



Transcript of “Fat Burning Man with Abel James”

Bulletproof Radio podcast #48



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DAVE: Today's cool fact of the day is that, before we used mercury in thermometers, we actually used brandy, believe it or not. It turns out that alcohol has a different density than water, and by using glass bulbs filled with brandy or other alcohols floating in water, you could tell the temperature of the room by looking at which sphere floated to the highest or lowest level.

You're listening to podcast 48. Alright, this is Dave Asprey here, and I've got Abel James on the line. Abel James runs [Fat Burning Man](#), which is a really popular #1 iTunes ranked podcast. #1 iTunes ranked in the same sense that this podcast has been #1 iTunes ranked in that iTunes keeps changing who's top ranked, but it's awesome that Abel has beat me many times for the number one spot. Abel, welcome to the show, man.

ABEL: Thanks so much Dave, it's awesome to be here. We're gonna have some serious fun.

DAVE: You can count on it because you're one of the other guys out there who talks about being a bio-hacker openly, which is kinda like coming out of the closet in some ways.

ABEL: It's a dirty little secret. It's funny. Because I get definitely some blowback because I'm all about eating real food and being natural with the body and that sort of thing but also ultimate performance at the same time. And so sometimes it's difficult to reconcile those.

DAVE: It's kind of convenient that eating real food makes you perform better.

ABEL: Right.

DAVE: Because there's a nice crossover. I mean if I had to eat bowls of silicon chips or something, that's not very Paleo, but I think I might do it as long as I knew that I was gonna live longer, feel better, like, be a better part of the system of the earth. But in the meantime, I'll take my real food because it tastes better than bowls of silicon wafers.

ABEL: Yeah. Well it's not that different from fish oil, right? It's kind of a weird

unnatural thing to take a slug of fish oil every day. Like, fermented cod liver oil, but it's a similar principle.

DAVE: I thought you were gonna take a slug. Like, slugs are not Paleo, I checked.

ABEL: I would do that too. I would not put it past me. I'm gonna be drinking snake blood in Thailand in two days, so we'll see.

DAVE: Nice. I've only done that in Taipei. I didn't know they did that in Thailand.

ABEL: But we're gonna...bouncin around a bit.

DAVE: You're gonna have an awesome time in your upcoming trip. Alright, I gotta ask you. Last time I went to Thailand was just like, for a day trip, and I wanted to go to a medical clinic there because you could do all sorts of stuff for almost free in Thailand that would cost 10's of thousands of dollars here. Like lab testing, and imaging, and even surgery, not that I need any work done. But I noticed you do—no I'm just kidding.

ABEL: Well thank you.

DAVE: So what're you gonna do there, biohacking wise, where you're spending a few weeks in Thailand?

ABEL: I think try new things. Try new foods. One thing that I also really wanna do is give my adrenals a bit of a rest because this is gonna be my first day off all year pretty much. It's been bananas. So I wanna get more into meditation, preferably on the beach. I actually had taken my [em Wave2](#), I'm gonna see if I can make that even a little bit better because I actually get something way back in the day. I think I was 14. I used to buy and sell things on eBay because we were poor and I needed to make money come out of somewhere because I wanted to do fun stuff. And I bought this thing called the Relax O Mat and it was this crazy Russian thing that measured your galvanic skin response. So I kind of learned similar tactics way back then. And it's interesting to see how that applies in like, some things that I did work with [em Wave 2](#), and other things don't. So I'm gonna be focusing on that a little bit and just reading a heck of a lot.

DAVE: It's kind of nice to be able to have some unplugged time. You know, bandwidth is available there, and wifi, but you'll be able to avoid over-communicating, which is pretty relaxing when you get a chance for that.

ABEL: Totally! It's kind of like anti bio-hacking I guess. Disconnecting from everything. You know, what's interesting about it, and it's cool that you've even worked this into the [Bulletproof Exec](#) thing. It's a dude meditating, right?

DAVE: Yeah!

ABEL: It's all getting back to what we should be doing at it's simplest. At it's most natural point when you're getting to like, Nirvana in your own brain. And we can kind of use these mechanical or electronic ways of getting there, or this crazy technology that allows us to measure something or even effects our own bodies, but we're all trying to get to that same point.

DAVE: Yeah. And honestly, when I was in Thailand I didn't go to any of the meditation stuff there, but I did it in Nepal. And I did it in Tibet. And I spent 10 days at a Buddhist monastery following Buddhist rules and farting a lot because it was all vegetarian food. By the way, that interrupts your meditation terribly.

ABEL: I'm sure. And the person behind you.

DAVE: Exactly. What do you mean behind me? I'm talking 3 rows in all directions! So, the problem with that approach for me was really powerful. When you do meditation in a group setting. It actually has more of an effect, as far as I can tell. Even according to some of the studies I've read about measurable biosignals. But it's slow! Like, it takes years and years, maybe one of the fastest paths is Zen, but it's also like, one of the more dangerous paths. People who are hardcore zen practitioners, a not small number of them can have psychological issues come up from it because it's such a fast path.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: So some of them read Samadhi. They become enlightened and they have amazing experiences and many have great benefit, but it is a high risk approach according to some of the teachers that I've worked with who are themselves huge

fans of Zen.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: So, like, it's always important as a bio-hacker to keep in mind the risk. And when you look on radical amounts of personal growth in short amounts of time, how do you kind of put rubber bumpers up so that you can be safer?

ABEL: You know, that's a really good point. I was just talking to one of my team members, Chris, about this on my own podcast. And so he knew that I was getting into smart drugs and experimenting with different supplements and that sort of thing a while back, and occasionally he comes over to the house and I'm just like, "hey you know what, I have a bunch of extra, some of the racetams, do you want them?" And he's like "Yes, absolutely!" And then he started reading up on mega-dosing and things like that. And he sends me this text a couple days later and he's just like dude, I just had the worst crash. I could not get out of my bed for like—it's been almost two days now. Have you ever experienced this? And I'm like, no I-- "What did you do?" And it turns out he just mega-dosed on piracetam specifically, and a few other ones, kind of a cocktail, and just couldn't get himself out of bed after that. Like, he was rocking the house after that for 2 days and then completely crashed. And I think that's a good example. Ya know that's been supported by science for a while and it's not very toxic at all, it's pretty safe, but at the same time, if you push it to the limits, you could totally blow yourself out. It's not a good idea to always be mega-dosing or trying to overshoot something that's—especially something that's altering you in some way.

DAVE: Yeah. There's, you know, a U-shaped response curve usually, or upside down U-shaped depending.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: And sometimes both overlapping. And sometimes a very small dose can have a big effect. And sometimes you hit that medium ground where you're like, "Okay, this is good" and you go higher. Maybe you get less effect or you get even more, but it's the wrong kind of effect.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: And the dose curve is very different. I mean, for the racetams. My buddy [Steve Fowkes](#), who spoke alongside you at the bio-hacking conference that we put on earlier this year. He'll take 10 grams of piracetam sometimes.

ABEL: Wow.

DAVE: In order to reset some circadian rhythm things, but also he does that knowing as the author of smart drugs and nutrients too, like he knows what he's doing. He's the guy I go to if I can't solve something. So from that perspective, it's like "well yeah, Dave, I'm one of the people with too much Acetylcholine so for me it helps to drain the Acetylcholine." Your buddy, Chris, he probably depleted his Acetylcholine, and if you're listening to this and you don't know what Acetylcholine is, that's alright. It's a neurotransmitter that's stimulating. So we need to have a balance of that and dopamine and other famous neurotransmitter. But if you have too little Acetylcholine, you're in bed, you feel just bleh. If you have too much of it, you get jaw tension and muscle pain and twitching. And you feel agitated and really unpleasant.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: It's kind of funny. I'm also one of those people with too much Acetylcholine. I didn't use to be. I think--

ABEL: Oh this is interesting.

DAVE: Yeah, I think probably from taking way too much Alpha glycerylphosphorylcholine or Alpha GPC as it's called, and all the other forms of choline, you can buy as supplements, for about 10 years I took relatively high doses of that every single day. And I think my body was like, okay, you got enough Acetylcholine and the other drugs like huperzine and things like that. They prevent your body from breaking it down. So it's very individual how it works and that's why my typical recommendation for people is like, aniracetam. Just try that. And it comes on quickly and it goes away quickly.

A; Yeah.

DAVE: And it's not gonna blow you out, even if you're someone low on Acetylcholine or you're someone high on Acetylcholine and from there go up and try some phenylpiracetam or piracetam and I finally found the source for phenylpiracetam now so I'm like completely stoked I love that.

ABEL: Oh nice. That's awesome. So when you're taking these, what are you actually doing? Like, what is the end goal?

DAVE: Rocking the entire day. I take them in the morning. My goal is to record awesome podcasts, write awesome content, make awesome coffee, have an awesome time playing with my kids. You know, stay up as late as I like, you know, having an awesome time with my wife after the kids go to bed, and then sit back down at the PC and then do what I wanna do and go to bed and wake up feeling awesome again. Like, I want all awesomeness recognizing that it's not, at least not possible within what we know today.

ABEL: Yes.

DAVE: To completely be at 110% like that all the time, because there's a natural rhythm to the body.

ABEL: Mmhmm.

DAVE: We wanna go high and go low and you know, you have times of the month, even as a man where you have more energy or less energy. And you have times of the day. And so trying to turn the volume up but still honor the natural curve of the day, and recognize, "Oh, it's an afternoon lull, even though I feel really awesome, could I take a nap now, but I'm not like so overstimulated I couldn't possibly take a nap because aaaah!" Ya know? What's your take on all this?

A: I think that's a really good point. Because I'm definitely all about rhythms and that sort of thing. And I think being a musician made me recognize that. Like, sometimes you sit down and nothing happens. Like, you can try to write a song or play a new lick, or do something creative, but you can't force it out of you. Other times, and it's usually about the same time of day. It just flows out of you. You know, like a song is there. In forty minutes you're like "I have no idea where this came from, it just worked." And I think once you start recognizing the patterns in your

own behavior, whether it be with working out sometimes if you can deadlift 50 pounds more in the afternoon than you can in the morning, maybe you should be doing it in the afternoon. Maybe you should be doing something else in the morning. So I think it's really important to recognize you can't be going at 110% all the time. You have to find those little idiosyncrasies about your own behavior and physiology and then follow those to reach ultimate performance. And sometimes the best thing you can do is not do anything.

Like, a personal example of that. In Krav, I was doing a reverse backfist at the end of class, like basically, they try to kill you at the beginning of class so at the end you're just completely smoked and it was sloppy form, did it completely wrong and I knew it as soon as I hit the pad that I had basically—I don't think I tore it, but I strained my shoulder and I'm like “Oh god” because your shoulder, I mean, it's something that you completely take for granted, right? But you use it for absolutely everything. Especially as it relates to working out. So I've basically been on my butt for 3 weeks and just started working out again. But I knew if I pushed it and I went back too soon, then I'd be on my butt for 3 months, right? Like, I'd still get a workout in, but I'd completely crush my shoulder and I wouldn't be able to do anything. So sometimes, the best thing you can do is take that time off. And there are even studies that support taking a week off every few months is absolutely essential if you want to level up again thereafter. So I think it's important to honor that stuff.

DAVE: The hardest part of exercise for the kind of people who listen to this podcast is usually, really, it's not exercise at all, it's recovery!

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: And what you're talking about having a week to let the body consolidate it's gains and to retrench and understand there's more stimulation coming, but get the house in order.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: So many of my clients. These guys are like monster entrepreneur people. They're also like “Yeah I'm gonna do the iron man!” I talked to a guy who's done the Ironman Kona like, 13 times.

ABEL: Wow.

DAVE: And I'm working with him and he's this amazing guy. But he has every sign of adrenal burnout ever because he's working out like 6 days a week for an hour or two and just like, you can just see the definition of burning the candle on both ends! So your recommendation there about take an hour off, that's really cool.

ABEL: Yeah. And it works! I think to some degree it's really easy to plateau if you're a Type A personality like us, like you're just gunning for it all the time, so it's really easy. You almost get used to doing the same level of performance which may or may not be high every single day. But when you take time away, I even lost a little bit of muscle mass. It didn't bother me too much. I lost a lot of strength, but as soon I came back to the 2nd workout, I almost got all of it back. So then it's like you're priming your body for growth again. And so like, maybe the next one it won't be double but it'll be bigger again instead of doing the same workout over and over again. And you can apply this to productivity as well or something artistic in nature. But taking that time off sometimes allows you to get to that next level and that's pretty frickin cool.

DAVE: It is really cool. And biohacking lets you do some stuff that's not supposed to be normal.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: One of the UFC fighters who's an ambassador for bulletproof, he went for a month after his last fight and didn't do anything except for once a week kind of basic workout and he was hardcore on the bulletproof diet. And he did a class where he fought 13 people in 1 evening.

ABEL: Geez.

DAVE: And he shot a video right afterwards and sent it over and he's like "Dave, I'm so strong I feel like I could hurt people!" Which is kinda good if that's your business right?

ABEL: Right!

DAVE: But he was blown away because that wasn't the diet he was on before. And

the amount of maintenance you can do when you crank up the fat, like, that's amazing! So you get the recovery without the loss that comes during recovery for a lot of people. Like that's the sort of thing—okay we're doing it like UFC fighters and Olympic champion stuff. That's like the formula one race car of the world and what a lot of people don't know is what they're doing in formula one racing makes it's way into your Toyota Camry in 10 or 15 years after they pioneer this on the track.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: I look at guys like this as being the race cars and what they're doing and honestly what you and I are doing right now. Some of the stuff around sleep and music and everything. That'll make its way into normal population stuff within five years because things have sped up. Thank you Internet. And we're not the supply chain like we do for a racecar building. It takes a long time to re-engineer cars. It doesn't take so long to re-engineer human behavior because there isn't a factory involved.

ABEL: Very true. Yeah and that's an interesting point because when I first got into all of this from the fitness and nutrition perspective, I wanted to do something different because what I thought was healthy and what my doctor and the magazines and everyone said was healthy clearly was not. It was not working well for me. I was sick, I was all sorts of jacked up. So basically looking for those exceptions. Where things shouldn't be working. Like, Mark Sisson shouldn't be 60 and have a six pack. Clearly something he's doing has got to be right, right? People should not be at 3% body fat. That's ridiculous. But there's something that they're doing that's leading them to get there. So what are those things?

And I think that's an interesting corollary when you look at Formula 1 racing. Any sort of inefficiency when you're performing at that level, the wheels will fall off pretty quick if you're going 200mph where it won't if you're going 40mph in your Toyota Camry, right? So looking for those efficiencies and applying them to your own life can make some pretty major results pretty quickly. Especially if you're looking specifically for those efficiencies.

DAVE: Yeah it's incredible what that can do. And you don't have to do everything and kind of, you know, people—biohacking? Lately I've been getting a lot of emails and all from women in their late 50s and 60s on the bulletproof diet. And I love

women in their 50s and 60s because they have so much wisdom I can learn from. In fact I have two of them working for bulletproof who are so amazing! And when I hear what they're saying, I know they don't think of themselves as “oh I'm a biohacker”.

ABEL: Right?

DAVE: But, do they wanna take advantage of the gains that come from biohacking?

ABEL: Right.

DAVE: You bet your ass! And those are the same idea, okay I'm driving a Camry, I'm not gonna go to the track, I'm not a safety driver, but do I want the safety improvements that a racecar driver developed by driving into a wall? You bet I do!

ABEL: Right! That's a really good point. And you've mentioned this a few times in your talk where you'll apply this super high level stuff to a normal person and the gains can be massive really really quickly.

DAVE: It's really kinda funny. It's like taking your Volvo and it's just a normal car and I say that because we have a Volvo, my wife is Swedish so that's the car you drive if your Swedish.

ABEL: There ya go.

DAVE: And so, if you just put wheels on the car which sounds kinda ridiculous and yes I did that because I had a racing Volvo—one of 3000 ever made--

ABEL: Really? That's awesome.

DAVE: Oh dude. It rocked. I even met the woman who made them. It was amazing. A 300 horsepower Brembo brakes, twin turbo, and it looked like a station wagon and it could smoke most cars out of there.

ABEL: That's nice.

DAVE: To get beaten by a station wagon is emasculating. So I got—anyway, back to

the biohacking. The car hacking's different. But what I did when I sold that thing was I had two sets of wheels. So I put the 18 inch high performance wheels and tires on my wife's 2001 Volvo wagon. And we keep thinking we should sell it, it's getting old, but it looks like new Volvos anyway and it drives like a new Volvo and it doesn't have that many miles on it, so it's like our daily car. But when you put those wheels on it, it was like getting a new car. It was just one performance improvement from the racecar, but it handles twice as well. It stops better. Everything is so much safer in that car from one little tweak.

ABEL: Yeah! That's really cool!

DAVE: Yeah! And it's the same for our bodies! Like Oh, I'm just gonna add MCT oil! Holy crap! Like, [MCT oil](#) will rock your world! And that's why I get a little bit territorial around the [bulletproof coffee recipe](#). Like, no you've gotta try it just once with actual MCT oil! Because it takes good with lots of stuff in it, but if you get the MCT in there, you'll feel a benefit that's different.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: So like, mix and match and put olive oil if you want in there, it'll taste gross, whatever turns you on but at least splash some MCT in there because you'll feel it!

ABEL: Yeah. [MCT's](#) are decidedly different. As long as you don't overdo them in the beginning. I actually, right before we recorded this, I had got an email from someone who tried the Super MCT and he said they were frickin awesome. I would love to try those.

DAVE: Oh I'll send you some [Brain Octane Oil](#). It took a long time to like, supply it, to get it so we could get it.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: So it didn't taste like crap. Most of the MCT you can get is not very pure, so it tastes kind of "goaty" is the right word.

ABEL: Goaty? I know what you mean.

DAVE: Yeah. So this stuff, it tastes just like regular MCT but the mental effects are substantially good and the disaster pants effects are noticeably less. And by disaster pants, if you're listening to this and you don't know what MCT oil is; MCT oil's medium chain triglyceride. It's extracted from coconut or palm oil and it's one that directly fuels your cells with energy in a way different than sugar or carbs do. So, Abel, you and I basically walk around with an unfair advantage because we have glucose metabolism running, which means we get some of our energy from carbs, but we also have ketone metabolism running which means we get a lot of our cell energy from fat and specifically something from ketones, and MCT oils, which have to be extracted from coconut for you to get the full dose they actually fuel that cellular energy cycle really efficiency.

ABEL: Yeah. And it's like a clean burn not distracting way of getting energy. That's kind of the way that I think about it. A lot of times, if I eat breakfast it's distracting and I'm hungry later. And you can tell when you're in digestion mode as opposed to MCTs or butter or other clean burning fats like that. It's not distracting, you can be productive. You know you're not eating but you're also not hungry and you have plenty of energy. It's a very cool feeling.

DAVE: It is. Like, I had a client in the UK. She's this massive sugar addict. To the point she wouldn't keep any food in her house. She's like "I just snack. I snack all the time. I can't control myself."

ABEL: Wow.

DAVE: So of course that meant she ate crap food because she had to go out and buy prepared stuff all the time.

ABEL: Wow.

DAVE: So it took within three days. She just was like "Dave, I have zero sugar cravings! I just look at sugar and I don't even miss it, I don't even care!" And she was like, completely flabbergasted about this. Isn't that cool?

ABEL: Yeah! That, to me, happened to a degree as well. I was definitely addicted to carbs. And now if I see something, it doesn't look like food. Like, if it's sugary and it's a cake, unless we made it ourselves and I know what's in it, it just doesn't look like

food and it doesn't lead to that same sort of Pavlov's dog effect of salivating and being like I need this in my belly right now.

DAVE: Yeah. Like the bagels lose their power.

ABEL: Yeah! Exactly!

DAVE: You just see it there like “why did you bring that crap in here? I’m not gonna eat that! It's not good for me!” I would even, before I figured this stuff out, even when I had lost 50 of the 100 pounds I lost and I was low carb and I'm looking and I would just drain my willpower all day long sitting in meetings at work with cookies and those stupid bowls of candy they put in offices to make people eat and I'm like, I'm not gonna have the candy. And then ten seconds later “I'm not gonna have the candy” and it's like my inner Labrador that's inside my nervous system that's like “must eat food” and it was interrupting my daily thoughts and my inner Labrador is like, “Have enough fat. Screw the food.”

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: And like, it just turns off. And I love that because food has lost it's power over me entirely. And it's not because I manned up and I got more willpower. Willpower's a finite resource. We've proven that. So you can get more energy and apply that to willpower, but it's still finite. So I don't waste my willpower.

ABEL: Yeah. And I think it applies more largely to decisions too. You know, if you have a crazy day that's why your willpower is all used up at the end and people start stuffing ho hos down their throats because they just don't have anything left. I remember especially before going to Thailand, all my days are packed with interviews and decisions with the different businesses that I run, and my girlfriend who works with me as well, comes up to me and asks me--I don't even remember what the question was but it was something really specific, and I just looked her in the eye and I was like “I literally cannot answer that question right now. I did not hear what you said.”

DAVE: Did you see the post that I wrote on decision making fatigue?

ABEL: No! But that sounds awesome.

DAVE: You should read it. And you might even wanna blog about the same idea. What I said in mine is very similar to your experience and of course I went into the science behind it, but my wife Lana will text me and say do you want lunch at 12 or 12:15 and literally, that's another decision that I have to make. And like you, I have my day job, working at a trend micro as a vice president and then I have the whole Bulletproof which is really starting to take a lot of time. I started it to help people, and it's become, it has employees and it's become of national prominence. Half a million people a month. So given all that stuff, I'm like "I can't make any more decisions right now without it costing me enormously, so could you just tell me when lunch is?"

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: And I developed this kinda mean habit. She said do you want lunch at 12 or 12:15 and I would reply "yes".

ABEL: Wait, you really do that?

DAVE: Totally!

ABEL: And she doesn't slap you in the face?

DAVE: She does but I think she kinda likes that so it's okay.

ABEL: Okay, there you go.

DAVE: But it's kinda funny because the first few times she was like "no what do you want?" and I would just keep saying "Yes, both" and so I realized that wasn't the nicest thing to do and she was laughing about it, she wasn't that upset and I finally just explained "Could you just be more bossy?" Like, I need a bossy wife because I just can't think about lunch is gonna be now or then because that's a set of work that sounds lame but it's not.

ABEL: Oh it's true! And I have so much respect for people who can plan logistics for events and things like that. I feel like I could never handle that because of the amount of rabbit holes you need to drive your mind down through in order to think

of all the possible things that could happen. It's just mind boggling and it's just not that interesting to me. I was just at a wedding and everything was perfect, right? Except. They didn't have napkins at the tables. And so it was a disaster for like half the people there that are like, what are we gonna do? Wipe our fingers on our tuxes and gowns?

DAVE: That's what cummerbunds are originally for. The little folds point up to catch crumbs.

ABEL: That's pretty cool! Now I like that.

DAVE: I have no idea.

ABEL: I wasn't wearing one at the time. I'd better invest in one of those.

DAVE: Get camo because it won't show the stains.

ABEL: Okay, that's a fashion statement too. I dig it. It'll be a new look.

DAVE: Totally, it'll be the bio-hacker look. You have a tux and it's camo.

ABEL: If we weren't cool enough already, we've totally got it.

DAVE: So we were talking about decision making fatigue, but we haven't talked about something that I wanted to pin you on in our interview today. And that is music and the brain. You talked about this, it was really awesome at the bio-hacker conference and we were putting together a whole packet of ted style type videos.

ABEL: Sweet.

DAVE: And you contributed your book on the brain and music which is gonna be an awesome part of the bundle for that. But can you give me the overview of the way that you think about music and the brain and what it does and all? Because I think people would be interested in your take on it because in addition to being fat burning man and a big podcaster, and sort of a presence in the Paleo scene, you've also studied the brain extensively and you're a musician. So you're a multitasking guy.

ABEL: It's fun stuff. And that's like what I've been obsessed with for a very very long time. When I went through some rough stuff growing up, the only way I could get myself that emotional release to cry, was to shut myself in my room and basically crank my guitar as loud as I could and just shred until I collapsed. And that was the only way that I could access that piece of myself and cope with what I was dealing with.

DAVE: I gotta tell you, Abel, I thought you were gonna say it was to turn the music on and listen to Britney Spears until it made you cry, so I'm so glad you played your guitar. So thank you. I already think you're more of a man for that.

ABEL: Well what's interesting about that, is that Britney Spears for someone out there, could work just as well! Like, lots of people tear up and it's like why? It doesn't make any sense! When you look at the evolution and where music would play into that, it doesn't really have a solid piece, right? Unlike sex and pooping and eating. There's no real adaptive significance for learning how to appreciate music or playing music that's obvious anyway. So for me, having it be such a huge part of who I was, and like, develop it as a coping mechanism and also seeing when I created music or played for other people, how it would effect them! Making them cry. Or making them happy. So I'm just like "alright, what is going on here?" And I started studying the brain in college and I decided to marry these two things together.

And basically, number one, music is very very good. Because when you look at a brain on music, listening to music, playing music. Every single piece pretty much is lit up. It's doing something. And when you look at the second half of my book is looking at the difference between non-musicians and people who don't have much musical experience compared to the ones who do, you start to see some interesting effects on their behavior and their abilities. And it's not just finger dexterity and stuff like that. It's more about—one of the most fascinating ones that I can appreciate, and I'm sure you can, Dave, in being a podcaster and someone who speaks a lot—is musicians seem to have an increased ability when it comes to understanding speech procity. So they understand the meaning behind the words. So if you listen to someone talk on the radio, you don't really see them. But compared to reading a blog post, you feel like you know them in a different way because you can hear all the different inflections and emotions and things like that.

So one example I use is if you have a wife or a girlfriend and she's ever said "I'm fine". Like, the words don't matter at all because "I'm fine", like "I'm fine" means something totally different than like, "I'm fine."

DAVE: Right?

ABEL: Frustrated, insecure, neurotic and exhausted. That's what it stands for, right?

DAVE: Exactly.

ABEL: But it could also mean that she's fine.

DAVE: Yeah.

ABEL: Musicians are able to outperform normal people by hearing that and assigning the right emotion or the correct meaning to that. And I think that that's really interesting. You could apply that to perhaps. And I haven't seen any studies that point to this, but it's sort of my mind running with it. Perhaps one of the reasons people tell me I have a compelling radio voice is also because I'm also a singer and I assign this inflection and rhythm in what I'm saying that communicates emotion more effectively than someone who's monotone. Who doesn't have a great radio voice for example. So I could ramble on about music forever, but it's a fascinating thing and it's important that everyone knows that it's very good. And especially if you have children in a developing brain, music can completely change the path of people's lives in a positive direction. I was just talking about sex, drugs and rock and roll which is also a great deal of fun. I'm talking about you're making connections that wouldn't otherwise be there. Music is a language. And once you understand it, especially from a young age, it can have dramatic effects on other pieces of your life.

DAVE: Yeah. We're signing my six year old up for piano lessons.

ABEL: Nice.

DAVE: We've got a really good quality piano in the house and it just makes sense to allow the children to do that because they'll also be better at math for the same reason which is kind of unusual to know that there are correlations between music

and math, but there are.

ABEL: There are! It's a very mathematical--It's almost like an advanced mathematics by the way, because it's theoretical. There's the surface piece where you're basically translating music on a page into moving your fingers. But there's also like, a whole other level beyond that when you're creating music from your head and then translating that into music. And using kind of the theoretical basis of what should apply in musical theory and combining that with the creative aspect. You're using the right and the left brain at the same time and that's where the real power comes in.

DAVE: And I kinda feel like with music, you're using parts of the mind and probably even the body to do the same thing that you do rationally with math. So when you're doing math, you're thinking about it.

ABEL: Right.

DAVE: You're very slow but very powerful rational brain. And when you're doing music, it's also mathematically but you're not thinking about it so you do it way faster.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: Like you could never in your rational mind, could figure out the equation to describe the sound waves.

ABEL: Right.

DAVE: But in real time. You could certainly figure out the sound wave, write an equation to make a sound. That would be midi. But what you're really doing, especially when you do improv music. Oh my god! How is it possible you can do that? Well it has to be the part of your brain that's way faster than your conscious brain. And so, just like you said on your guitar, you were getting through to that part of your brain because you were using it.

ABEL: Yeah. And I think a lot of people never really had access to that part of the brain and it is a shortcut or a bio-hack, if you will, of getting to that place.

DAVE: It is! In fact, music is one of the original bio-hacks in one of my lectures that I give to corporations about improving performance.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: It's like yeah! This is drumming. Shamanic drumming was one of the first kinds of drumming we think people ever did.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: Well that's why! Well you talked about listening a little while ago, and I'll share something that I don't talk about too often. I have holes in my auditory spectrum. I have an auditory processing disorder. So I don't the same way that you and most people do. Most people filter out background noise in their brain stem. And I don't. I filter it out consciously. So for me to hear what you're saying in a really crowded room or in a noisy environment, it takes an enormous amount of brain energy for me because it's effort.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: But that also means I miss gaps. I have very low hearing. I can hear low frequencies and I can hear very high dog frequencies that people my age aren't supposed to be able to hear because my tissues are in better shape thanks to bio-hacking. But in the middle, I'll have like 50Hz gaps where I just don't—it sounds like mud.

ABEL: Wow.

DAVE: So I've trained my brain to reduce the impact of a lot of those, but the core processing wiring thing, it happens probably in the womb or in birth or very early in life and my brain just does that and it's something that might be possible to change, but it would probably take an enormous amount of work.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: More than I'm willing to invest right now. So that's changed a lot because I

don't necessarily pick up what other people pick up from the sound, but when I do it, I do it with full consciousness of it. And that's made my auditory bio-hacking different. I just this last week went through that neurofeedback. This [40 years of Zen](#), in fact if people are interested in this thing I'm talking about, I'm just creating a website—fortyyearsofzen.com

ABEL: Cool.

DAVE: And I apologize in advance, this is the kind of training that's [40 years of zen](#) meditation in 7 days using 11 million dollars worth of EEG machines hooked up to your head. Like, it's intense stuff and I do it with my super high-end coaching clients. Like, we get together, I go in for a full week with them and I don't get paid to do that, I just go in and I chaperone it. I can do 4 people at a time with me. And because you're listening to these tones so intently that come from your own brain, the brainwaves go into a computer, the computer plays the brainwaves back to you. My hearing acuity goes up. So I did my third full session and third full week of this stuff and each time I do it I'm just blown away because 12 IQ points and 50% creativity boost. But the benefit that I feel the most when I come out of that is that my hearing is better! So I was like, in my office listening to Breakbeat the other night, and I'm like this is the best music ever and I'm like “wait a minute, I'm on Pandora and I've heard this song like 15 times before because there aren't that many breakbeat artists out there. And I'm like why does it sound so good? And I'm like oh wait! It's because I actually learned in like, 7 days, to listen more intently.

ABEL: That is so cool.

DAVE: The idea that listening is a teachable skill is awesome. And it's not like listening to someone's voice and paying attention, attention is a teachable skill. Focus is a teachable skill. But the very core subtle act of making the brain more sensitive to certain parts of the sound range or to the entire sound range, it's hackable! It just is!

ABEL: Yeah. It is, isn't it? And I think musicians are forced to that because that's what you need to do when you listen to music. If you're a band leader for example, you need to be able to listen to a song, and I do this all the time on the radio “oh that bass line is sick.” Right?

DAVE: Yeah!

ABEL: A lot of people who aren't musicians, they won't think of it that way. They won't imagine a bass and the frets of that bass and what needs to happen to create that sound. And the auditory processing that happens in the studio in order to round it out and make sure it doesn't have those sharp edges or that too much punch. But it has that like, big bass sound that allows you to shake—it shakes your torso when you listen to it from the right speakers. Being able to focus in on those individual pieces of sound is a pretty cool skill.

DAVE: I'm amazed when people do that. And like you say, because it's your profession, you listen really intently and I'm sure if we took apart your brain or did a specs scan or something and we'd see more metabolic activity in the sound processing parts of your brain.

ABEL: Yeah, probably, always!

DAVE: There's another thing that's less music focused but it's the same idea. And it's with visual acuity. And this is also hackable. And it's something that I've worked on pretty extensively on myself because lucky me, my eyes don't team up pretty well and my brain turns off my left eye some of the time because it's too much work to see through both eyes. I don't know! Like it's not conscious that this happens. I don't see a change in my vision unless I'm looking at the very carefully designed test for it. But it does create weird neurological stress sometimes. You'll see me wearing some orange sunglasses sometimes, because of that, indoors. But I've retrained a lot of my visual processing so it's much less of an issue than it was before.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: But the idea that you can have super vision came to me when I was doing this crazy urban escape invasion course. And if you dig through my video archives, you'll see where there's a video where I'm climbing out of a trunk in a cut before this playboy playmate of the year climbs out of the same trunk. And I'm like "Whoo hoo! I was in the same trunk as a playmate!" I'm just kidding. But she was in the class with me. And this was a class on what to do if you're kidnapped. And they teach you how to escape from handcuffs and really how to survive in an urban environment if there are people chasing you. It's meant for execs and I'm breaking duct tape and all

this cool how to video stuff. But the final exam, they handcuff you, they hood you and they put you in the back of a van. And then you have to escape, and you spend all day being chased by a dozen bounty hunters while trying to get stuff done. And so there are disguises and people tailing you and you're tailing people and you're teaming up—like it was one of the most neurologically amazing experiences ever because if you really wanna see your fight or flight response, like knowing that these guys are gonna grab you and kidnap you again if they catch you and bring you further out of town and you have no money and no resources and you don't know the area, it'll really teach you who you are. I was like, I was so rocking this thing. I had this disguise. I had like, a fake ponytail and one of those knit caps.

ABEL: And a cummerbund.

DAVE: Nice. And I had a—I looked like a total hoodlum. I had a cigarette, I don't even smoke, right? And I was walking like a guy—a meth-head. And I literally walked right past three bounty hunters, like within 10 feet of them.

ABEL: Wow.

DAVE: Like, I stopped to take a drag, and I'm kinda shaking, people are walking, like they're making a circle in the crowd for me because I looked so repellant and dangerous and on edge.

ABEL: Right.

DAVE: And I felt so cool! And then another guy walks up and taps me on the shoulder and he's like “I got ya.”

ABEL: Oh no!

DAVE: And he goes “Truth be told, your costume was perfect. But--” he said “--the cameraman from the History Channel who's with us, he spotted you.” And that was this! It was visual acuity! This guy's trained everything in a scene because later during the cut, like “oh god there was trash on the road, we can't use that.”

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: So he sees more. His visual bandwidth was bigger than you or me. Right?

ABEL: That's a really good point. Yeah that's fascinating.

DAVE: You have bigger auditory bandwidth than the average person, by far, and these guys who do camera and video for a living, like they see everything with this high bandwidth like X Ray vision that I totally wanna develop. And so I want your hearing and those guys eyes, and we can be like, super bio-hacked.

ABEL: I like that. I like that a lot. Let's do that.

DAVE: Alright, it's a deal. We'll do a swap.

ABEL: Okay. As long as I get to wear the orange glasses and a cummerbund at the same time.

DAVE: It's okay, we'll make a match.

ABEL: Sweet.

DAVE: Well I'm not sure how much more time you've got on the podcast today. Do you have another like, five minutes or so?

ABEL: I've got another five, yeah.

DAVE: Alright, cool. Tell me what's the latest going on? What are the new bio-hacks you've been working on and what's the latest going on with your podcast and your blog. Mention URLs and stuff like that.

ABEL: Sure. I'll talk about this quicky experience that I had that you'll appreciate. I tried modafinil for the first time this Saturday.

DAVE: Woo hoo!

ABEL: I was planning on having a day off but didn't really sleep the night before to do some extracurricular activities. And the primary function of modafinil is you don't feel as tired as you otherwise would be so you'll be able to perform. So I wasn't

really planning on doing anything special or different. But I wound up, despite having no sleep, and usually when I have no sleep, I don't perform very well. Like, I made crockpot pulled pork, took the dog for a huge long walk, cut and applied 15 room darkeners to a particular thing. This has been on my to do list for two months! I packed for Thailand, reorganized two closets, reorganized another shelf, did a bunch of work on the house, wrote a couple of blog articles, did a mini workout, dead lifted. I did so many things that I ran out of stuff to do on my to do list and had to make a new one! It was nuts!

DAVE: Now let me ask you this, if you're willing to say, have you ever tried adderall or meth, which is the same thing as adderall or a hardcore stimulant versus provigil?

ABEL: I haven't. Just Sudafed. That's the closest I've got.

DAVE: Man, you're hardcore. No, I don't advocate meth or even adderall for people except as a really last resort under a doctor's care. I had a prescription for adderall once and I took it for about a month at like, 5 milligrams per day and it was just a really unpleasant feeling.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: And when I take modafinil, it's a very different experience. So I was wondering, lets say compared to several cups of really good coffee, what's the difference between what you feel on modafinil versus the ultimate clean caffeine buzz?

ABEL: I think the biggest difference, this is kind of how I was. I was writing in my notebook because I think I'm going to write a blog post about this. The feelings I was experiencing? Because it was novel to me. You know on your best day, not when you've necessarily gotten the most sleep, but you've gotten the best sleep for a certain period of time and everything's firing on all cylinders. You wake up, you pop out of bed and you're like "I feel amazing right now."

DAVE: Yes!

ABEL: Like, I'm gonna crush it today. And it's not distracted, it's not hyped up. It's not jittery. It's just like lucid. That's what it felt like. I read up that the half life is 15

hours which is incredible, so I was feeling that way for pretty much all day. And to be honest, there was a certain time of the day, it was like the afternoon probably when my body knew that it should be down regulating a bit and having that lull. When I didn't and it felt a little bit too much, I was just a little bit up in my head. And it was interesting when I finally did work out. It was probably 5 or 6PM. Usually I'll warm up by doing a Krav workout on the bag. I'll be doing punches and kicks and my head's moving around a lot. I found that I was getting a little bit dizzy. But when I was doing the lifting, I was able to do more reps than I normally do. It was interesting. The exhaustion when you work out to failure or something like that, usually comes from your brain more than your legs, per say?

DAVE: Yep.

ABEL: So it's like your brain knows that you shouldn't do one more because you might get injured. And this was a little bit different than that. It was almost like “I know that I won't get injured if I do more.” Does that make sense?

DAVE: It makes great sense! I think that what's going on is, if you were to measure a frame rate of your eyes—a frame rate is 30 frames a second is what TV or in the movies go at—and this is about what you see without flicker. I feel like on modafinil, my frame rate is higher.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: I have more times a second when I can pay attention to things. And this is what really advanced meditators get. There's a study--don't ask me to site sources on this, I don't remember the sources on this one—they took some really advanced meditators versus people who didn't meditate very much and they put them in a room and they had a super bright flash bulb go off, but they had two flash bulbs go off almost on top of each other. So there was a very short blink between them when there was no flash bulb. And the advanced meditators would say “there was a period of darkness, there was a bright light, there was a period of darkness, there was a bright light, and then a period of darkness.” And the other people would say “It was dark, got a bright flash, then it was dark.”

ABEL: Wow.

DAVE: So this is what it's like when you pay attention with all of your faculties. You have more abilities to see things and to be aware of things. Because meditation at the end of the day is about awareness. So what I think was going on with modafinil is that it turned up your frame rate. Like, it made you more aware of what was going on in your body because you could pay attention to more things at one time. And my EEG study, not that it was that scientific, of modafinil, when I was doing this [40 years of zen](#) training, I did it on and off modafinil. And my brainwaves, I had much stronger alpha brainwaves, which is what I'm working on training there, when I'm on modafinil than off of it.

ABEL: Mmm. Interesting.

DAVE: Because anything that lets you pay attention better is going to let you meditate better.

ABEL: Right.

DAVE: So of course you can meditate better when you're on modafinil. Because it's not ampy, it's not stimulating and distracting, it's focusing. And also if you teach your brain to perform really well, even when you're tired—half the reason you don't perform well when you're tired is not metabolic. It's fear.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: Yeah. Your body's like “oh I needed more sleep. Oh goodness, I better make sure you get more sleep.” and the low level parts of the nervous system sort of stumble around and they're like “I'm afraid, I might not get enough sleep!”

ABEL: I love your inner dialogue voice by the way.

DAVE: I'm trying to imitate what a dog would talk like because I picture this Labrador. It's like “Oh look! A leg, I think I'll go hump that! No! Down dog! Down!” Right? Because we all have this inner dialogue whether we're aware of it or not, like it's in there going “can I eat that?”

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: That's what dogs do!

ABEL: Totally.

DAVE: Yeah. I just found the modafinil changed the dynamic there. So instead of like, "I'm so tired", etcetera etcetera, it's like "Oh wow! I can totally rock the day when I feel this way" and I got used to it. My brain's like "it's my job to operate at this level of focus at this level of time" and after the first Joe Rogan show I went on in November, a lot of people said "Oh everything you do is because of modafinil" and I'm like, that's a bunch of crap.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: So let me prove it to myself. So I've gone for many times a month or two without it, but I was like "alright, I'm just gonna see what happens" and then I totally stopped taking modafinil in November of last year. I've taken it like, twice since for two one day things when I had like serious international travel kind of stuff.

ABEL: Right.

DAVE: And what I found is that my ability to pay attention, I mean I've pulled out the stops. I have trained my brain to focus in other ways. I can pay attention as much as I want, all day long, as long as my interest is good. Modafinil, my brain is used to being on modafinil.

ABEL: Yeah.

DAVE: Like, it just doesn't give me the huge benefits it used to. I think people who take a low level modafinil for a while, while learning to focus their brain and learning to pay attention, I think that they probably get some neurological changes after a while that are beneficial, but I don't know.

ABEL: Yeah. It's like you develop the habit of thinking that way or feeling that way which leads to new connections and it myelinates them--

DAVE: Yeah!

ABEL: And after a while, it's kind of a pattern of who you are.

DAVE: God, we haven't even had a chance to talk about myelination. I think we need to schedule a bunch more podcasts to chat about the cool bio-hacking stuff that we're working on.

ABEL: Oh we will.

DAVE: Exactly. Exactly. Well Abel, we're running out of time on this podcast and there's a question that I've asked every guest forever. What are the top three things that you recommend people do in order to be higher performance in all aspects of life? So it doesn't have to be biohacking. It doesn't have to be anything. Just in your entire life's experience. Your top three.

ABEL: Number one, someone was asking me about this today. I was just on another interview. They were like "why is eating well important?" It's because it's necessary for everything that happens after that. Everything that you do with your body. The way that you think, the way you perform, your health down the road. The number one factor in that is eating well. Making sure you're getting enough nutrients, making sure you have enough energy. Do that first.

Number two, relax. Don't worry about it. Life is grand. And you know, we have a lot of popcorn brain going on with all of the electronics and responsibilities that we have today that we didn't necessarily have in the past. So try to disconnect from time to time. Take a walk. Every day. You know. 20 minutes. An hour. They've had studies where they've shown that an hour walk a day is more effect as an antidepressant than an antidepressant is. So go ahead and do that. It'll keep you sane.

And number three, you absolutely create your own situation in life. So if you hate your job and you're staring bleary eyed at your computer screen right now, reexamine how you got there and see how you can get out of there to do something you're more passionate about. Same thing goes with your friends, how much time you spend with your family, that crazy uncle or the brother who you love so much. Like, who would you rather spend your time with? If you want to be a happy person, surround yourself with happy people and create your own perfect situation. Start with your perfect day and just go from there.



DAVE: Abel. Amazing stuff. Now tell our listeners your URL and how they can get in touch with you.

ABEL: Right on. The best and easiest place to find me is fatburningman.com. I've had Dave on the show a couple times. I know you guys will dig it. Best way to get all of the free goodies from me including your free ebook is to sign up for my email list at fatburningman.com which is right up at the top or on the side bar. Or on the popup menu or on the left hand side, or on the bottom.

DAVE: Exactly. You and me both, buddy. Alright, everyone, thanks a ton for listening. Abel, it's always a pleasure. Hook up, whether it's in person or on the podcast. See you soon!

ABEL: Right on Dave, thank you so much for having me out, man.

DAVE: Bye.

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