 countries. The show is earnest and endearing and continues to challenge social norms and in the best moments, the fab five themselves, Bobby Berk. Welcome to your shoes.

Good morning. Thank you.

It's such a pleasure to have you with us today. Thank you so much for accepting the invite.

Of course, anytime.

So the first thing I really want to know is is this, you come from you were born in Houston, Texas, but then you move to Missouri. And my pronunciation probably is not the best.

No, No. You got it right. Some people might pronounce it misery. But it's Missouri, you have it right.

And so in the, in the little town, what was the name of the place where you are living?

The little town was mountain. Well when I was little it was Miller. Um, but my parents now live in a town called Mount Vernon, which is just six miles away from Miller. Missouri is filled with a bunch of just little farm towns right next to each other.

And then you move from that situation. There are so many people living in those kinds of towns in the Midwest of America. So you move from that to New York first and LA you became a

TV star and, and, and here you are today. So what's in between. There was definitely a few more stops in between that. Um, I went from the little town to actually Branson, Missouri, which is like the little it's like Nashville and Las Vegas, all in one in the Ozark mountains of Missouri. Um, and then I went from there to Springfield, Missouri, which, you know, was the big city to me. It was about 200,000 people. So it was huge. Um, and then from Springfield, Missouri at 17, I left home at 15 and then at 17, I decided to move to Denver, Colorado. Um, really kind of the only reason why I moved to Denver is because I, I needed to get out of Missouri. I felt I wasn't going anywhere with my life. There, there wasn't any opportunity for me. I needed a fresh start and Denver was the only place in the world. I knew anybody. I had one friend there. So that's how I chose to go to Denver. Um, I'm glad I did though.

Denver ended up being a great place to live. I moved back there anytime. It's so beautiful. Um, so I was in Denver. I moved there in 99, I think. Um, and I was in Denver until 2003, and I remember moving to Denver and pulling up over the Hill in my U haul and seeing Denver and how big it was and pulling over on the side of the road. And literally I started crying and I was like, Oh my God, I have made a huge mistake. This city is so big. What was I thinking? I'm never going to make it here. I'm going to end up living on the streets again. Um, and then, you know, fast forward four years later, I'm like, this city is so small. What was I thinking? I've got to get out of here. I've got to go to New York, Denver, so tiny, such a little cow town.

Um, so in 2003, I was 21, 22. I decided to move to New York. I had went there to visit a friend that I had met somebody and fell in love and had decided to actually move to New York for this guy. We ended up breaking up before I even moved. But at that point I had fallen in love with the city. And so I decided to go ahead and try my luck in the city, on my own by myself. Um, so I moved there in June, June 6th, 2003. Uh, I remember, um, it was pride weekend and my first apartment was at eighth Avenue and 15th street. Um, you probably know it it's that like gray cinderblock looking building right next to that bank building. I think a CVS now it used to be like a Dean and DeLuca. And before that it was a carpet store before that it was a bank, before that. It was a spa, but that, that iconic corner there. And I remember coming out of the subway from JFK, with all my luggage and that's all I owned in the world and walking up into the middle of pride and again, going, Oh my God, I made a huge mistake. Like, what was I thinking? I'm

never going to make it in this city. Um, and I, uh, my first apartment was there. I had luckily found a guy who had a two bedroom apartment. He was going back to Israel. He was Israeli. He was going back for three months. So I was subletting his apartment for three months and somebody else was subletting the other bedroom. And I get there that day. And he was like, Oh, we have a big problem. Um, the person who's subletting the other room, um, flaked out. And so you're going to have to pay the whole rent.

I go, well, I only have enough money in my pocket to pay my half of the rent for the next three months. And that is it. So if that doesn't work for you, I'm going to have to go sleep on a friend's sofa. Um, and luckily he was, he was in between a rock and a hard place. And he's like, all right, well, I guess I'll take that cause it was better than nothing. So of course, when he went back to Israel, I promptly put the other room on Craigslist and rented it out and paid for my room by renting out the other room. Um, so that was my, my first apartment experience in New York. And my first job in New York was restoration hardware. I was the design manager of the one at flat iron. I don't even think it's there anymore. I think that moves it all to meat packing district.

Um, but yeah, I was a design manager there. I actually got fired from that job while Thom Filicia, the original designer on Queer Eye was upstairs filming a long story, nothing bad technicality, the general manager who fired me to this day, you know, 18 years later, we're still friends. When I got cast on Queer Eye she messaged me and she's like, aren't you glad I fired you? Because if I hadn't have, you would have probably never been where you are now. So after restoration hardware, I actually went to work for an Italian linen company. We were talking about this recently. Um, they, they brought me over to help them expand their brand into the US and we didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things. Um, and eventually they fired me telling me I was never gonna amount to anything and I was worthless and get out of the office.

Um, and so I went to work for a company called Portico. Um, which if anyone listening has been in New York or Chicago or San Francisco for years, you remember very iconic home store, um, that the Italians made bedding and for them, which is where that connection came in. And I worked my way up from store manager of the Soho store to buyer to then head of e-commerce and then eventually creative director of the company. And unfortunately one day the company went belly up and I was like, well, crap, what am I going to do? Um, so I cloned the website that I have built for Portico and I quickly

registered Bobby Berk home.com. And I launched it that night. And I thought to myself, well, maybe I'll sell a sofa or two while I look for another job, but I ended up selling more than a, sofa or two.

And the website started doing really well. Um, I was one of the first online retailers of modern furniture in the world. Um, there was no Wayfair's, Amazon still does primarily, primarily sold books. Um, so it, it did well, my biggest struggle was actually finding furniture manufacturers and home manufacturers that would sell to me because back then the thought of selling things online. And this really wasn't that long ago. I mean, it was 2005, 2006, but the idea of selling things online was so foreign to the home industry and any, any manufacturer that sold furniture to brick and mortar retailers was scared to death to sell online because it would upset their brick and mortar retailers. So I remember the first week I launched, I got a cease and desist letter from one of our biggest suppliers that I had gotten to come on Porticos website.

And I got a cease and desist letter saying, you know, cease and desist. You do not have the right to have our products on your website. We had a relationship with Portico. We do not have a relationship with you, take our products down. And, uh, I won't say the name of the company, but I ended up calling the owner and basically begging her. And I'm like, please just give me a chance, give me a chance. I'll, you know, your relationship was with Portico, but it was with me, like at that point I had been the last man standing at portico. If I'm like, give me a chance. Fast forward a year later, I was their largest US retailer.

Did she give you a chance?

So she did. And a year later, I, I was their largest US retailer. So it, that chance that she gave me ended up being a really good thing for them, because I started selling more furniture than any other US retailers. So to counteract though, the, the problem of trying to get vendors to sell to me an opportunity presented itself. I got a call from the Italian bedding guys, and they're like, Hey, we see that. Normally I try to do my Italian accent right now, but I'm not going to do it because compared to your, your good Italian accent.

So they called me up and they're like, Hey, you know, we see that you have your own brand now. And it seems to be doing really well, and we're not. And we have a store in Soho and we're about to have to close and were in debt, you know, do you want to partner with us? So, uh, I ended up buying out part of the half the company, um, for a small amount of cash, but taking on a

very large amount of debt. And all of my friends in finance and business were like, no, no, no, this is really stupid. Like they have almost seven figures in debt and an unsuccessful store. Why on earth would you think that you can now turn this around? This is dumb, but I looked at it as a once in a lifetime opportunity. You know, when you have a store in Soho, I mean, that is what international brands work their lives for is to have a store in Soho, New York, you know, and once your brand is in Soho, you've made it.

So I thought, you know, what, if I can skip decades of work, you know, just by, you know, paying off around seven figures in debt, that's a win. You know, if I don't make it happen, you know, I start over, I try something else, but if I can make it happen, my God, that's a huge leg up. It's going to take me decades to accomplish this otherwise. So I took it on and most of their debt was like back rent and they had massive amounts of debt to their suppliers, all these amazing bedding manufacturers in Italy. So I called up their suppliers and I'm like, Hey, I'm taking over this company, give me a chance, give me more credit and send me more product. And I will not only pay for this product, but I will pay you back for what they have stiffed you for already.

And I paid them off in nine months. I turned that store in Soho, on Crosby street into an Italian bedding sample sale. I had a guy standing out on the corner of Spring and Broadway with a big cardboard sign on, you know, Italian bedding, 90% off. And I brought on brought in this beautiful, you know, cause I mean, if, if there's anything Italians are known for, it is bedding. You know, I only sleep on Italian bedding. It is just it's the best in the world. So that was it attracted, especially in New York, like people know like Italians are known for their bedding. So it, it was hugely successful. Like that place was packed all day long with people walking out with boxes, full of bedding. And, you know, I just had tables lined up in the center of the store. It wasn't anything pretty. It was like a typical New York city sample sale.

And within nine months I paid off all the debts and bought out the Italian partners completely. And I converted the store into a Bobby Berk home store. And that was my first store. And then that did well. So I opened up a store in Miami and then Atlanta and then LA and those stores were successful and they did well. And due to the exposure of where the stores were, which was the whole plan, like open up stores in high traffic areas and, and fancy brand areas. And people will notice it. And the brand will start to have brand awareness and be associated with those more well-known brands. And because of that, I started

getting licensing deals for the brand and for manufacturing and, and other retail stores, you know, with wallpaper and Target and Nordstrom's and in Japan and, um, art collections and rugs. And so as the licensing division started expanding and leases were up in stores.

I started getting rid of stores because my ultimate goal was to never be in retail. I worked retail, my whole young adult life every day. Retail is rough, especially in New York customers... Customers can be awful. You know, the amount of times I would watch customers just make my employees cry over, trying to get a discount or, you know, I remember the, New York's a rough place to be in retail, you know, and sometimes I thought I'm like, well, maybe it's just the furniture industry because, you know, it's, it's about people's homes. So people get very emotionally fired up about it, but you know, you'd be in Starbucks and you'd see poor baristas is getting screamed at over coffee and you'd be in the Apple store and you'd see the poor genius bar guys and girls getting screamed at over a phone. So it's just New York's a hard place for retail.

So as other divisions in my business started growing, I started getting rid of my retail and then in 2015 builder magazine contacted me and said that they had hired Ketchum PR to find the most well-known millennial interior designer to design the international, uh, to design the show homes for the International Builders Show and Ketchum PR told them that it was me, which to me in my mind was funny because I wasn't an interior designer. Like I was a retailer, I was a merchant. I was a curator, you know, I would help my customers pick out the furniture for their home, but I didn't go in and do like kitchen design and, and electrical plans and, you know, construction documents, which are the things you need to know how to do when you're an actual interior designer, but they're like, we want you to design the show homes for the International Builders Show.

And I was like, okay. Yeah, sure. I'll do that. Even though in my mind, I'm like crap. I have no idea how to do that. And that was actually the month that I had decided to also close the New York store and my husband and I were moving to Los Angeles and I was just going to focus on product design and licensing. And so I I'd said I would do it. So I got online and I would YouTube and Google and Photoshop, I designed these homes and they ended up being a pretty big success. And so the large home builder that built the homes for us liked what I did. And so they hired me as a test to design another home for them for one of their big developments. And that home ended up winning interior design of the year from the National

Association of Home Builders.

And that kind of kicked off my interior design company. So, you know, I quickly started hiring all the people that knew how to do the things that I didn't know how to do, like the CAD and all that, the technicalities and, you know, the, the things that you, you actually need college for and architecture and design. Um, and I launched my design firm and that was 2015. And so it was successful for a good two years. And then Queer Eye came knocking and ITV and scout and Netflix, they asked me to audition and I almost didn't, I almost didn't go to the audition, um, that week. Uh, I'm sure you're familiar with Porcelanosa out of Spain. Um, Porcelanosa was taking me on a trip to Spain. They were taking me all over Spain to give me the tourist, Spain and their factories, and you know, this beautiful, all expense paid trip to see this amazing the way they make tile and, and to see Spain.

And at that time I had never been to Spain. So I'm like, ah, I really want to go to Spain. Like, there's no way I'm going to get this Queer Eye show. Like there's no way. Um, but luckily the trip to Spain was happening in the last day of audition. So I'm like, ah, what do I have to lose? I might as well go to the first day. Um, and it's funny enough, I was actually super sick with the flu. Um, the first few days of auditions, just downing DayQuil and Sudafed to stay awake and alert. Um, and again, I didn't think auditions went well. Um, it was Thursday night, the day after the second day of auditions, Friday morning, I was supposed to get on a plane to go to Spain. And I had been told, Oh, you know, we'll call you tonight if we want you to come back for the last day of auditions.

And it was still one o'clock in the morning and I hadn't heard anything, I was in bed getting ready to set my alarm to go to Spain the next morning. Uh, and the creator of Queer Eye called me and he's like, Hey, you know, I just want you to know, we want you to come back for the final day of auditions. And we talked for a little bit and at the end of the call he's like, by the way, not to give anything away, but you're our first choice. And I was like, that was actually the moment I had the meltdown, even when I got the official casting notice, I didn't have a meltdown, but that night I did. And

Did you realize right away that this show was going to be important. And then will they give you fame that you have today or not?

No, no, I actually didn't. None of us thought that show would be the success that it is. The meltdown that I had was because the original show meant so much to me. Um, the original fab five were such inspirations to me. They were the first real live

gay people on television. You know, they were the first real examples of five successful gay guys who, you know, were, were quote unquote normal because I grew up in middle America where I was told that being gay was not normal. I was told that you could never be a success. If you were like that, you would never leave a happy life. People would never accept you for who you were, but they showed me that that wasn't true, they showed me that I could be accepted. I could be successful. I could find a core group of people that loved me no matter if my family did or not. So the original fab five meant a lot to me. And so just the thought of being able to attempt to fill their shoes was very emotionally overwhelming for me. Um, yeah, I love that you're saying this story is really, really, it touch you, it moves you.

Um, so the, the final few days of, uh, the in-person auditions of Queer Eye, there was like 40 something guys. There was about anywhere from five to seven guys per category, you know, cause there's five categories, culture, food, grooming, fashion, and design. There was about five to six per category. So the next morning I get to the final day of auditions and remember how he had said that I was the first choice. Well I get there and there were still five out of six of the other guys in my category is still there. When the other categories, a lot of people had been sent home. So I was like, well, wait a minute. What the hell? I thought I was a top pick? Like, why are there still so many people in my category left, but I whittled them down. Um, and by the end of the day, I was the last man standing. Um, and then we still didn't find out though till about two weeks later that we had actually gotten the job . That night, the creator of the show he's like, well, just so you know, guys, it's in God's hands and I'm God. So I'll let you know. Yeah. So that's, that's the long story short of from Missouri to Queer Eye.

I see a theme that is something recurring that keeps coming back from when you were 15, probably even before you didn't tell us what happened before, but essentially you had a dream or an intuition or a vision of something you wanted to do and you act on it. Many people don't, you know, everybody, many people are out of there, they dream from their couches. And then at the end they don't try because it's risky or you need to get out of your comfort zone. So you had this multiple intuition, multiple dreams, you act on it, you took a risk and often, and that's what makes the story very interesting. You, you know, there was a failure or a mistake or roadblocks or somebody that stopped you on the way. You know, you mentioned that you were fired, then many people may have stopped there.

And instead, what do you do? You transform the failure or their roadblock or whatever it is, into an opportunity. And you take another risk, and you act again. And essentially I love when you say that the store manager that you are asking people essentially to take a chance on you. But the reality is that you are the one taking a chance on yourself first. And I think people have somehow are feeling that from the little that I, that I know you. I think that that's what happened. People Were feeling what you were doing.

Because I had no business background. I mean, I didn't even graduate high school. I left home at 15. I learned at a young age that I couldn't sell... I couldn't sell my experiences. I couldn't sell my knowledge. I couldn't sell my, my education and my pedigree because I didn't have it. I had to make people want to work with me. I had to sell myself for a lack of better terminology. And so I always made sure that no matter what business I'm in, no matter what job I'm in, what, no matter what interview that I'm making people want to work with me, like I'm showing them what it's going to be like to work with me. And I have always, you know, I've lived by the golden rule. You might say, it's do unto others as you would have them to do unto you.

I'm like, you know what? I've always went out of my way to be nice, you know, and too often to my detriment in business, to be honest, to always do the right thing. And, you know, I've sometimes found that I've gotten screwed because I've, I've always tried to do the right thing. And I always try to not take advantage of people in business. There have been many of opportunities where I could have really taken advantage of situations in business and really catapulted myself even further than I had by, you know, diminishing somebody else and taking advantage of somebody else that wasn't as smart or as savvy as I was. But I have, I've always made sure that I didn't do that. You know, and at one point I, uh, I hired a CFO to help me grow my company. And he ended up highly taking advantage of me and embezzling from me because I trusted him and I wanted to help him grow as well.

And so again, sometimes it's, you know, it can be a bad thing, but for me, I think trusting people, to an extent, and trying to make sure that I'm always fair in business and that I'm not just making business about me and my successes, but about the successes of the businesses that I work with and that the people that work for me and that I surround myself with has been one of the keys to my success. You know, if you're only in business to catapult your own career to make your own self successful, and you're not worried about the people that

are helping you get there and you're not pulling them up with you, you, you will fail. And honestly, I hope you do because it's, it's about bringing the people up with you. You know, the people that are with my company, everyone, almost everyone that works for me out here has been with me since I've been in LA.

You know, I, I am very much a people first company, and I think that's one of the keys to the success of my company. I always have been. I take, you know, I even back in the day there would be financial problems. My company, after my CFO embezzled, when I didn't even know if I was going to be able to keep the lights on one thing that my employees never had to worry about was their paychecks. You know, making sure that you take care of your people, making sure that you take care of your suppliers. It's just, it's a very important thing.

I I'm so glad you're mentioning it. I believe so much in this idea of being a good person, being a kind person, if you want to use this word and just spread that kindness to the world in a way or the other, by the way will come back. And most of the people that do it, that any way they have it inside, they will do it no matter what, but for the ones that eventually not kind by nature, the reality is that sooner or later, this kindness, this karma comes back.

I hope some, sometimes you sit in there and you're like, ah, karma, are you ever just going to get this person? Come on. You know, you just watch people, bad person after bad person succeed. And you're just like, come on, karma, come on, get them, you know? Yeah. Cause you, you want to see the kind people, you know, like I I've recently I'm developing a new show for, uh, you know, I'm, I'm not just in front of the camera. I'm, I'm also behind the camera. And right now I'm, I'm developing shows for other talent as well. And there's a specific talent that I'm creating this amazing new show for that I think he's going to be very successful with. It's very unique. And I reached out to them because I, I saw their kindness, you know, they were on a, another very popular show and I just saw them time and time again, prove that they were a genuinely kind and good person and I've reached out to them and I've taken them under my wing.

And I have, I've introduced them to the right people in Hollywood and we've gotten them a major deal. And one day he said to me, and he's like, you know, why are you being so nice to me? He's like, I don't under, I don't get it. He's like, I from day one, I've been a bit reluctant about this because I just don't understand why you are doing this for me. And I said, I am

tired of seeing the assholes succeed. I want to see the people who are genuinely kind succeed and I want to help them do that. And so I am in business, not just in my design business and my media business, but also now in my production business, I want to help the people who are truly kind and are really going out of their way to make the world a better place. And sometimes even at the detriment of their own success, I want to see them succeed,

Scream it to the world. Bobby, this is so important and you have a fantastic platform to spread this message. I totally, totally agree. Going back to your journey, we're talking about the fact that from time to time you found these roadblocks, I mean, this difficulty, what would you recommend to people that are in that phase right now? They are, they have something in front of them that is so difficult to overcome. It's funny. You should say roadblocks because rewinding back to the day I left Missouri, I, um, was taking a friend to work and the road that we normally went on had to roadblock because it was under construction. So I quickly turned off to go through, to cut through this hospital parking lot, where I knew I could cut through to a street on the other side. And that parking lot also had a roadblock. And I went to go out a different exit of that parking lot to get to the other side of the street. And that exit had a roadblock. And I remember just screeching, my old 1984 Buick century to a halt and opening up the door and just getting out of the car and sitting down in the middle of the parking lot and screaming, going, this is my life. Every where I try to go.

Every time I try to succeed, every exit I try to take has a roadblock. And I'm like, I've got to get out of here. I've got to do something with my life because everywhere I turn here has a roadblock and it could not have been more literal. And so that day I got on the phone with my friend that lived in Denver. Cause again, it was the only person I knew outside of Missouri. And he told me, he's like, you know, come to Denver. And I'm like, I don't have money. I don't have a job. I don't have a place to live. And he's like, I'll work on the place to live. You work on the other two things. So he calls me back an hour later and he's like, uh, my old college roommate has a second bedroom. You can live there as long as you need to.

So I'm like, all right, have a place to live. So then I went to one of my three jobs that I had at the time. And it was a stock guy at the body shop, the body care company. And I told my manager, I needed to get out. I needed to move to Denver. She comes out of the back room an hour later and she's like,

you're now the assistant manager at the body shop and the airport in Denver. So I'm like, all right, I have a job. So then I went home that night and I saw all the DVDs that I owned and I took them and I sold all the DVDs and I got 500 bucks, which was enough to rent a U haul. I'd get myself to Denver. And within 24 hours of having that breakdown in a parking lot, I had packed everything I owned and I was in a U Haul on my way to Denver.

And I think my, my recommendation is if I had let my fears get the best of me, I would have never gotten in that U haul and left. If I had sat there and overanalyze, Oh God, what am I, what am I thinking? You know, I don't have, I'm never gonna make it there. Just like when I pulled up to Denver and I saw that massive city and I had breakdown again, if I had actually let myself think about that while I was still in Missouri, I would have never left. I'd still be there. And you know, there's nothing wrong with being in Missouri. But for me, that wasn't where my journey was supposed to be. Um, so I, you know, and again, when I went to buyout the, the bedding company, if I had sat there and I had let my fears, and honestly what most people would have said to me as logic, I wouldn't have made it.

I wouldn't have succeeded. I definitely absolutely would not be sitting here talking to you right now. But instead, I, I don't know. I, I just, I think at one point, one of the guys that worked for me at my retail company who ran my retail company, he said to me, one day, he's like, you know what? I think one of the keys to your success is you literally have no training. I can say he had a, he had a master's in business, you know, which is one of the reasons why I hired him. I always made, I've always made sure I hire people that are smarter than me. I hire people that know how to do the things that I don't know how to do. I I'm I am never too arrogant to go. You know what? I have no idea how to do this.

I know there is something that I need to grow in my business that I don't have the knowledge to do. I know what needs to be done, but I don't know how to necessarily get it there. So I will bring in somebody that I know is smarter than me. They may not be, they're not smarter than me in other things, but they're smarter than me in the areas that I'm not, you know, and that's one of the keys to a successful company is bringing in groups of people who all have strengths in different areas. But he said to me, he was like, you know, I think one of the keys to your success is that you do not have the business background that I do. You don't have all this knowledge that you learned in these books and all these professors in the back of

your mind, when you think of an idea going, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

That's not the way you do it. That's not the way business operates. You just think, Hey, this could be a good idea. And you just try it. And if it doesn't work, you're like, ok, it didn't work. Let's try this. And you don't have those voices in your head going, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Don't try that. That that's a bad idea. It's been proven that that's a bad idea. You just do it. And you know, it's been a success for you. Believe me though, when I say there've been a lot of failures in between, you know, I always say my fail, my, my career is just a bunch of upwards failures. You know, I, I have, I just fail upwards. I failure is not a failure. A failure is just a lesson on how to do it better next time, you know, or, or a lesson on don't do that again.

You know, that was not your direction in life. That was not what you were supposed to be. You tried it, you gave it your all, you need to let it go. You know, there have definitely been times in business that I've had to let something go. Something that meant the world. To me, something that I thought was where my career and my life and my retirement would go. And the first time I had a situation like that, it was very hard. You know, you felt like your heart gets ripped out. You feel like a total failure, but you have to remember, it's just not your path. That's just not where the universe wants you to be. But you, if you, if you, and if you let that go, you will find where you're supposed to be. You will find that success. But if you don't let that go, you won't. So sometimes letting something go and failing is the absolute, best thing that you can do because it opens yourself back up to the thing that will be a success for you.

Many years ago, I, I used to work in a company that was a science company, technology company. I spent a lot of time with scientists. And when you look at the work that scientists do, they know that to arrive to one innovation, one patent, they need to do thousands and thousands of experiments. Those experiments is what in the marketing world, in the business world. Or sometimes in life, we call failure. In reality, they are experiments. If you have the right perspective, the right mindset. And if you see them as experiments towards that innovation, then the journey is going to be really, really different.

Yeah. And just like science experiments, they're expensive. So are business experiments, there, there can be times where you're like, wow, I just lost everything, but you didn't because your greatest resource is yourself. You know, and you

have to realize that when you think you've lost everything, you don't, you're still alive. You have your health and that's all you need, you know? And as long as you can dust yourself off and try again, as I think Destiny's Child would say, um, you know, as long as you're still breathing, you can make it work. And, you know, I, I used to live on the streets and in my car and I'm where I am now. So, and I'm a high school dropout with no education. So if I, if I can do it, anybody can, you know, I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth. I grew up very poor ya know I, I, I'm not one for excuses. And sometimes people might consider that to be a little insensitive when I don't really, I don't know when people are like, Oh, well, I couldn't do that. I'm like, why what's your excuse? You know, again, I, I can understand sometimes it can be disheartening when you look at the world and you see that a lot of people that are successful are successful because where they came from. They're successful because who their parents are, they're successful because you know, like our current president, you know, they got a \$400 million loan from their father and that's how they started their company. You know, it's just a small little loan, um, you know, so I can see how people could look at the world sometimes and get very discouraged and go, you know, what, how can somebody like me with, with nothing that came from nothing. And with, without this Ivy league education, where is my place in the world when there's all these other people who were literally born with their place already handed to them, you can do it, you know, be kind, sell yourself, you know, make people. And I don't know if I ever finished that thought process. You know, I, if it was a furniture manufacturer, if it was me sitting in an interview trying to get a job at the Gap, you know, when I didn't really have retail manager experience, but I was selling myself as being able to do it, I was making sure that during that interview, that person that was interviewing me, liked me and realize that, Oh, Hey, like I want to work with this person. And I'm willing to take a chance on training somebody that clearly doesn't necessarily have all the technical skills that I'm looking for, because I can tell that they're gonna do everything they can to be the best manager. They're going to do everything they can to make this a happy workplace. So make sure that you're going out there and selling yourself like back in the day. I don't think I ever had an interview that I didn't get the job. You know, often it was hard for me to get that interview because I didn't have the skillsets or the education that, excuse me, I didn't have

the skillset or the education that was on the job description. But once I got my foot in the door and got in there, I sold them on me. I sold them on my, my desire and yearning to absolutely be the best I could for them. So, you know, if you don't have all the things that they're looking for, an education or a technical sense, make sure that, I mean, sell yourself. You know, I, it's not the best way to put it, sell yourself, but you know, do it.

But story telling is what in the business world with call storytelling and, and it's confidence also. And it's the ability to really add something, a content, any way you are trying, because I think there is a very important message in what you're saying, not just for the people that eventually don't have that lack of education, but also for the ones that do and for everybody and the message is that you have been learning on the way you have been, what we often call a student for life, you know, from the very beginning and still today, I'm sure you're still learning as I am, as, as the people that try to change the world are doing. And so these, this idea that you need to keep learning is something that even the ones that are starting today, they need to understand because that even even the college degree, that eventually get you in the door and get you into the interview, most of the times is even that, is not enough. You need to have something more that, you know, that is essentially what you embody and what you're describing right now.

And I'm, I'm glad you mentioned confidence because a lot of people are like, I don't have confidence, you know? And, and I hear all the time, you know, getting DMS or from fans that I meet in person, they're like, God, I wish I had the confidence that you and the fab five have. And I always laugh. And I'm like, honey, we're five of, some of the most unconfident people out there. You know, we struggle with it too. You know, I struggle with being nervous. I struggle with being unconfident. You gotta fake it til you make it, you know? And that's definitely what we all do. I still walk into meetings, nervous and unconfident. I, I still walk into the Hollywood parties that I have to, to go to now terrified sometimes where I just want to like run, hide in the bathroom. until it's over, you know, so, you know, a lot of times fans will think that, Oh, I could never be the success you are because I just, I don't have the confidence, neither do I, but I have the desire to succeed.

And I know that, you know, fear is our worst enemy. And there are many times where I do let fear get the best of me. And I, it keeps me from trying things, you know, and I find to almost

more so, as I've gotten older, I let it get the best of me when I was younger. I was, you know, I was literally, I had nothing to lose. So I'm like, sure, let's try it. What else do I have to lose? I'm poor. Now I'll be poor again. You know? Um, but don't let fear get the best of you. What's the worst that can happen. You get a no. All right, try it again. Yeah. You get it. Yes. From somewhere else. Turn that no, into a yes.

Yeah we live in this social media driven society where you have, you're bombarded by the superficial image of all these celebrities, and you think they're all confident and you know, they, they that's often the drive of their success, but we're talking about this last time we talked, I met so many celebrities over the years, especially in PepsiCo, through PepsiCo and, and you meet them and you see the behind the scenes and you see often that as you say, right now, they struggled and they're afraid. I saw something that is a common theme in what they do. They work hard. They work hard to try to be perfect, to try to not make mistakes. And they know that sooner or later the mistake eventually will arrive. But there is that, you know, the work behind that appearance of confidence, that is key.

You know, I'm, I'm going to tell the story about Heidi Klum. And I hope she doesn't mind me telling this, and I don't think she will, because I think it just speaks to what amazing wonderful person she really is, um, the boys and I were hosting Elton John's Oscar party for him this year, because he was nominated for Rocket Man. So he was actually at the Oscars and every year he has this huge Elton John AIDS foundation, Oscar viewing party. And so the boys and I were his guest hosts. And at one point, Heidi Klum and I were up to speak with each other, speak on stage with each other, and we're standing there waiting to go on stage. And I look over and she's just, she looks terrified. And I looked at her and I was like, are you okay? And she's like, no, I'm, I'm terrified.

And she grabs my hands and her hands were just cold and clammy. And I was like, what? Why? And she's like, I'm, I'm terrified of public speaking. I hate doing this. I'm so nervous. And I literally dumbfoundedly said that I go, but you're Heidi Klum. And she's like, I'm just, I'm I'm I get so nervous. And I just looked at her and I go, I love you. I like, to see Heidi Klum, one of the single most successful supermodels and not just supermodels, but one of the, literally one of the most beautiful women in the world, one of the most successful women in the world, not just because of her beauty, but because of her brains and her success and having, I had met her many times before. And she's always just so genuinely nice, you know, and

you can tell it's not a fake nice.

And she goes out of her way to say hello to people and shake people's hands, no matter who they are from PA's to Elton John, it doesn't matter. I'm like, to see somebody like you still be nervous and still be terrified and be a success I'm like, it's so inspiring to know that, you know what, they're the good people are winning. You know what, and that you don't have to be an asshole to succeed in business. It just made me feel so good to know that this woman who is a success, isn't a fraud, you know? Um, and another moment that brought me a lot of joy. Um, last year, um, the Hollywood reporter magazine had the very first women empowerment awards ceremony. And the first award they gave was to Oprah Winfrey. And from now on, it's actually called the Oprah Oprah Winfrey award.

But she was the very first one to receive it. And Alicia Keys got up on stage to introduce Oprah and to give her the award. And Alicia told this story about when she was little, the only time she saw success in business was old white men, old, angry white men. But you know, like in movies and in television, you know, you saw those successful executives, you know, they're in the boardroom and they're yelling and screaming. And like the successful executives were always like these very aggressive, very mean old white guys. And so to Alicia growing up, she's like, Oh, to be successful in business, you have to be aggressive. You have to be an asshole. You have to be a white man. And she's like, Oprah was the first example to me as a little girl of a person who A, didn't have to be a man, didn't have to be white, but was also kind. She proved to me that you can be kind in business and you can lift other people up with you and you can do everything you can for other people. And you can still become a billionaire, you know, I love how many times you're repeating this idea of kindness. You know, I'm writing a book and it's all over the book, I believe in this so much. And nobody talks about this enough, not even the kind people, because often they credit it as actually a weakness that they have.

Yes, yes.

Yeah.

You know, and, and, and again, like I said earlier, sometimes it has been. Because sometimes the bad people are just bad people and sometimes you will get taken advantage of, I have, you know, but, but at the end of the day, luckily for me, you know, the, the kind of moments have, have pushed through and I found success, you know, but if you go through life, always just thinking, you know what? I, I've got to take advantage of them before they take advantage of me. I've got to screw them over

before, because I know they're going to screw me over. So I've got to be the ones that do it first. Otherwise I'm never going to be a success if you go through, if we all went through life thinking that, we'd all just be screwing each other over all the time and the world would never become a better place. So, you know, sometimes you will get screwed over, but you just have to be smart about it. You know, you don't, you can still be kind and not be taken advantage of you, you know, will it happen sometime? Maybe. You just, you have to, you know, be, be smart and kind, you know? Yeah.

Bobby, you are a designer, no matter the college degree, you are a designer now. And, and I am a designer too, and in PepsiCo I work, and most of the time on mass products, and even though design so many times in the ine the idea of the masses is luxuries. Niche is what we refer often as design. Uh, you touch many products and you do many things that are for the masses. Even the show itself is talking to the masses, how important it is in your mind design for the masses, for our society?

So if you can see this book right here, the one with the XXO. So that book is actually Target's 20th anniversary collaboration book and that book, and there's also a documentary about it. And there was a whole ad came up, ad campaign about it. It is a whole book of the collections of every design collaboration they've ever done. And their very first design collaboration was with Michael Graves, um, 20 years ago. And that collaboration was literally what inspired me to be a designer. It is the first time that I looked at a tea kettle or a spatula or a spoon or a toaster as something that not only toasted bread or, you know, boiled tea or boiled water, but also something that sparked joy, something that made me happy. Something that when I used it, I'd look at it and just go, Hmm, this makes me happy.

That was the first time I had thought of products like that. Because before, like growing up where I did like design, wasn't a thing like, you know, things were just utilitarian, like a soup. You use it to eat, to eat, you know, a teakettle it just boiled water. Um, so their very first collaboration with Michael Graves, me seeing that as a young teen in target inspired me. And that was really the first time design. It was the democratization of design. It was the first time where the masses or Target said, you know what? We are tired of, good design, only being for the rich, we want design to be for the masses. And that has been their guiding light from that very first design collaboration for everything that they've done since is that democratization of design. And even before I knew

what that meant, even before I, I, now years later, I'm a spokesperson for Target now and was actually the main person in that campaign when they launched it.

I I've kind of been guided by that where I'm like, I don't think that good design should just be for rich people. I brought up Italian bedding earlier. And even when I was poor in New York, you know, living in that fifth story, walk up, you know, spending \$3,000 a month on rent when that's literally all I made in a month, I saved up my money for good bedding. When friends would come to stay with me, you know, they're like, we always laugh because you live in the shithole apartment, but God, your bedding is always so nice. It was, it's important to have, you know, nice things. And I always, I, I always kind of check myself when I say it's important to have nice things, because I don't think, I don't want people to think that I'm saying that happiness is surrounded by things, but you know what, it is, you know, and it's not just about money buying happiness. As our species, we're, things make us happy and it doesn't even have to be expensive things. It can literally be a rock that you find on the side of the street that is shaped cool, that you paint black, that looks like a cool sculpture that literally costs you nothing, but it's, it's an object that sparked joy for you. It's an object that you were passionate about. So when I say that things make us happy, they do. That's just the way our species works. So to surround yourself by nice things is important. You know, because we need to, our, our, our energy is, is my brain is going blank. We're, we're recharged by the things that make us happy. And for some people that's, you know, going on a hike out in the middle of nowhere, by themselves, for some people that's, that's painting. And for some people it's making things for some people it's, it's shopping, you know, some people it is.

And so to be able to, as a company, make sure that you're offering cool things that will spark joy for people at a price that they can afford has always been very important to me. And, you know, it's, it's also a fine line between price point and quality. And I'm, I'm also always very aware that making things that are of good quality, it would cost a little bit more, but those are things that are gonna last, and they're not gonna end up in landfills and they're not going to end up continually screwing our planet over like so many products do. So it's, it's important not only to have quality and a good price, you know, but to make it available to the masses. And that's always been a very important part of my company. Right. I totally agree. I love the, you mentioned also Target.

I had the same experience. It's been inspiring for me. And also I use Target so many times over the years to show that design actually could be sold to the masses first. And then one of the problem I had was at the beginning, I was Italian and I was coming to the United States to these American companies. You're not now?

Haha.

You're not, in the beginning you were Italian? You're not now? You're fully American now?

Don't you hear my perfect American accent? Now at the beginning of it was this Italian arriving here, you know, exploring. And everybody was like, well, yeah, we know that design is important in Italy, but Americans, no, no, no, no. They don't like design. They don't understand design. And then Target happened. And I was like, what about Target? And what about Apple, by the way? That's another one. And, and it's funny because then I ended up moving to Minneapolis. I've been living there for a few years. I have many friends in Target and then that has been very, very important in my journey. But this idea of democratic design is what we are also trying to do at PepsiCo. Making design available to the masses, creating these experiences that unlock joy, happiness, what you were talking about. It's so important. And, and tying in what we were talking about before. And again, even with Target kindness and people first, you know, I went to their fall national this past year. And if I didn't love Target before, I, I, I love it even more now because they really showed time after time, after time in the ways that they have completely turned their business around in the last five years, that one of the main ways that they turned their business around, was focusing on their people and not only their people, but their customer and the experiences and, and making sure that their, their employees were learning and growing and that they were in the departments that they were passionate about and that they were, that made them happy, really focusing on taking care of their people and because they are taking care of their people, their people take care of them and their company has become a success. And, and it, it's much more of a pleasure to shop in than many of their competitors because they're, their people are happy. You know, so it really goes back to success in business, it's, you know, if you can be kind, I think you can be a big success. Look at Oprah, look at Target, you know,

Well, on these note on kindness, I think is the perfect way to close. We have been so inspiring in so many ways. We talk about resilience, innovation, uh, this idea of kindness spread across

the entire journey and that manifested itself in so many different ways. Actually, I have one last question. What are you working on right now? You mentioned something earlier. Can you tell us more about that? Can we close with that?

Oh God. There's, there's a lot of things I'm working on multiple new shows that, that I'll be in front of the camera on, um, there's another Netflix show that I'm hosting that we're, I'm getting ready to head to Canada to film. Um, I'm working on a lot of other great design project with my company. We have new licensed products that are coming out, um, new, new seasons of my furniture collection coming out. Um, and then other shows that I'm working on that I'm developing for, for other talent, you know, so got my hands in a lot of different pots.

Well, Bobby congratulations, first of all, once again, but mostly never stop spreading design and kindness all around the world.

Grazie. Grazie

Prego.