

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 or 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.

Again soon. Thank you, Jon.

Our accomplishments, may be more a by-product of the community we build around us than our innate talent. Maybe what makes someone extraordinary and influential is their ability to build meaningful communities around them. I'm quoting my guest of today who is a behavioral scientist best known for his work in influence human connection. And decision-making. He specialize in applying the latest research to transform the ways company's approach, marketing, sales, consumer engagement and culture. His clients range from fortune 500 brands like Microsoft, Google, Samsung to start ups. More than a decade ago, he founded The Influencers Dinner, a secret dining experience for industry leaders ranging from Nobel prize winners to Olympians, celebrities, executives, artists, musicians, a Grammy award winners and many other interesting characters in his second book, You're Invited: The Art and Science of Cultivating Influence illustrates the importance of human connection, trust, and community to accomplishing what is more important to us. In his free time he works on outrageous projects, among them spending a year, traveling to all seven continents, or to the worlds greatest events like the Grand Prix, Arbaza, Burning Man or running of the bulls, barely surviving to tell the tale. He chronicle all of these adventure in his first book, the 2 AM Principle, Discover the Science of a Adventure.

John Levy. Welcome to In Your Shoes.

John is such a pleasure to have you with us today.

Today.

I.

Are you kidding?

I.

I love hanging out with you. You always have such a wild perspective on the world and I couldn't be more excited to be here. Thank you for having me.

So today we will listen to your wide perspective. I think it's even wider than mine. I met you several years ago in the world, uh, trade center in the, in the new tower. Um, during a conference, we were both speakers at a conference, and I remember your speech was just mind-blowing. You're such an

amazing storyteller. And then after that, you invited me to one of your dinners and we're going to talk about this in a second, but before anything else, you are a behavioral scientist. What does it mean? Well, this is an innovation podcast, you know, many designers listen to us, many innovators. We're not familiar with the behavioral scientists. What do they do?

So it's kind of funny. There's a, there's the way that we expect people to behave. And then there's the way we actually behave. And as a behavioral scientist, my job is to understand kind of the gears of the mechanics that drive our behavior. And their sometimes really weird. I'll give you an example of one study I did. This study I did with a neuroscientist by the name of Moran Cerf at Kellogg School of Management. And we were curious what actually causes people to go on a date. And so we looked at 431 million potential matches on the dating app hinge. And what we found was really weird things like if you have the same initials, you're 11% more likely to date. And that's because of a weird characteristic of human behavior called implicit egotism. Anything that reminds us of ourselves is more attractive or appealing, for the most part. And so we found that across all characteristics, the more similar you are, the more likely you are to date. So opposites don't attract.

What about the people, and I got to. I'm, I'm so curious. What about the people that apparently don't like themselves too much, they're still attracted to people that look like themselves?

Uh, so that's an interesting question. I think that in those cases you don't actively, uh, think about the fact that your initials match, right? It's something that occurs other than consciously. It has to do with familiarity. There's, here's a, you're as a designer, you might really appreciate this. Why is the Mona Lisa considered the greatest painting of all time? Why? I have to answer? Is that a rhetorical question? You could answer.

I'm gonna make a fool of myself. Go.

It's a, you know, you're Italian, you, you know, classic Renaissance piece of, uh, art. Um, but what is it that that's so special about it? And it turns out virtually nothing. So if you actually look before 1911, it hung in the Louvre under a much larger painting in a side area where, uh, the Renaissance works were. And then a Italian shop worker came in on a Monday when the Louvre was closed, walked in and grabbed literally the smallest painting he could off of the wall, tore it off, put it under his workmen smock and walked

out. It took them about two days to figure out that the painting was missing. And when it came out, countries around the world showed photos of it as news in order to, uh, kind of shame the French government for being incompetent at protecting their national museum. So this was like the first viral painting.

Three years later, when it was finally returned, it happened again in the meantime, thousands of people stood in line just to see the empty spot on the wall.

Now what makes the Mona Lisa so great, it's simply called the mere-exposure effect.

Effect. The more familiar we are with something, the more we tend to like it or trust it, it's a tendency. And so we all know the Mona Lisa, it was spread far and wide because of all these articles. And it was the first painting that the entire world knew. And so.

So if you actually speak to art critics, apparently there are plenty of DaVinci's works that are considered far greater than the Mona Lisa, but that one was the one that became famous.

So I think it's kind of those behavioral quirks are what behavioral scientists are trying to figure out, how do we actually behave? And then now that we know that, how do we use it to actually improve people's lives or help market a product or help people become friends?

Uh, actually, as you were talking about the Mona Lisa and this specific story immediately, I started to think about the art of influencing. You're a master of it, a theorist of it. When you wrote your second book is about this. You're Invited: The Art and Science of Cultivating Influence. How what you just described, help influencing others. So how can brands, companies, or communities leverage what you just described and I guess, all the levers to influence.

So it's kind of one of these funny things. When you really look at influence, it's the ability to impact a person or an outcome, right? We only care about influence to the degree that it helps us accomplish the things that we care about that could be driving a social movement. It could be getting customers to fall in love with the product. And when I really started breaking this down, in most cases, what we're talking about is a by-product of who we're connected to, how much they trust us and the sense of community that we share, right? It's really hard to influence somebody who doesn't know you exist. If they don't trust you, they're not going to believe what you say or consider your opinion. And when we share a belonging, right? So you've traveled quite extensively when you meet somebody from Italy, but you're in Japan, I'm assuming you experienced this like sudden comradery, right?

Like you're a familiarity that, you know, each other because you share the same culture that allows you to...

It's incredible because of this, it's easier to build connections with Italians when you are abroad. For instance, in New York where I live, the Italian community is very close than to build the same connection, probably with the same people in your own country. It is so true.

Yeah. So it's it. And this is, what's really interesting as a by-product you probably have more influence in the Italian community because it's so tightly knit, right? There's an experience of belonging. So what interests me the most in this area of influence is how do we use this knowledge to improve our lives? And here's something really kind of wild. There was this research study done by a guy named Paul J Zack. And he he's kinda like the oxytocin guy, you know, that chemical, that floods, when a mother, when the baby's born or it gets released, like when you hug somebody or have like these very positive social experiences, it turns out that you can track a company's stock value, employee sick days and profitability based on the level of oxytocin in people's bloodstream. Right? So fundamentally your experience of belonging defines the success of a company.

So, the stock price and value, connected to This? How do you do that? I mean, tell me more about this. I'm very curious. The connection between... Yeah,

I didn't do this specific study, but, um, I think the general premises is that if you feel really connected to the company and the people that you work with, you're not going to want to call out sick as often. You're not going to be pretending that you're sick to go take another job interview, right? You're going to want to work harder and be more committed to an organization that really cares about you than you are to one that's just using you to make as much money as possible and treating you poorly. Right? There's a, there's a kind of a great study that was done on big box companies. You know, the like Sam's clubs and the Costcos. I don't remember which one is which, but one of them pays their employees a really solid wage. And the other one tries to pay them as little as possible as a by-product their profitability per square foot of the, uh, of the one that pays the higher wage is significantly higher because you're showing the employees that you respect them and you value their effort and time.

And so when you give people a sense of belonging, whether that's, I respect you as an employee, or you give people like the privilege or the ability to design their own

break rooms and invest effort into it, then they're going to care about their work more. It's just a, a nature of human beings. There's this weird thing called the Ikea effect. And, um, the Ikea effect essentially states that we disproportionately care about our Ikea furniture because we had to assemble it. And so anything we put effort into, we care more about, uh, you know, this as a designer with the designs that you slaved over are the ones that are, that you feel like you've invested the most in there. They feel like your children almost. And so, um, I, I think when it comes to influence the, to go back to your original question, uh, there's.

There's everything that you could possibly imagine influences our decision-making from the temperature in the room to how hungry we are to, uh, if you come from the same culture. And the question is, you're either going to be affected by it, or if you are aware of it, you can potentially design an environment where you can make better decisions and affect people positively.

And so I have a huge and profound respect for people who do what you do, which is design and engineer things. Because I think that gives us the best potential to have a positive impact on the way we make decisions or think about the world.

You've been using the word positive multiple times, and I'm sure you're doing it on purpose, because I guess in years of studying the art of influencing people, you, for sure you face the ethical question, I can influence people in a positive way or I can do it in a negative way. If I give in a way the tools to influence people to anybody out there, then there will be people that use them, will use them in a positive way. And people that will use them in a negative way. So how do you control how people use the tools that you're providing them, obviously you can't control it. Right. But yeah. I mean, I see that you're using the word positive many times. What else do you do to make sure that those tools are used in the right way? We are influencing for the right purpose and the right causes?

Yeah, I, I think these questions get brought up a lot right now, especially with all of the advancements in, in tech, I'd say you, the person who invented the infinite scroll, that idea that you can keep scrolling through Instagram or Facebook forever, regrets inventing it. The problem is that we reward innovation without thinking if we should. And if we don't do it, we assume somebody else will. And so the, the answer to your question of if I can control, I can't. Right?, uh, I

sometimes might not tell people about things that can have really negative ramifications. And then my general policy works like this. If I am willing to tell you all the behavioral mechanics that I designed into something, and you're a stranger, uh, and you're okay with it, we're in the clear. So if I say, okay, I wanted you to invest effort into something, apply this Ikea effect so that you'll care more about, you came to one of my dinners, we cooked dinner together. I applied the Ikea effect. So that way you would care more about each other, because as you're cooking dinner together, you'll build a relationship faster. You're like, okay, I'm okay with that. If you found out that it was somehow to get you to start smoking cigarettes, you wouldn't be okay with it. And so my general rule is I tell people anything and everything they want to know about our designs. And then if they're okay with it, I'm in the clear. And the important thing is that it needs to be a stranger. And the reason is that Mauro you've known me for years. If I tell you about the design of something, because you like me and you've invested effort into our relationship, you'll give me a pass on a lot of things. So I don't want a pass. I want somebody being really critical to make sure that it's keeping me honest.

And so, uh, so I think that that's kind of like that, that minimum barrier, especially because it's so easy to use this knowledge in kind of funny ways, I'll give you one example. There's a, uh, the real, like master the GOAT. The greatest of all time, in terms of influence research is this guy, Robert Cialdini. He wrote the book called Influence and then he wrote a book called Pre-Suasion. And his book Pre-Suasion he looks at how do you prime the brain ahead of time so that it will already agree with you when the decision time comes. And one of the experiments he did was he had a furniture company as the background image of the website switch between pennies and feathers. And when it was feathers, people searched for soft furniture. And when it was a pennies, they searched for cheap furniture more often. Now it wasn't like a hundred percent of the cases, but it was significantly more. It was statistically significant. If you were to ask anybody who viewed that website, what the background image was, nobody would be able to tell you, right. It's just, that's not how we process information, and yet it has an impact on us. It's really, really fascinating.

You're, so the question then becomes, Oh, and here's actually take it a step back. The, uh, if I were to ask you why you bought that really soft couch, you'd be like, Oh, you know, I wanted to relax more and really be comfortable. And if I asked you,

why did you get a cheaper couch? You would say, I didn't feel it was worth the investment of spending all that money. Our brain tends to create a really clear narrative that doesn't actually include the truth of what's going on. So we won't remember it anyway. And that's why I think it's really important that I keep pointing to this, that it has a positive impact, that it's in people's best interests. One of the craziest, if you want to hear, have ever discussed Disney World?

No, we didn't.

Oh my God, Mauro.

You are going to love this. Okay. So as, as I was researching my book, I, uh, I got to go to Disney World and meet some of the people that work there. Uh, it was, we were brought in by a company and Disney world has this unique design that doesn't necessarily make sense. If you're not standing, staying on premise, you drive in, go to the parking lot. You go up an escalator and you get to a ticket counter, you buy your ticket, and then there's a 23 minute or so boat ride or monorail ride. And only then at the end of that ride, can you enter the Magic Kingdom? Now here's the question. If Disney wants to be a successful business and they want to be the happiest place on earth, why would they make you wait 23 minutes before entering?

Why?

I got this completely wrong and I do this professionally. I thought it was to build anticipation, but then I'd realize that you've probably been planning this trip for months, right? So you can't have any more anticipation. It, according to, uh, I'm going to emphasize this. I, this could be a coincidence of design that they later took credit for, or it could have actually been the design. I'm not sure, but this is what I was told. The average American earns probably about \$44,000 a year after taxes, right? That's like the average household income, a five-day pass at Disney for a family, I think is like \$1,200 bucks. Which means that when you've just shelled out the equivalent of your mortgage, car payment, you know, all, everything, like at one time, that's a kind of intense feeling and people will sometimes feel buyer's remorse. According to Disney, it takes about 20, or at least the person that I spoke to at work there, it takes about 23 minutes for buyer's remorse to kind of process for this purchase. So that by the time you get to the front entrance, you're actually ready to be happy and you're ready to spend again.

That's really interesting.

Isn't that crazy? So that way, if, even if you're not affected

by it, let's say you make a whole bunch more money and you don't have to be around a bunch of parents who are yelling at their kids because they're anxious and you're ready to spend again. So Disney is getting every damn dollar out of your pocket. So it's absolutely brilliant, but it's oddly one of these situations where it's both in the best interest of the company and in your best interest. So that way you don't remember it negatively, right? You want your memory to be positive, not that day that you yelled at the kids because you were anxious.

So this is a story that in the book?

Yeah, yeah I cover this because one of the things that I focus on.

What's the book about tell us what's the book about.

The book is about how essentially the greatest predictor of anything we care about from business success to human longevity, is a by-product of who we're connected to, how much they trust us and the sense of belonging that we share. Now, coincidentally, that's also our influence. So our ability to create an impact on anything we care about really comes down to our relationships. And there's a huge misunderstanding on what actually causes us to connect and build trust and how these things work. And so I break it down and then we do a deep dive into how to apply these things, both for companies and their culture, individuals, and, uh, their communities, uh, social causes and sales and marketing. And then really now that so many of us are kind of locked in our homes, uh, or at least, uh, doing a partial at home. And some people are going to the office. Then how do we actually manage that digitally? Because it's really hard to feel connected when we're at a distance.

And how, for instance, you, you have been organizing events for years. For many years, they were physical. There was a lot of interaction I would ask them about, I would ask about them in a second, but even before getting there, now, these events are happening digitally. How do you compensate for the lack of physical interaction while you are in front of a screen?

I think that's a really tough, um, tough answer, right? In the sense that the expectation that we can get the same thing from a digital event that we could from an in-person event, I'm not sure that's possible, but I think we can get other things. And so if I were to ask you, what has you go to an event we met at an event, right? It was a Interbrand award ceremony. I think PepsiCo was getting, uh, an award as one of the top brands in the world. What had you show up? Well, I'm going to answer, because by the way, I'm on the board of



design, the Design Management Institute, we always talk about how to get people to physical conferences. So both for me, and for many people is connecting with others, networking. You know, it's not even this speech is, is between this speeches, that coffee that you take with people you don't expect. Exactly. So here's, what's interesting. When COVID hit everybody thought, okay, people show up to events to be entertained or enlightened. So people did Zoom... Uh, was it concerts, um, WebEx meetings with a thousand people on it and you were on the tail end of it. And the problem was that it was like a really bad version of some, I don't know, YouTube video, right? Like you couldn't connect with anyone anyway, you felt completely isolated at home. And if you keeled over and died, nobody would've noticed, it's just not like a pleasant experience. So the question is, what do we do about that? And you pointed to it in a really important way. The first thing is that we were not just there to be entertained and enlightened, we want human connection. And we also want the feeling of influence. Now I say influence. I mean, if you're on a WebEx, like there's, you can't do anything. Maybe you can ask a question that they'll ignore, right? You feel like you have no impact. If you're at a concert, you can scream, shout, clap, boo, dance, whatever it is, you have an impact on the people around you, you have interactions. And so when COVID hit, we said, okay, we're going to throw out all of the designs of everything that we've done before. And we're going to start from scratch. And instead of me being the focus of the experience, what technology actually allows, and this is what's different is that now the participant can be the focus of attention and it can happen at scale, right? I can't at an in-person event, have the participant be the focus of attention at scale, right? There's limited physical space. It starts getting really expensive. But you know, with the right digital technology, I can have 200 people on and have them have very individualized experiences that feel great. And so in the first few minutes we welcome people and then we immediately send them into breakout rooms to meet other interesting people. And we keep the groups kind of small, like five or six people because in a 15 minute period, we don't want to overwhelm people. If there were 20 people in the room, then the loud ones would take over the conversation and nobody else would even talk. And then from there, we invite people back and we do super quick, like 10 minute talks with a couple of questions. And then we started doing a game show, and this is super fun. We literally created fully interactive games and they work in one of two ways. Either, we'll split people up into teams

of eight or nine in breakout rooms and we will give everybody a link with questions, trivia, all that kind of stuff.

And the first team to email all the right answers in correctly, will win. And we give them a silly prize that nobody actually wants. I mean, maybe they want it, but it's like just silly. So we had the president of Hanes, you know, like Hanes champion and all them give the winning team a year supply of underwear of his choosing, which is completely ridiculous. Like nobody needs it. They're fine. But there's something really funny about getting it from the president of Hanes. And so you see suddenly what went from a very passive experience is now fully interactive. During people's talks, we have poll questions and we quiz them and make sure they're paying attention and all these things. And then from a design perspective, we design it to, at least our intention is that you walk away with new friends. So you can see this Ikea effect by playing the game together.

You have this investment of effort into one another. So you actually connect. It's not, doesn't feel like an interview. Like I've just said, you two talk, that's awkward. Human beings, bond over a shared activity. So now you're a team, there's like an inner group and it's you versus them. And here's the other thing. What we've generally found is that people are feeling more isolated and lonely during COVID. And as a result, also anxiety is higher. And what we know is that play has an ability to reduce anxiety. Also it's a pro-social behavior that releases that oxytocin and makes us feel more belonging. So we figured the best thing we could offer people is an environment to connect. And that's well, curated, something that's fundamentally novel and different so that they don't know what to expect. And so they become curious and want to engage. And then on top of it, give them the ability to connect with each other and activities that actually let them bond and make new friends. Because most of us haven't made new friends in a while.

Yeah. Entertraining and Terrell pale tickle. We can label it that way. So I mentioned it now twice, the, the dinner you invited me to, you invited me to dinner and you made me cook, but not just once, multiple times. And yet that has been one of the most memorable dinners I ever had. The first one, then the, the one after, you made me meet Nobel prizes and celebrity actors and musicians and CEOs and people interesting, no matter the title and the label. Can you tell us more about these dinners? You need to tell us more.

For sure. Uh, so I'm really proud of this. Uh, when I was about, let's say 29 or so, I was like the stereotypical kid not

living up to his potential. Right? Like literally my parents were like, what's he doing with his life? We don't understand. And the answer is, I didn't know, like it's us trying to figure things out. And I, uh, I came across a study by these two guys, Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler. They were curious about the obesity epidemic. And they were curious, does it spread from person to person like a cold, or is it a percentage of the population like Alzheimer's, right? So you don't get Alzheimer's shaking hands with somebody who has Alzheimer's, to the best of our knowledge. And it's something that develops over the lifetime. And what they found was startling. If you have a friend who is obese, your chances of obesity increase 45%, your friends who don't know them have a 20% increased chance and their friends have a 5% increased chance, which means that it goes several degrees away from the person.

This is also true for happiness, marriage and divorce rates, smoking habits and voting habits. And what's amazing about this is that we all want good habits, but we don't think, Oh, maybe what I need to do is curate or select the people around me in order to have them. And so I wanted to connect with the most influential people I could, because I figured if I'm going to get financial advice, it might as well be by some like super successful business person, not, you know, my buddy who's been crashing on my couch for a week. And, uh, and then I realized that the real strength of, of connecting with people isn't just to know them, it's for them to know the people that you know, because with each additional relationship that's positive, they're having a positive impact on each other. And they're getting them closer to you as a friend.

Right. So I can't see you all the time, but if you're friends with 20 of my friends, suddenly we're staying up to date on each other's lives. Even though I, I don't know exactly what's happening today. Uh, so what I ended up doing was kind of modeling the behavior of influential people and to prove it out, I created a secret dining experience and the way the dining experience works is 12 people usually come together. They don't know each other ahead of time, and they're not allowed to talk about their career or even give their last name. And then I do something absolutely ridiculous. I make them cook dinner together. And when they sit down to eat, we play a game where people guess what everybody else does. And then there's this big reveal. And so, as you said, Mauro, you find out that somebody is a Nobel Laureate and Olympic medalist and editor in chief of a magazine or a C level executive at one of the largest companies in the world. And, uh, and it's

been a real privilege hosting everybody. And what's really amazing is just how terrible the meal is and how much people enjoy it. Like, you know, it's fine. .

Because we're cooking it right?

It's like, it's 12 people who don't know how to cook, who are usually like very career oriented and probably order in more than they make their own meals. Uh, but it's also burritos. So like think slightly worse than Chipotle and Chipotle is great. Right. But like, you know, it's all of you could afford to go to like some Michelin star restaurant. It's definitely not that. So.

It's, uh, it's amazing how you build the business out of it right? Met, many people listening to us right now, uh, they they're thinking what is going to be my future? What could I do? I mean, in the moment of your life, the business is not that nobody's paying for this experience.

Oh yeah, i pay for it. I'm.

Sure you're building your network and your connections, something valuable for you on top of the inspiration. So, you know, I think many people listening to this podcast, once again, they are in the phase that they're figuring out what to do next. And often these conversations are in inspiration for them. By the way you were, when you created these dinners around the period, I guess you wrote your first book anyway.

That some years later.

Years later?

Yeah. your.

But this books about something you're doing all around the world, right. The 2AM Principle, tell us about that.

I. So I started the dinners back in 2009, 2010, sometime around then. The, uh, and just as a point of clarification nobody's ever paid for a dinner and it's completely free. Um, I needed to figure out a way that was really inexpensive to bring people together because I had no money, right? Like the supplies for burritos, aren't very expensive. Even at the scale of 12 people, versus like, you know, if Pepsi were to host an event for these people, they would spend a fortune to impress them. I didn't have that. So very fortunately for all of you listening, who aren't in the best financial situation to spend a fortune on these kinds of things, I've found no significant evidence that more money makes connecting with humans better. Right? If you look at the poorest communities, they're often bonded the most and that's because of the need to invest effort into each other.

So if you don't have a ton of money and you still want to have amazing relationships, that's not an issue. Now you asked

about the, the 2:00 AM principle, uh, as I was running these dinners around 2013, I started, uh, or actually even before, I started realizing that living in New York gave me a very, very specific view of the world. And I realized that I didn't want to spend every, all of my free time trying to get into nightclubs and all that kind of stuff. It just, wasn't something that interested me to do all the time. So I made a policy to start traveling at least one weekend, every month, I'd have to leave the city. Now you've taken that to the next level Mauro I see your Instagram. And your like, you you're my hero these days. Um,

Well, we're both thirsty for experiences, right? And again, you don't need, you said, it's not about money, You can take your car or a train and there are amazing places you can visit with no money.

Public transportation.

Sleeping in motel.

Assuming like you can afford the, the amount for like a bus ticket or a train. You can go gorgeous places around the city for very little, um, or you could get a bunch of friends to chip in for gas and then get one of them to drive the, so I made the policy that one weekend, every month I would have to leave the city and that developed and kept evolving. So as my career improved and my work improved, I was able to afford a little bit more. And by 2013, I'd make these completely insane, uh, goals. So 2013, I said, every month I would travel to the biggest event in the world, wherever it was. So one weekend I'd run off from work. I'd kind of like leave on a Thursday night, right after work. I'd take like one day off and I'd go to Pamplona for running of the bulls, or I'd go to Burning Man.

I'd go to, uh, I went to Antarctica one time, not for a weekend. That was the sorry. That was the next year's project where I went to all seven continents in eight months. Um, so yeah, I've, I was, uh, crushed by a bull and almost died in Pamplona. I went to, uh, to what is it? A Nice, not Nice. Oh yeah. I went to Nice during, uh, the Cannes film festival and, and I made this absurd challenge to myself that either I was going to convince a stranger to put me up for the night or I would sleep on the streets. Like I, I just would play games with myself to see how good I could become interacting with people socially. And this wasn't like, my objective wasn't to,

By the way, did you sleep on the street? Or.

Oh my god, it was so crazy. I ended up staying in a three story mansion, uh, on the border of Monaco. Uh, and it was just

these random guys that I met at a bar. I had no idea. We were just having drinks together. And, uh, by the end of the night, they're like, Oh, let's go. And so we all piled into a cab and I had no idea where we were going. Uh, when, when we got out, we were at like, w uh, it turns out that one of the kids was really, really wealthy and it was his parents' home. And, uh, and so I ended up staying in this like ultra posh house and making, you know, four o'clock in the morning meal for everyone. And it was just a wild experience.

It's fun. It's funny. I'm asking because I did sleep on the street in Nice, when I was.

Oh did you?

Like 18, 19. Like you I wanted to experience and do things. I didn't have a penny. I remember I went to Spain, camping for like three weeks in vacation. And then on the way back, I was like, okay, from Spain to Italy I'm gonna stop to all the interesting places by train, I just pay the ticket train. So it doesn't cost me anything. I didn't have the money to sleep anywhere. And so the most of the time I was asleep on the beach or on the street. So in Nice I end up sleeping in the street with my backpack as a pillow. And the morning after, in Nice, I find my backpack completely cut open, and they stole multiple items from my, from my backpack while I was sleeping, that's how tied I was, or how stupid, I was by the way also. But yes, that's why when you say maybe I, you know, I was going to sleep in Nice immediately, that experience came to mind. So wild.

So you, you went to all these places and then you wrote a book about this.

Yeah. Uh, so my first book was about the science of adventure, right? What is it to live a fun, exciting, and remarkable life?

And kind of the conclusion of it is that.

Our life is in the, or the size of our life is in direct proportion to how uncomfortable we're willing to be. And if we really look at great adventures, they have three characteristics. One is that they're exciting and remarkable. They're worth talking about, right. They make great stories. As a culture, and you know this is a designer. If it's not worth talking about, it's not culturally relevant,

Right. We pass down our knowledge through an oral history. The second is it possesses adversity and or risk, preferably perceived risk. So they're perceived risks like public speaking, asking somebody out, or I don't even know, uh, launching a company. If, if you screw everything up in most cases, you're still fine, right?

You're going to be alive, you're safe. You're going to be able to

cover your next meal. It's all going to be okay. Then there's peril, right? Climbing Everest, kind of dangerous. A lot of people die. That has actual peril. So I say pref preferably perceived risk because much like when you were backpacking, chances were you, weren't actually going to get hurt at any point. You might've ended up having to call a family member or friend embarrassed that you need money to get home, but you probably had some kind of safety net somewhere. And then the third is it brings about growth. The person you are at the end is different than the person who started. And that's kind of that classic hero's journey, you're changed by the experience. And so my objective was for that year, and actually the following year was to put myself in situations that were uncomfortable as possible.

I don't mean uncomfortable as possible like, you know, giving an embarrassing wedding speech. I mean, ones that actually caused me to grow. Ones that forced me to develop new skills or a higher capacity. And, um, that to me became kind of this goal. And it would be things like, Oh, wow, that looks like a really high jump into that Lake. That terrifies me. I should definitely do it. Um, and, uh, that's kind of what the book's about. It's the journey of me going from incredibly awkward, uncomfortably socially, uh, to slightly less uncomfortable, uh, and you know, slightly less geeky, but still being a lover of science. And, and in the process, I got crushed by a bull and Pamplona and almost died. I needed to take, be taken to the emergency room, uh, and battled Kiefer Sutherland in drunken Jenga, and won an invitation to his family Thanksgiving, that he forgot. I, and he invited me to. And so when I showed up, he was like, who are you and what are you doing here? Um, but then he realized that he did it while he was drunk and was very nice about the whole thing.

And by the way, I read the book, I'm listening to you and immediately I'm drawing a parallel with what we do as innovators in PepsiCo, and also outside of PepsiCo, an innovator of the world every day. You know, what you describe innovation is again about creating something that is worth talking about worth sharing, there is always perceived risk and eventually a peril, but the most of the time is a perceived risk. And you need to manage that perceived risk and understand how to build confidence in your organization, your customers, you know, your investors that that's the perceived risk. And understanding, what is it really? What are the consequences of those risks? If things go wrong. And then finally, it's all about growing, growing personally, but through your innovation, growing your

company, your products, your enterprise, whatever you're doing. Uh, so there, there is a direct connection with the world of innovation, right? So innovation is adventurous by definition.

I would absolutely agree. And I think that there's a whole bunch of things that you could do from a behavioral science perspective that would reduce the risk and increase buy-in. So remember the Mona Lisa story about how it got stolen. Yeah. Uh, there's this desire, especially as somebody who's like works kind of in the creative field to do this like big presentation and wow people, right. Suddenly I'm unveiling this thing. Now that can work with technology because it's people go, Oh my God. Wow. Right. But if I need approval for stuff, it's actually better to use the mere exposure effect. I want to introduce people to the idea slowly over time. So it fits in what Allen Gannett calls, the creative curve have you come across this idea? That Gannett in his book describes it as a curve where on the far end are things that are extremely creative.

Uh, but not necessarily for everybody think Bjork, right. Everybody would say, Oh, an amazing artists. But the number of people who listen to Bjork is like questionable. Right? Then there are things that are really familiar. They feel very safe. So, uh, it might be that song that you heard for the 10000th time. You like it, but you're like, great. I, you know, it's kinda been overplayed.

Creativity is somewhere between this esoteric kind of craziness and familiarity. It has to be familiar enough that it's safe and new enough that it feels original. And so by, you could come up with the most original, incredible thing. But if nobody's been exposed to anything like it before it'll sit so far out there, that people won't feel comfortable with it.

So by exposing the executives over time to the idea, piece by piece and getting them to invest effort into it, so you get that Ikea effect, they'll care more about it, and they'll think it as better on the creative curve.

I, you know, I, this is so true. And, and to hear this coming from a scientist, somebody that, you know, knows what he's talking about because he studied, you studied the human mind, and by the way, you have also data to support your theories. It's very interesting. I, I call it the quest for confidence, is a phase in the five phases of innovation. I'm, I've been decodifying in my life from denial to the occasional leap of faith. Uh, I mean, either rejection, denial, little rejection, occasionally leap of faith. The quest for confidence is the full phase where essentially you're trying to



beat confidence in the organization that what you're doing is the right thing to do and manage that risk and bring in people with you involved in that step by step, build familiarity, uh, with, with the idea you're developing in a journey in a process.

It's so, so, so important. And I think one of the problems in many companies is that often there is a disconnection between the people that actually work on the projects, and then all the stakeholders that need to invest in the product, approve the project or take the tough decision to go or not to go. And often you try to fill that gap with tons of data and consumer research and, and, and, and essentially insights that are trying to rebuild the confidence in your organization that what you're doing is the right thing to do. But most of the time, this is not enough, I mean, I usually say, listen to your consumers, do not believe them. You need so much more, you know, you need to listen to them, but they know what they know. They looking at the past, they can't predict the future.

So you need so much more. And what you just describe, you know, in a way that just you, you can do it that way, you know, with data and science is so powerful and so true. Uh, Jon, I could go on and on for hours talking with you. And by the way, I really think we should have another conversation. Maybe in a few months we'll organize and you interview if you're willing to, because I didn't even start with the list of questions that I had. Literally, I didn't go, I wanted to ask you about failure. I wanted to ask you about, you know, consumer insights and branding, and many other things we touched on some of them in the way or the other, this conversation was so natural and so interesting. And I heard you speaking to people and to me, so many times, you have so much to share. So first of all, I recommend everybody to read your first book and the new one that is from, May is gonna is, is available, um, everywhere. Uh, the title is, let me read again, You're Invited, the Art and Science of Cultivating Influence. Uh, but then, uh, again, I want to thank you for spending the time.

This has been so much fun Mauro. Thank you for having me on. And we'll talk again soon. Thank you, Jon.