



**Transcript – Rocking the Spectrum with Joe Biel
#317**



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Speaker 1: Bulletproof Radio. A state of high performance.

Dave Asprey: It's Dave Asprey with Bulletproof Radio. Today's cool fact of the day is that even though Asperger's Syndrome is an autism spectrum disorder, studies show that the Asperger's brain has different, stronger connectivity patterns than the autistic brain especially in areas of the left hemisphere. Also, intelligence and academic performance separates Aspy's or Asperger Syndrome people and it's generally thought that Einstein had Asperger's.

This is going to be a really interesting episode because we're going to talk about Asperger's. A lot of people don't know this, but I come from a family where it's very common. I had all the symptoms of it, but was not formally diagnosed. When I was formally diagnosed, I had already done huge amounts of bio hacking and was only diagnosed with ADD. I'm grateful that I was able to make that shift. We're going to talk a lot about this and how it affects your brain. How it's coming to be more popular and how you can actually use it as a tool, so I'm pretty excited about this interview.

Before we go into though, if you haven't heard about Fresh Books yet, listen up. These folks are on a serious mission to help small business owners save time and avoid a lot of the stress that comes from running a business. As a small business owner myself, I pay a lot of attention to not wasting my time and not wasting my staff's time.

One of the things that makes a big difference is pain-free invoicing for freelancers and small business owners. Using Fresh Books you can take about 30 seconds to create and send an invoice. You get paid online because Fresh Books gives your clients tons of ways they can just pay you with credit cards or other ways which can seriously improve how quickly you get paid. In fact, customers get paid 5 days faster on average. You also get an instant notification to tell you when your client has looked at the invoice the second they view it. You don't have any more excuses from people saying they never received an invoice that you know they got.

Fresh Books also lets you keep track of your expenses. It's ridiculously simple. No more boxes full of receipts. For me, that's some of my personal kryptonite. Expense reporting drives me nuts! Making it simple with Fresh Books is really cool.

The Fresh Books mobile app lets you take photos of your receipts and Fresh Books organizes them for you later. It can create expense reports for you and it also makes claiming expenses at tax time a breeze.

Fresh Books is offering 30 days of unrestricted use to all Bulletproof listeners, totally free right now and you don't need a credit card to sign up. To claim your 30-day free trial, go to Freshbooks.com/bulletproof and enter "Bulletproof Radio" in the How You Heard About Us section.

I'd love to chat with you briefly about Bulletproof XCT oil. This is our most affordable oil that you can use in Bulletproof coffee. It's not just MCT oil. MCT oil is 4 kinds of oils. One of which gives you disaster pants and is very commonly found in trace amounts in a lot of the preparations out there. The other one is reasonable good for you. It's unfortunately mislabeled as an MCT oil. It's legal to call it an MCT oil, but it doesn't go to energy in the body. It actually goes through the liver like a long-chain fat. XCT oil is just two of the MCT oils that companies will try to see you and it's triple distilled. Never any solvents used and is made in the United States, not in China and it is made on food grade machines. If you like to know what you're getting and you like to get the most affordable way to get your ketones up a little bit, not as much as Brain Octane, but enough to really feel the difference in your day, go for Bulletproof XCT oil. I use it quite a lot on my salad and it's amazing. Bulletproof.com.

Today's guest is Joe Biel. He's a really interesting guy and you might not have heard of him, but you probably will. He's an independent filmmaker and self-made publisher who's gotten to be known for using punk rock tactics in publishing. He founded a company called Microcosm Publishing at 18 years old, literally running it from his closet and started the Portland Zine Symposium. The reason he's on the show is he just released a book called Good Trouble, Building a Successful Life and Business with Asperger's because he has Asperger's Syndrome and is doing a lot of really cool and interesting stuff. He's definitely a bio hacker and Joe, welcome to the show.

Joe: Thanks for having me.

Dave Asprey: Your book was pretty fascinating because you talk about your journey when you're a teenager. By the way, how old are you now?

Joe: I am 38.

Dave Asprey: 38, so we're going back. You and I are about the same age. I'm 43, so you're 5 years younger than I am. You spent a long time as an entrepreneur and a surprising number of entrepreneurs are ADD, ADHD, Asperger's, ODD or somewhere on the spectrum of not neuro-typical. You've taken all this experience and put into a book which is really, really pretty cool.

Walk me through your story. How did you get into all this stuff? What happened before you were diagnosed? What happened when you were a teenager?

Joe: Sure. My childhood was pretty, there's no way about bad. I grew up in Cleveland in the post-steel through the recession of the 80's. My dad was physically disabled. My mom was very violent. I left the house as much as I could. I didn't really have parenting as a kid so I found punk rock at a very young age, 13 or 14. That kind of helped me to figure out morals and ethics and things that really still guide me today.

Your age or my age, we're too old to have been diagnosed as children with Asperger's. They

didn't know it existed.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Joe: That's the difficulty of it is that. I'm just kind of bumbling through life. I feel different. I don't really relate with other people. My experience is very solitary. Other problems like I feel unchallenged in my academics.

Dave Asprey: Everything is boring. Right.

Joe: Yeah. I mastered calculus in 9th grade and then I felt like I had nothing to do, so I stopped trying. That kind of thing sort of plagued me and so I was a bad kid. I got in trouble a lot. I just didn't have that kind of an understanding of right and wrong in that way.

Dave Asprey: Did you get in a lot of fights?

Joe: Yeah. When I was younger, sure.

Dave Asprey: If you were going to school today, would you be in jail?

Joe: It depends where. That's the thing, where I grew up, that was pretty normal, I was the least of the problems. I have a lot of funny stories in the book because I was up to mischievous pranks all the time.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Joe: That's how you entertain yourself when you're in a position like I was. Through punk rock I discovered publishing and I found originally in the 90's, I discovered zines where are a combination of a love letter and a book. They would teach me about subjects that I did not yet know that I was interested in.

Dave Asprey: Would you be comfortable saying that zines were like Facebook pages for people long before we had any of this cool internet stuff? It's kind of like having a blog or something, like a pre-blog kind of thing. I used to be into zines as well. They've kind of come and gone.

Joe: Actually, no. There's more zines being published now than ever.

Dave Asprey: Oh, really? I don't follow it, but okay there are?

Joe: I feel like the differences are, it's similar to a Facebook page in that it's an obsession. It's like an obsession that you cannot contain and you have to tell everybody about. The difference is it's like a safe space. You aren't going to be regaled by internet trolls for your views on your subject of choice. In that way, it's comfortable and it's a way to figure out your voice and how you feel about things and what you believe in deeply as an individual.

I think that's one of the reasons that they're still so successful. Zines started in the 1930's, so

we're 85 years in. It's relevant for the same reason even through the internet.

Dave Asprey: Okay. That makes sense. You made another comment there that you learned about morals and ethics. It sounds like some of your rules of social behavior through punk rock because when you have Asperger's, you don't know the social norms. You didn't see them. They didn't get uploaded or something. How did punk rock help you with that?

Joe: I think there's a little bit of similarity with all these things especially with Asperger's. Punk rock has just as many misconceptions as Asperger's does. Many times people think of it as nihilistic or whatnot, but to me, punk rock really taught me social justice values and about the important of learning about history and about learning about how and why to respect other people. When you don't have mire neurons and you don't understand what people are communicating emotionally, as I did not, you have a really hard time understanding then all the things that that feeds into. Punk rock really taught me all those things, sometimes clumsily, sometimes awkwardly, sometimes many years after. I joke that a newborn baby had more emotional intelligence than I did until I was 35 or so.

Dave Asprey: What changed? How did you grow emotional intelligence?

Joe: Asperger's is defined through failure. Asperger's is not a disability until it causes failure in your life. I founded Microcosm when I was 18 years old. I had done all these things. I had gone on a sort of clumsily, walked into walls my way through life.

Dave Asprey: You see some things that other people find blindingly obvious and I very much sympathize with that.

Joe: I think a lot of it, especially for people that are our age in that range, you get rid of bullying through becoming an expert on a subject. I really became obsessed fundamentally with this idea of not only the punk rock music but also the social history, things like DIY skills. I really became the expert on those things. That sort of afforded me being a weirdo. Many, many people have utilized similar tactics who are too old to be diagnosed as children.

Inevitably by the time I was in my 20's, I started to run into problems. I would offend people unknowingly and then I would offend people and they would see it as I being callous or things like that. I had gotten married very young and my marriage fell apart within 2 years or so. That was really the big wake up call for me. I didn't really have an idea of what a healthy relationship looked like, but then after the fact, I went into therapy and I began learning about what are emotional norms and how should I feel in a relationship and what it should be offering me.

Dave Asprey: I'm laughing because a lot of people listening are "What the hell?"

Joe: Right.

Dave Asprey: I'm just laughing because I totally sympathize with this. I've also been divorced. I was in a marriage that didn't work. It's because stuff that you're supposed to know, you just don't

know.

Joe: Then it's also to some degree the thing they don't really tell you or talk about is that the kind of people who create a lot of emotional proximity to Aspy's are people who don't tend to have very good boundaries.

Dave Asprey: You're a co-dependent magnet? Is that what you just said?

Joe: Not necessarily, but it's more like people that expect you to change and figure these things out on your own, but don't really have a way to put up a barrier around that. It's people that have sort of their own sort of emotional intelligence problems or just were never taught about that as children.

For me at least, I became close to a lot of people that didn't know how to tel me what they did and didn't want. That creates a further problem of just basic level communication.

Dave Asprey: A lot of people have that program running. I've interviewed a bunch of guests recently talking about how you get programs before you're 7 that are kind of sub-conscious. Vishen Lakhiani's new book, The Code of the Extraordinary Mind writes a lot about this. If you somehow learned when you're a little kid that asking for what you want is a bad thing, if you ask for what you want and your parents yell at you enough times, you pretty much learn not to do that. Then you'll carry that right up into your first marriage and you'll never ask for what you want, and you'll be pissed off you didn't get what you want. Lo and behold, it's not going to be what you wanted it to be because you never asked.

I totally get that.

Joe: I was coming from the other direction, where I knew what I wanted. I would always ask for what I wanted.

Dave Asprey: Bluntly.

Joe: Right and without any sort of care or understanding of how it was coming across. I would be "Well, you want to go to this place. I want to go to this place." I was "So what are we going to do?" It wasn't like hearing the other person. That doesn't really go well, but through talking it out years later, I could untangle all the ways that it was an unhealthy relationship for everybody.

Then I feel like and some Aspy's debate me about this, the thing that we know is that Aspy's never stop intellectually growing.

Dave Asprey: I was about to say, what will an Aspy not debate you about?

Joe: Exactly. I was very, very overjoyed to find the Aspy forums until I found that any subject was a controversy even things that everybody had shared experiences around. Then I was "Maybe this is not my place after all."

Dave Asprey: The over-intellectualization of things is no better or worse than under-intellectualization of things, right?

Joe: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: When it's over done like that, you end up in lots of just very long debates and some internet trolling probably comes from that. I think most internet trolling just comes from the bullies who probably picked on both of us when we were in school. They tried to pick on me, but given that I was a beast, I usually just sat on them and it solved that problem.

Joe: I had a big Mohawk and would wear sleeveless shirts.

Dave Asprey: You didn't look like someone to tangle with, so you were probably okay.

Joe: Yeah. That was part of it too. I was larger than most. I'm 6'3.

Dave Asprey: I'm 6'4". Neither of us was a good target. Every year I had to kick someone's ass at least once or twice before people were "You really don't want to fight with Dave because he'll leave marks on you." I was "That's good."

Joe: Right. I didn't really ever think of it in that way. By the time I was in high school, I had built up such a defense mechanism for it, that it was no longer a problem.

Dave Asprey: I think kids today who would have done the things that you and I would have done to be amused as people with Asperger's undiagnosed in high school bored out of our minds, I am always amazed that I never got arrested for something stupid. That was the norm. Like you said, it depends where you go to school, but for me, someone attacked me after school and I kicked their ass, now is cause for a year in jail. I don't know how kids do it today because I wouldn't have been able to do it.

Joe: Right. I definitely had scuffles with the cops when I was a kid. Again, it was just the climate was such they had bigger problems.

Dave Asprey: There you go. You looked like someone they should arrest, but when they talked to you it was "Eh, whatever."

Joe: Yeah. I didn't have any crazy history. I was causing trouble, but there were no capital crimes.

Dave Asprey: Exactly. I just feel like today people are much harsher on kids. Teenage boys without Asperger's cause a lot of trouble and the ones with Asperger's typically they do it with less elegance maybe. I'm happy that I was a kid then, not a kid now, put it that way.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

- Dave Asprey: Why did you write your book? You talk about building a successful life and a successful business with Asperger's. Did you write that for people who are teenagers now? Did you write that ... who's it for?
- Joe: It's a few different things. I feel like you don't have to have Asperger's obviously to relate with or appreciate the book because I think everybody is a weirdo in some senses, especially the kind of person who's obsessive enough to be an entrepreneur or want to be in that position. I feel like there's that hand.
- I've done what I do for over 20 years. I have people that this is the kind of writing that they had always wanted from me as a fan. I had never really been ready before. I waited for our 20th anniversary, mostly to get my house in order to understand exactly what was going on.
- I feel like the real problem as I came to read all the existing literature, and I do mean all of it, was that when I would look at the way especially non-sufferers would talk about it, it was always about mitigating failure. I feel like that is just such a horrible barometer because I do feel like all of the famous cases are these tremendously successful people, but instead we're trying to find ways of how to keep Aspy's off of social services and how to find some level of what we call "high functioning". It's just a misnomer. By aiming low, you inevitably achieve low results.
- I really wanted to show that my life was not charmed in any sense of the meaning. I had to really, really fight for everything I got and I never got all that much. Then the more I look at it, the more I was "I'm not doing this so I can achieve personal wealth. I'm doing this to create resources for the people that are doing this in my wake that are growing up in these kind of environments." If I had anything to look at, it would have helped me and I just didn't.
- That's all that Microcosm does is looking at these various kinds of DIY skills and what came before and what that can inform us about now.
- Dave Asprey: It's really interesting. I hang out with Dan Sullivan who has for about 40 years been working with entrepreneurs to teach them how to put a business together and maybe build an operating system for a business. His point, and he's one of the wiser guys I've met, is look around the room. You have to audition or fill out a bunch of papers to even qualify to be in the coaching program with Dan himself. He's "How many of you have been diagnosed with ADD?" Three quarters of the room.
- Joe: Right.
- Dave Asprey: "Everyone else here, you haven't? You just don't know you have it."
- Joe: Your diagnosis hasn't happened yet.
- Dave Asprey: Right. Let's just talk about some behaviors. Everyone is "Oh my God! There's all these

people." Why were we all drawn to be high-performance entrepreneurs? It's some neurological thing there. When you accept that might be part of your entrepreneurial reality, then all of a sudden what may have been a weakness or that overcoming failure thing, is suddenly also a strength when you realize that you have instincts that are in certain things. Knowing those, having high functioning Asperger's, assuming you don't have full-blown autism where you are unable to deal with environmental inputs all together. Assuming that you have cognitive and basic neurological function that you need to do that, as an entrepreneur it can be a gift because like you said, you're obsessive looking into something where you've read all the papers on it. Same thing with bio hacking, right?

Joe: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: I care a lot about the anti-aging stuff and fertility and hormones, so I read everything and I build a picture in my head about it. That's what my biology, my brain wiring helps me do. The fact that I have social skills now that came at the cost of a lot of hard work. I probably still miss a few little social cues, but I don't really care because at this point, people are going to tell me if I do that. If they don't and I miss it, I didn't know that I missed it so who cares. Not to sound too egotistical, but I'm doing my best here and it doesn't really matter as much as I used to be. I lived for a long time in fear. I know I'm not going to get this. It's going to be awkward. Now you just kind of roll with it. That may be just the voice of wisdom of years, but also understanding more about my wiring because of the things we probably both read about Asperger's and how the brain works.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Dave Asprey: What did you learn in terms of ups and downs of running businesses as someone who has Asperger's? What did it bring you and what did it make more difficult?

Joe: I feel like literally every success I ever had was because I had Asperger's.

Dave Asprey: Wow.

Joe: I charted it. When I was researching the book, this is the only reason. I meet obviously there's no shortage of book publishers on earth and every time I meet them, they just have such poor understanding, I'm generalizing, but the generalization is that they have very poor maths skills. They have very poor business skills. Data never enters the equation of decision making. Whereas to me, I can do it all in my head and I know the probability of a manuscript's success within seconds because I can think about it and realize "Oh, this is about how big the audience is. This is how well we can reach that audience. How it's different from the existing material on the subject."

Dave Asprey: That's a skill that's easy for you, but maybe knowing whether you should trust the person across from you, how easy is that?

Joe: My upbringing actually informed that. I can really smell dishonesty a mile away because ...

- Dave Asprey: That's unusual for an Aspey.
- Joe: Right, but again, we learn by failing.
- Dave Asprey: Okay.
- Joe: I was raised in such a dishonest environment, after the hundredth time, I was never going to fall for it again.
- Dave Asprey: The learning by failing thing is really perceptive. Every night when I put my kids to bed and I think both my kids are neuro-typical. I designed a whole preconception program so that they wouldn't have ADD or Asperger's or whatever else and they appear normal at 6 and 8, so fingers crossed, it worked. Given the genetic risk and all that other stuff, but I still every night, tell me one thing you failed at today. Then I'm high fiveing them. "Good job. You failed at something. That means you were working really hard on it." They're not afraid to fail and if they don't fail, I'm "Maybe tomorrow, you can work so hard, you'll fail at something because today wasn't a good day because there wasn't at least one thing you failed at." I'm trying to get them to not be fear avoidance. Whereas, I'm going to go kick some ass. I think it makes happier kids who probably do kick more ass, but I'll tell you in 18 years.
- Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative) For me, that it's more like intellectually lonely at 38. I've sort of mastered my craft in a very difficult industry. I just don't have a lot of peers that are intellectual equals and have similar knowledge bases.
- Dave Asprey: Why not?
- Joe: I feel in some ways people come at it for other reasons. There's other interest or they just don't master the business side of it as well as the publishing side of it.
- Dave Asprey: It is tough to find a tribe of people who are kicking some ass. I spent a lot of time in the last five years realizing for me to perform really well I have to have a community of people like that. Dan Sullivan, Joe Polish from the Genius Network and J.J. Virgin, New York Times bestselling author really got me plugged into networks like that, but I spend an honestly disturbing amount of money and weeks of every year going to places to hang out with people like that because I don't know how to continuously bring it the way I do if I don't get people like that in my life. That was a conscious multi-year effort for me in order to do that as one of the ways I perform really well. I've got to spend some time with people like that otherwise you said, it's a little too lonely intellectually and other ways too.
- Joe: Sure. My industry is very much stuck in the 19th century in many ways still. Incorporating data even is so strange to even the mainstream houses and doing a lot of the things that we do. I feel like that is part of the problem. The industry still works on a 3-year schedule and things are still very, to anybody in tech, it's impossible to conceive of.
- Dave Asprey: I've had two really successful book launches hit the New York Times with my first big book.

My first book though, the one that had 5 years of research in it and was just 2 years to write and so important. It was a tiny advance. I published it through Wiley. They sold the division in the middle of the launch. Launched it 6 weeks ahead of time and it only sold 5,000. This book will actually prevent Asperger's in kids. I wrote it for that reason even though that's not the marketing. It almost broke my heart. How is this possible? How broken is it?

Then just like you, you sit down and you're "I'm going to do this right." The next time it sold hundreds of thousands of copies for the Bulletproof Diet. Like you said, when you dig into the industry, that is the most bizarre way of structuring it. It turns out it's the same if you want to go to radio from podcasting, Bulletproof Radio, 30 million downloads. It's amazing, but you want to put that on national radio, I've tried twice and both times it's like weird stuff. You look at TV and movies and almost every industry, it's done the way it was a hundred years ago and to someone like you who's been a successful entrepreneur, who's navigated an old industry, how do you deal with the sense of sheer stupidity that you must see all around you?

Joe: Thank you for using those words so I do not have to, but that is for me the hardest thing every week, every day. Just calling anybody we have to partner with and seeing how antiquated their systems are and it's not that they're uncooperative in changing those systems, it's such a slow process to do that that creates more stress in my life because I simply cannot resolve their inadequate systems. '

That is actually the biggest problem in my life right now. How much anxiety it produces to ... This is sort of the myth right now. People believe that self-publishing will undermine all this stuff and that digital products are what people actually want, but none of those things are true. The industry works very much the way that it always has and 2015 was a record sales years for books. At the same time, we're still using these systems. They still sell the wholesalers 9 months before publication. They'll still sell, especially holiday things even further out. That part of it is because the people who control these aspects of the industry see no reason to change because what they're doing is still working even at their increased volume of new books coming out every day.

I guess that's the difference. Even 5,000 books is a paltry sum. That's like painful to you as an author that put years of work into that, but that is nearly double the industry average. That's insane. It hurts to think that after all that, that's a flop, but in fact, that's a success according to the industry. Really the problem is that there are simply too many books being sold in every day.

Dave Asprey: Some of them are not worthy. There's a lot of recycled content. I see my content recycled sometimes.

Joe: Yep.

Dave Asprey: There's a guide to hacking your sleep? I wonder where you got the collagen and honey stuff because I know where that came from.

It's frustrating too because I assume somebody's ratio is going down in publishing. As someone who runs a successful publishing company and has this data mindset that just comes from you neurologically, what do people do? If you're listening to this show, there's probably a 1/4 million people are going to listen to this interview and they can buy books, they can not buy books, how do you know when you're getting real content versus someone is selling another book that they threw together?

Joe: For me I really, really push this idea that this is the best case we've ever heard for the need for a consumer to have good analytical skills.

Dave Asprey: There you go.

Joe: Because they need to be able to ... Admittedly, I see these skills developed much better in Canadian consumers and in British consumers, for whatever reason.

Dave Asprey: In Canada, it's because they're sorry. Living here, I can say that.

Joe: They know how to look at a book and figure out if it's for them and what it offers them. What are the benefits of the book and if it's a subject they're interested in and familiar with, they know what is original research and what is not. I feel that is really what the American consumer needs to perfect. The difference, of course, is that in the US most people are buying books as a gift for a relative or someone they care about or things like that. They don't use those same analytical skills.

Dave Asprey: This is probably a really good time to mention, if you're listening to this, it's definitely within the next 30 days, there's a statistical likelihood that someone you know is going to have a birthday or that there's some holiday. I can absolutely without a doubt recommend that it is a really good idea to buy a copy of Joe's book and give it to someone.

Joe: Right.

Dave Asprey: You want to hold up a copy of it real quick?

Joe: The statistical likelihood is high that it will benefit someone in your life.

Dave Asprey: There you go. It's called "Good Trouble".

Joe: Yeah, it is and this is on one hand it is for people that have an interest in entrepreneurship as well as people that are themselves or someone they care about dealing with Asperger's or what is likely some related syndrome.

Dave Asprey: For that person in your life who is a little odd and you've often said, "Is probably on the spectrum". They actually probably are somewhere, even if it isn't Asperger's. The number of people who just have brains that work a little differently, we call them engineers.

In fact one of my favorite Dilbert's ever is some little cartoon strip and it might even been animated, the mother takes her son, the young Dilbert into the doctor and the doctor says, "We'd like to do a scan, but the brain scans broken." Of course, the little kid takes apart the machine and fixes it right there. He says "Oh, it's worse than we thought. I'm sorry, ma'am, you son is an ... engineer!"

This is running rampant. The person around you who probably doesn't have that level of self-awareness, I actually liked this book for that reason, just because it's actually got a good mix of business stuff but it's also got a good mix of what's going on in your head that's different. It's actually a useful gift and since today that's what we do in the US anyway.

While you're at it, if you just double down and you stacked it up with the Bulletproof Diet, then it's going to be like upgrading someone's life like you've never seen. There you go. We did our good author plugs for the day!

Joe: Yeah. I know. That's the thing too, you get, especially for older people, anybody that came of age after '92, they're not going to have been properly diagnosed. Then you get like a pudding mix where symptoms start to disappear and then what really, really struck me as odd was that makes it harder for the professionals to diagnose people that probably have Asperger's. They would get to the point where I have met so many people that are "I've been told that it's 99% likely, but nobody wants to actually confirm my diagnosis."

Dave Asprey: I had a really interesting experience. I was working at a startup that ended up having a very successful exit and I was going to Wharton Business School in the Executive Program, so super-intense. It's the same number of hours as a full-time MBA program while you're working full-time. It's burning the candle at both ends. I was having test performance issues. I would get 100% on the first question, 70% on the second question and then I would have no mental activity on the third question. I would get 0 points and I was "But I studied this". It was a curve. You could plot it on every test.

I didn't know what was going on here, so I did, of course, brain scans and all sorts of stuff. I wanted to try Modafinil. This is way back in the day. I went and I did a spec scan where they inject radioactive dye to look at metabolic activity in the brain to see which parts of the brain are taking up glucose. It was pretty shocking because the psychiatrist I was seeing clearly thought I was hitting him up for Aterol. Lots of students do that. When he got the brain scan results back, this is a direct quote, I'll never forget it because I was kind of stunned, he says "Inside your brain is total chaos. I have no idea how you're standing here in front of me now. You have the best camouflage of anyone I've ever met."

He had identified me as being completely neuro-typical because I had learned how to play the game in Silicon Valley, which is a good place to learn how to play the game. You're playing at a high level. It was with intent that learned how to do all this stuff, but the fact that inside my brain there was no metabolic activity in parts of the brain where really there should have been some was a clue. I did manage to turn those parts of the brain back on eventually.

Your story reminded me of that with what you were just saying there because there is that sort of a thing that you learn to do. You're almost 40 years old. You're running a successful company. You actually do know how to do what you're doing, but it's different inside your head. What happens to you when you walk into a party or a meeting? What happens inside your head?

Joe: I am immediately overwhelmed and I have to really mitigate. That's any time there's more than 6 people in the room. I'll need to plot where my chair is, where I feel comfortable and I have to sort of carve that space out for myself and build an environment that I can manage in my head.

Dave Asprey: You just said that. You run a successful company and you do those things. That's the thing. Someone who doesn't have it, they just walk in a room like "whatever", they don't do that and they might run a successful company, they might not, but the fact of the matter is that absolutely happens.

Joe: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: For me, I used to do that. Now what I do though is I learned, I actually process auditory signals and visual signals at a level up from the brain stem compared to most people. Someone or another hypothesized probably that it's a congenital thing, but I went through and retrained my ears to better discriminate auditory sounds. If this was a noisy bar, for me to hear what you're saying, I have to really focus. It takes energy like glucose or ketones in my brain to hear your voice. Whereas for someone who's wired normally, they will actually effortlessly pick a voice out in a noisy room.

Joe: Sure.

Dave Asprey: That's a very common ADD, Asperger's sort of thing so what I'm going to do is I'm going to choose the quietest table at a restaurant and I'm going to sit down because I know that my visual processing takes more work. My brain sees light differently than the average brain. Of course, one in two people do this. Helen Irlen's work has been fantastic for people with Asperger's, autism and ADD. I'll also choose the table that doesn't have a spotlight shining in my eyes because I'm going to get tired and cranky if I'm sitting there in a noisy environment with two different loud drunk people on either side of me with a spotlight in my eyes. I'm just not going to have resilience as long as I normally would.

I learned all this stuff, but no one tells you that.

Joe: Right.

Dave Asprey: If you're not neurologically normal or you just have some weaknesses and some strengths that are different than the average and you go to an environment that starts taxing you, you're "I don't know why I'm tired. I don't know why I don't want to be there, but I just don't want to go back." Then you feel like you're antisocial. Does any of that sound familiar to you? Do you look at those angles too?

- Joe: Oh, yeah. I cut out alcohol completely years ago. I cut out sugar completely years ago because they were just grinding me down so bad. I don't go to a bar. There would be nothing for me there. I do still end up and a lot of times in industry events or even conferences or expos are so incredible crowded and difficult. I have a service dog. It's hard to walk as it is. It's hard to make sure ...
- Dave Asprey: Oh, you have a service dog. Okay, cool. I noticed the dog sitting on your lap. Is that your service dog?
- Joe: Yeah.
- Dave Asprey: Oh, cool. What kind of dog is he?
- Joe: She's a rat terrier.
- Dave Asprey: She ... a rat terrier, cool. I've always had dogs, at least most of the time and my last dachshund before this one was part rat terrier. It was definitely a cool little breed.
- Joe: With all of that, I don't think that anyone would ever notice that I'm overwhelmed or dealing with things that they aren't having to deal with. I think for me a lot of it, I just created systems where it becomes manageable, where it's not overwhelming even when I'm having to deal with things that other people don't have to deal with. Similarly, what it sounds like for you, I just found a way to make that seem not weird and maybe not even noticeable.
- Dave Asprey: I found that if I just turn up my mitochondrial function and I've done all the rewiring of stress responses, I'm actually not stressed. It's not as comfortable as it could be, but the level of stress I would have felt, just overwhelmed, it's pretty much gone. I might get tired eventually because, I'm getting a headache because these lights are just fluorescent lights in the corner of my vision, they just are uncomfortable kind of like having a stone in our shoe for someone who doesn't like stones in their shoes.
- Joe: Yeah.
- Dave Asprey: It is what it is versus that feeling that I used to get which was intense discomfort, "I'm going to die. I need to get out of here." I hacked that to the point that I'm actually really comfortable in an environment with lots of people. It doesn't bother me either way, but if I hear in detail what the person's saying to me and everyone around me is talking, there is a time limit that I haven't learned how to transcend, but it's pretty long compared to what it used to be. It's hours and hours and then I'm spent. Whereas, I think maybe some people aren't quite as spent as I would be, but I can live with that.
- Joe: Right. I think for even neuro-typical people would probably have some discomfort, but I think the difference is they wouldn't have to develop or own an awareness like you or I would to realizing what's going on with them or how they're responding to it.

Dave Asprey: One of the gifts that my nervous system has given me is that I realize there's some things in the environment that make me stronger and some things that make me weaker.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Dave Asprey: When I put in the trouble of making a system and identifying those things, then reading the papers, reading the research, you realize "Wow! There's a lot going on here." Then you take that to someone who either is neuro-typical or believes they're neuro-typical, I don't really believe in the term "neuro-typical." You're always deviating in some ways on some things from the average. Almost everyone can have at least 20% better performance by messing with their environment until it's tuned for their biology.

Joe: Sure.

Dave Asprey: Maybe for you and me it's 40% better performance.

Joe: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: Right? But there's always meat on that bone if you pursue that avenue. Just having a greater effect for you and me means that we're more likely to notice it. The things that are reducing your stress, for a substantial percentage of the population, it's going to help them too.

This visual thing that we talked about. Irlen Syndrome. 48% of people will test positive. They're stressing their brains more than they need to when they're trying to read or when they're paying attention. The people who benefit the most from figuring this out are autistic people, Asperger's people, ADD people, dyslexic people, all those things. They get the most, but you can take someone else and if they're one of the one in two, they're "Oh my God! Things are so much better." You take someone sitting next to them and they're "No effect." Completely invisible to them.

Then you switch over to some other modality and then the person with the colored overlays on what they're reading, the other thing didn't effect them. Having a list of things that make people generally strong or weak and then just systematically testing them, transforms every one I've ever met. There's always somebody "Oh, that got better" except the one in a hundred person who probably have liking and they're "I don't know. I rub mercury from a broken thermometer on my skin. I drink 14 six-packs a day and I only eat pizza and I ride a century every day on my bike and I kick ass." I don't know what to do, but I like your genes.

Joe: Right.

Dave Asprey: There just aren't very many of those left anymore.

Joe: Yeah. I do feel like that kind of body goes away. Now I feel like it's probably because I live in

Portland so to some degree people are either super-aware of anything they're insensitive to or

Dave Asprey: Oh yeah.

Joe: They just feel left out of that so they want to be, have a list of things that they can't be around. It does seem like the person, like Keith Richards' of the world, are fleeing.

Dave Asprey: That is very true. Portland is a good area for that. A lot of the Bulletproof team is up in Portland. We roast our coffee up there. It's a good city. I definitely like that.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Dave Asprey: I want to talk some more about other hacks you have because you get more of that social anxiety than average. Asperger's can just being on meltdowns. "This is too much stress." You mentioned you have a service dog. Do you have a daily stress management ritual or practice or something?

Joe: I have probably the silliest one that you'll ever hear, but it provides me great endless entertainment. I feel like this is the continuity of my teenage self with my nearly 40-year-old self and my reporter-ly skills as well. When someone behaves inappropriately, people constantly are, I'm aware of it and rather than getting upset about it, I will compose a Tweet that is just describing in a completely denotative way what happened. To most people, they can see the humor, however dry, in this transmission, this communication. I feel like it's fascinating because to a needy person they see that as I'm asking for sympathy which I'm not. I'm saying "This is hilarious." Some people that I know they feel like I have more inappropriate things happen to me or happen around me than most. It's also a way for me to practice my skills of observation and understanding this stuff, but it really does reduce my stress load, to sort of get it out of my system and it makes me not have to process it anymore for whatever reason.

Dave Asprey: Offloading is a big strategy for you?

Joe: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: Just get it out.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative) Then I have this beautiful record of these are all the cataloging of an inappropriate and hilarious things that have happened in my presence because it's just so daily.

Dave Asprey: At this point in your life, do you feel comfortable in your own skin?

Joe: Yeah. I do.

Dave Asprey: Did you always? When you were young, did you?

Joe: Oh no, not at all. Not at all. I would have very awkward posture. I would get migraines and they would tell me that the problem was literally how tense my muscles would get because I was so anxiety-ridden constantly.

Whereas now, we have younger staff and they've known other people with Asperger's, they've known people that had maybe a lower level of expectation than I do, they really will have a hard time seeing it in me because it doesn't mesh with their understanding of what Asperger's looks like. I feel like that's really the transformation. I can pass. Maybe not to everybody and obviously, things will happen and I create faux pas, but it's maybe 1% of what it once was.

Now I at least know how to acknowledge and apologize and realize what has gone on rather than explaining how what I did was well-intended or in their benefit or whatever.

Dave Asprey: "You're wrong" sort of explanation doesn't necessarily work for me either.

Joe: Doesn't help. No. That's the thing that's really hard for me to understand is that intentions don't really matter.

Dave Asprey: Nope.

Joe: It's people are very ... I guess the thing, and maybe it's the awkwardness of it all, but I feel like my bio hack is that ... I don't know if you saw, there's been a lot of things, my greatest likelihood of death is suicide, just statistical probability because of Asperger's, because of all of my background factors, but I learned, if you saw the New York Times piece yesterday, there was a really fascinating thing about how even college enrollment levels of men in the US are way down. They dropped 9% over the last 20 years.

Dave Asprey: Yeah.

Joe: It's really come down to the fact of they do not know how to offload and talk about their feelings and they cannot do it with their friends because the social mores don't exist for that. I really feel like my bio hack is men talking about their feelings. That for me has been the thing that has totally made me comfortable in my skin. While it does certainly take people by surprise plenty frequently, I feel like that's really the next level for a lot of people.

Dave Asprey: When I was a kid and this may be a generational thing, but you're about the same generation, I used to feel like if you really had many feelings, you were pretty much weak. I used to actively dislike feelings.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Dave Asprey: That might be partly be Asperger's/ADD kind of mindset. "Why would you bother with that? They don't make any sense."

- Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)
- Dave Asprey: What I ended up unpacking in therapeutic sessions was that I actually didn't have labels for any of these things. Every feeling has a physical sensation correlation.
- Joe: Yeah.
- Dave Asprey: No one taught me that and it maybe some people just know that, but I think most kids learn that when they're little and their mom says, "You're feeling 'x'" and they "Oh, that weird feeling is that." I didn't have any of that wiring. It took two days of feeling extremely uncomfortable in a group environment working in a group therapy thing. Finally the woman who was working with me she's "You must be feeling something." I'm "Yeah, I'm pretty pissed off right now." Justifiably so. She's "No, there's other feelings in there." I'm "No!" Finally she said, "Okay. I'm going to look at is there a feeling anywhere in your body?" I'm "Yeah, my stomach feels weird." She's "Great! That feeling. That's called fear." I'm "Are you kidding me? Really?" She's "No, seriously. All those things that are happening right now, that's the name for that." I'm "That is the most profound thing I've ever heard of." Then I said, "Why would it be fear? That doesn't make any sense. There's nothing to be afraid of here."
- Joe: Right.
- Dave Asprey: Then came the real bomb for me which was of course it doesn't make any sense. It's a feeling. Feelings don't have to make sense. I was "Holy crap! No one ever taught me that either." That to me was one of the things that let me ... I'm going to make a map and now I'm actually pretty good at emotional awareness, like my state. I'm maybe like you, pretty fearless about talking about it. When I could identify it, I could then manage it and actually learn how to turn on happiness and turn on empathy and heart openness and all those sort of things that to were states I didn't know how to identify.
- Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)
- Dave Asprey: Do you feel like you've gotten somewhere in that direction? Do you think it's possible for people with Asperger's?
- Joe: Yeah. Of course they do, but I'm granted aiming higher than your average.
- Dave Asprey: Of course.
- Joe: Fifteen years ago, I remember it was when I was getting divorced, the counselor was "How are you feeling right now?" Everything I said was my thoughts.
- Dave Asprey: Exactly.
- Joe: Because I was not aware that there was anything but my thoughts, so I was this is what I

think about that, this is what I think about ... Then she pushed and pushed and pushed until it became clear that I had no idea that feelings existed.

Dave Asprey: Yes.

Joe: Or were a thing or that there was anything to be aware of in the first place. Then 15 years later I was in Washington, DC a month ago. I was at the National Bike Summit which is like a national conference for people that are advocates and I had a moment where two men came up to the table. I was talking to them. I basically heard them expressing things about their lives but in very guarded ways. I sort of gave a little bit of myself. I told a little story. I talked about my feelings and within a minute, both of them were talking about their feelings. It was very apparent that neither of them had ever done that to each other before. They were friends. Fifteen minutes later they wrapped it up and they have this grand plan to how they're going to resolve what's going on in their lives. The two women in earshot were "How did you do that? I've never seen that happen in the world, men talking to other men about their feelings, let alone in the presence of a woman. That just does not happen!"

Admittedly, I didn't even think of it in advance. I did what seems natural. What it seemed like they wanted from the conversation and the ways that they were engaging with me. Again, once more, I was using data to draw out what I thought would be an appropriate response. I think it was, but it's funny that even then, that's the degree that I can take it.

Dave Asprey: That's cool. That ought to offer hope for parents of very young Aspy's who might hear this and go "Oh, there's no hope for my little Johnny. He'll never have a date." It's "No, chill. Johnny will have a date. She might be odd too, but that's why engineers reproduce."

Joe: Yeah.

Dave Asprey: For someone listening who knows they have ADD or Asperger's or something like on the spectrum, if they want to start a business, what advice would you have for them right now?

Joe: I would say everybody will tell you and everything I ever heard was "It's not going to work. It's really difficult. It's really competitive." I would say, I follow the Paul Hocking advice where he says "Do the thing exactly how you feel it in your own way, the way that you believe is right, because nobody could ever mimic that and it will be nothing but uniquely your own." Obviously, I'm paraphrasing here. I haven't read the book in 20-something years.

The concept is that people really try to take an existing idea and twist it a little bit or do something they think is of a good sound business mind. I don't think that's very good advice. I think you really need to do the thing that is personal for you and that you have some kind of entrenchment in because I think that will come across as more authentic to the community of people that the products serve. I think it will become, and this is the other thing that people come up with constantly that they're afraid that someone will steal their ideas or whatever. It's impossible when it's that way. If you're communicating

genuinely of yourself, nobody could ever take that and do it as well as you do.

- Dave Asprey: Yeah. I hear you. That's really cool. I wish that I a) had known that I had any of this stuff going on when I was younger and starting companies so that I had that kind of advice when I was younger. I think now one of the advantages of being young when you start a company is that guys like you and me put in sick amounts of infrastructure. I helped to build the cloud and the internet as we know it today. A lot of my time in Silicon Valley was working on projects like that. It's shockingly easy to do things and you also have a much better chance of having self-awareness and having someone point out "Your nervous system is different than normal. You're two standard deviations off. Here's the direction you're off and here's the compensating strategies." It's much easier to find that knowledge and just recognize everyone is off on some of the thousands of ways you can be off. It's not that being on or off is a good or bad thing. It's just we're all different that way. Now that you can identify the norm and you can say "Here's how I can at least approach the norm when I want to and still live where I am." That's a pretty elegant way to live, I think. No matter how your nervous system works.
- Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative) I think a lot of people, they try to think that they'll live on a desert island and not have to engage with people that I would call neuro-typical, but I think that's just not possible. I think that's the source of unhappiness for people who are on the spectrum. It's so isolating to begin with that you really need to have social contacts with all kinds of people.
- Dave Asprey: Even if you feel like you don't like it, there's still great value in it and you need to overcome the anxiety of that.
- Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative)
- Dave Asprey: We're running up on the end of the show and I do want to know if someone came to you tomorrow and said, "I want to perform better at everything in life. What are the three most important things, three most important pieces of advice you have for me?" What would you offer? Whether they're Asperger's or not, you don't really know, just the average person walking in off the street.
- Joe: I would say that No. 1 is have a bike commute to work which also means live in the city and work manageably nearby. I feel like that solves so many problems from a correlation of divorce rates to car commutes to basic level of 15 minutes of exercise and all that. I think people see that as unreasonable or not for them or as causing other problems but it's totally not. You can do it.
- Then I would say finding what you need as far as personal time away from other people or away from work or away ...
- Dave Asprey: Alone time.
- Joe: Figuring out an ideal amount of that every day whether that's with your spouse or with

your dog or with your kids or whatever or by yourself and making that non-negotiable and do your thing.

Then I would say figure out what work makes you genuinely happy because I feel like that the thing that you can never replace. That's the thing that I think causes the most deep-seated problems that there's really no way out of, if your work is making you miserable versus if your work is fulfilling. It makes money insignificant, I think.

Dave Asprey: Wonderful advice. Thanks.

You've been listening to Joe Biel, author of *Good Trouble, Building a Successful Life in Business with Asperger's* in case you tuned in halfway through the show. Holding up the book there. It's a worthwhile read for everyone whether or not you have Asperger's. It'll open your eyes to what's probably, if you sit down at a table with three or four other people, one of the people at the table has a lot of the characteristics in that book. It's useful whether you're that person or the person sitting next to that person.

Joe, any url's, any other places people should go to check out your book, check out Microcosm Publishing or any of the other things you're working on?

Joe: Sure, MicrocosmPublishing.com is the spot generally and I also am involved in a social justice video project called The Groundswell that you can see at pdot.org.

Dave Asprey: Beautiful. Thank you so much for being on Bulletproof Radio. It was a fun interview and keep on giving back.

Joe: Mm-hmm (affirmative) Take care. Thanks so much.

Dave Asprey: If you liked today's episode, you know what to do. Pick up a copy of *Good Trouble, Building a Successful Life in Business with Asperger's* because when you read good stuff from good people, good stuff happens. While you're reading, you're going to need to fuel your brain and well, I've got to show you this because it's the coolest thing I've ever seen. Okay, maybe not. It's Insta-mix. This just came out. We've been working on this for three years and this has grassfed butter and brain octane oil in a single serving fully portable packet so you can just brew your Bulletproof coffee beans in your hotel room which is trivially easy. You add this to your Bulletproof travel mug, shake it up and you're good to go. You've got your Bulletproof coffee for the morning. You feel amazing and you can do this over and over and over. I'm super stoked. Bulletproof Insta-mix. You can find it on the website and you can even subscribe so it just arrives every month. If you want to buy lots of it for your office building, we can hook you up with that. Insta-Mix, it rocks and so did today's show.

If you liked the show, seriously the best way to say thanks, aside from trying Insta-Mix is heading over and read Joe's book. It's a good book and having the ability to interview guys like this for me is part of what we just talked about, part of this social time with intelligent people. I find it really fulfilling to be able to do this show. I started the show and I still do the show two episodes a week is really an intense schedule with all the preparation work



and all. I do the show because these are conversations that I would have even if no one was listening. It's a chance to just learn from people. I can't believe other people want to sit in over my shoulder on these conversations, but that's why I do it.

That's why I love doing it because it gives back to you. It also gives back to me. When you take your time to learn more from people on the show, I believe it's going to help you. With 30 million downloads and counting on the show, that's the equivalent of 65 human lifetimes if I did my math right. Think about that. I've either killed 65 people if I basically have a whole bunch of dick jokes or I may have helped 65 entire human lifetimes. I actually feel a sense of responsibility for that. I won't waste your time on the show and I won't bring you people who I haven't vetted as knowing how to share something of value and having something of value to share. Thank you for listening and thank you for coming back and thank you for subscribing on iTunes and just thanks for your last hour of time. I hope it was worth it for you. It was for me. Bye.

Did you know that Bulletproof is on Instagram? You can find us at [Bulletproofcoffee](#) or my personal feed is [Dave.Asprey](#). Hope to see you there.