

Dave: You put locks on your home, you buy home insurance. You have an alarm on your car and you buy car insurance. You've worked hard to build your business, and yet you don't have any cyber insurance to protect it. Small business like yours are especially vulnerable to cyber attacks. Over 40% of cyber attacks in 2015 targeted small businesses, and 60% of those small businesses attacked closed within six months. Let CyberPolicy keep you safe. CyberPolicy's the first end-to-end solution that combines cyber planning, security, and insurance customized for small business. With CyberPolicy, your business will be protected against cyber attacks. Get peace of mind for as little as .40 a day. Secure your business, visit [cyberpolicy.com](http://cyberpolicy.com) and get a custom quote in just four minutes. Look, it's not a matter of if some hacker's going to try to attack your company, it's a question of when. Plan, prevent, insure, with [cyberpolicy.com](http://cyberpolicy.com).

Speaker 2: Bulletproof Radio, a state of high performance.

Dave: Your listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's cool fact of the day is that, well, Americans, and probably Canadians too, but Americans have a lot of stuff. There are about 300,000 items in the average American home. Side note, in my home, that includes just those little hair bands for my daughter, there's got to be 300,000 of those. 3.1% of the world's kids live in America, but they own 40% of the toys consumed globally, which is kind of shocking actually. Most U.S. homes have more television sets than people, and American women will spend more than 8 years of their lives shopping. Although, I don't know that that's a bad thing because if they're shopping for really good food, it was probably something that was kind of necessary. We'll give everyone, including all of the guys who go shopping for food, a pass on that one, but if they're shopping for plastic toys, we've got a problem.

Hey guys, you know I love Dollar Shave Club. I've been using their razors for quite awhile now and the shave is fantastic. What you probably don't know is that they've got a bunch of other amazing products too. For instance, they have a new skin repair serum that's got a ton of hyaluronic acid in it, which is something you really, really, want to use to have healthy collagen in your skin. Once you join the club, you'll see they've got a bunch of other great stuff for you, and it's all affordable. Right now is your chance to see for yourself why so many of us love Dollar Shave Club. If you're not a member yet and you've never joined, now's the time. You get your first month of razors for free, just pay shipping. After that it's only a few bucks a month, join today. Head on over to [dollarshaveclub.com/bulletproof](http://dollarshaveclub.com/bulletproof). That's [dollarshaveclub.com/bulletproof](http://dollarshaveclub.com/bulletproof).

Today's guest is Joshua Fields Millburn. He's a minimalist and that means he left a six figure job as a successful corporate executive to become a minimalist after a series of tragedies. He wrote a book called "Minimalism: Live a Meaningful Life", he runs The Minimalist Podcast and just starred in the film Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things. This is a trend of people who are saying, you know, there's psychological and neurological stress that comes from just having too much crap around you and just having too many things that you don't use. We've seen this huge trend of people like Marie, I was going to call her Kimono, I'm totally forgetting her last name.

Joshua: Kondo.

Dave: Kondo, thank you.

Joshua: Yeah.

Dave: I'll tell you a story about her later, but anyway, and other people are saying, let's just have peace in our world around us and you're one of the leaders in that movement, so I wanted to have you on the show to talk about the stress side of kicking more ass. Welcome to the show Joshua.

Joshua: Yeah, thanks for having me, I really appreciate it. Big fan of the show and excited to chat with you today.

Dave: All right, let's get right into this. Before we get into minimalism, we've got to talk about Marie, give me her last name again.

Joshua: Kondo.

Dave: Kondo.

Joshua: For the people that don't know her, she wrote a book called, "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up".

Dave: Right. The reason that that sticks in my mind and the reason I have a traumatic block against her name, I like to call her Marie Komodo, like Komodo dragons, because my wonderful wife, Dr. Lana, read the book, and I read the book too, and it's actually a good book, I didn't have a problem with it. That meant that for one week, there was a failed experiment, which I rebelled against.

To move my coffee maker and coffee bean grinder, and coffee making equipment off the counter, under the counter, so that every morning I had to wake up and pull out all my coffee making equipment, set it on the counter, make coffee, and like, no. There are limits, and when you hide coffee making equipment so you can't get access to it quickly, I'm sorry, something snapped in me and I just set the coffee maker on the counter and I left it there. I think maybe I'm happier for that, does that make me a bad person  
Joshua?

Joshua: I think you and I, we worship at the same alter, the same coffee alter that is. You see my kitchen right now, the counter tops are clutter free, except for my coffee equipment. The scale, the pour over device, the bean grinder, yeah, you and I share a similar sentiment. I think the difference between some of the stuff that Ryan and I talk about at [theminimalist.com](http://theminimalist.com) versus someone like Marie Kondo or a lot of professional organizers, I think those people can be very helpful, but for me, I'm much more concerned with the why-to side of things than the how-to side of things.

I think you and I instinctually know the 67 ways to declutter your closet or whatever the click bait blog post title might be. You'll never see me write something like that because I'm not as concerned with the how-to, I want to know the purpose behind simplifying. Why do we want to do this and that give you the leverage you need to then figure out the how-to which is appreciably easier than understanding the purpose behind minimalism.

Dave: What is the purpose of minimalism? What do you get out of this?

Joshua: For me, I think of minimalism as the thing that gets us past the things so we can make room for life's most important things. Which actually aren't things, physical things, at all. For me, the purpose has to do with the experiences we have after the clutter. I think the initial bite of the apple is removing the excess stuff in our lives. As you started out the show and you mentioned the average American household has 300,000 items in it. I've been to Canada, it's very similar, we've done tours in the UK and Australia and our American dreams, supposed American dream, has permeated the borders to all of the Western world and what we're realizing is as requiring more and more stuff ... There's nothing inherently wrong with consumption, right? We all need some stuff, there's not doubt about it. I'm not advocating a life of asceticism or being a monk living in a cave. What I'm advocating is bringing the things into my life that add the most value, that augment the experience of living as opposed to living to accumulate more stuff. '

For me, the purpose of minimalism has to do with the benefits we experience once we're on the other side of decluttering. You start with looking at the stuff that you have and if you're anything like me, yeah, of course I had ... I was wildly successful like you were in a very narrow sense. I was out of shape, I weighed 80 lbs more than I weigh now, my relationships were in shambles, I didn't feel creative or passionate about what I was doing even though I had an ostensibly successful career. I was the director of operations for 150 retail stores which I know is really ironic with the whole minimalism thing, but I really felt like I wasn't growing, I wasn't contributing to the world around me. I was so focused on so-called success and achievement and especially in our culture that means the accumulation of stuff, these sort of trophies of success. I had the big house with more toilets than people and more TVs than people as well.

I had the luxury cars, plural. I had the closets full of expensive clothes, the full basement that was jam-packed with stuff and all of these things, they were supposed to make me happy, but they really weren't doing their job. I worked so hard to climb this corporate ladder to achieve this level of success, but I didn't feel successful. Instead of success I had debt and anxiety and stress and discontent and I was kind of overwhelmed working 60 or 70 or even 80 hours a week forsaking the things that were most important. I got to this point in my life by my late 20s, I'm 35 now, by my late 20s I didn't even know what I was important to me and so I didn't know what to focus on because of that. Of course, I just kept not looking down and trying to continue to climb that corporate ladder and I realized that these things that I'd worked so hard for, they weren't doing their job. They weren't adding joy or contentment or fulfillment and I certainly wasn't happy with all this stuff.

Dave: it's interesting, I went through a similar thing. I made \$6 million when I was 26, lost it when I was 28. When I got \$6 million it wasn't all in cash, there as stock option too, but it was a lot of cash.

Joshua: Right.

Dave: I'm like, "Cool, I'm set for life. What do I want to do? I know I'll be happy if I make \$10 million so I just need to push a little bit harder." Literally, I told myself that, I told me friends that. Unfortunately, at the time, most of my friends were also working at the same company and all dealing with the same thing. What I realized was that I was actually no more or less happy with \$6 million or without \$6 million. It was like, what do you do with every day that makes you happy and what's going on inside your head. Why wouldn't you have all the trappings of success and be happy?

Joshua: I'm not saying that you can't, I'm saying that quite often the things get in the way and keep us from figuring out what's important in our lives. Like I said a moment ago, when I was I was essentially morbidly obese. I mean, I weighed 240 lbs and I was all gut and chin basically. Not only was I just fat though, I felt like crap and as you know from all of your journeys and whether it was being over weight or with the toxic mold, you realized that when you feel like crap every other area of your life ... Forget about being optimized, it's not even functioning right I think the stuff, in a way, is the metaphorical toxin for many of us because we think we need these things to bring us status or it's part of our identity and there's nothing inherently wrong with the stuff. The question is, what are the things that truly add value to my life? Often, when people ask me, "What is minimalism?"

I'll answer that question with just a question. I'll say, "How might your life be better with less?" By reframing the question that way it helps people identify what the benefits might be for them. For me at first, it was regaining control of my finances because even though I made really good money, I spent even better money and that equation just doesn't work. You can do the back of the napkin math. I'd racked up six figures worth of debt, about half a million dollars worth of debt if you include my house and I felt stuck under the weight of that debt. As I started thinking about, "How might my life be better with less? Well, I could improve my health because I have more time to focus on that, I could improve my relationships, I could finally work on a passion project I want to work on, or I could do yoga. Whatever the thing is that I'm throwing up all these barriers to keep me from doing that thing and then the things I do bring into my life I ask another question.

Does this add value to my life? What I mean by that is does it serve a purpose or does it bring me joy? I get everything else out of the way. By figuring out, here are some things that will actually serve a purpose in my life or they'll bring me joy, if it's artwork or music or something like that. I don't think minimalism is sort of one-size-fits-all and that was one of the things that was really appealing to me at first. When I first stumbled across this thing called minimalism, it was actually at a low point in my life. My mother had died and my marriage ended both in the same month. I was living in Dayton, Ohio and, like I said, I was ostensibly successful. I had climbed this corporate ladder, everyone

around me wanted to achieve the level of success I'd had by age 27 and then these two events forced me to look around and take an inventory of my life, figure out what had become my life's focus.

Then, within a month, I stumbled across this thing called minimalism. At first it was this guy name Colin Wright, he runs a blog called exilelifestyle.com and he was like this young, cool guy who everything he owned fit in his backpack and he was traveling to a new country every four months and he didn't even pick the country was going to. His readers at his website voted on his next country and that was kind of cool and admirable, but I like owning a kitchen table and I like having things that won't fit in the overhead storage compartment on an airplane. I said, "Well, maybe this minimalism thing, while it's neat, it's only for these young traveling peripatetic writers."

Dave: Without kids, by the way.

Joshua: Right. Yes, exactly. Without kids.

Dave: It shockingly easy to live a four hour work week when you don't have kids.

Joshua: Yeah, and so I figured out if you were to throw any complications into this equation this minimalist lifestyle and work, but then of course, I stumbled across some other folks as well. People like Leo Babauta who I'm sure you know, he runs a website called Zen Habits, and he's a father of six. When I first stumbled across him he had kids everywhere from entering college to elementary school and everything in between and he and his wife Eva lived in the city in San Francisco, yet, they were minimalists. Then, I found people like Joshua and Kim Becker who were in the documentary and they have two kids in the suburbs of Phoenix or Courtney Carver and her teenage daughter and her husband in Salt Lake City.

I realized, I was like, wait a minute, there are all these different flavors of minimalism. It's not as simple as, "Well, here's the list of the hundred items you should own and then you'll be happy>' I wish I had that list because how how easy would that be, right? It doesn't work that way and so the things that add value to my life may not add value to yours, but also the things that add value to my life today at age 35, may not add value at age 40 and so I have to continue question the things I keep in my life and the new things that I bring into my life. You don't ever get there because it's like a horizon. Once you get to a horizon or course there's always going to be that next horizons.

For me, I really found out that, "You know what? If I want to simplify my life, live a minimalist lifestyle or something that was close to that, I'd have to figure what my own recipe for simple living was." Because my life wasn't going to look just like Colin Wright who's traveling all over the world, it was going to look like Leo Babauta because I also didn't want to have six kids. It was probably going to be somewhere in between there so I started tweezing ingredients from all of these different minimalist recipes and creating my own flavor of living a more intentional life.

Dave: Something interesting happened just yesterday. My daughter, who's nine, she came over, she said, "Daddy. Can we have less presents for Christmas?" I'm like, "Okay. What happened? This is natural." She's like, "Last year we just had too many presents and it was just too much. I just want a really good present." It really wasn't like someone told her to say it, she was just like, "This is what I want." They go to Walter school and they have all sorts of interesting neurological developmental things they do. It was touching because she had the same vibe going on. I think a lot of people who are listening right now, they're actually commuting to work, or they're actually listening to this while they're at work on iTunes.

This has to come off as a little bit like self-serving, sanctimonious. You want me to like give up my nanny, which is helping me to stay sane and live in a smaller place so I get lower quality sleep. Eat less quality food because you've got to have good income to eat good food. Some of his sacrifices ... Are you in a cult? People have to be thinking that.

Joshua: No, and here's the cool thing. I don't want anyone to do anything. I'm not out proselytizing, I'm not trying to convince people to live as a minimalist, I'm not jumping up and saying, "Look at me. I'm a minimalist and you should be a minimalist too." What I found is that there's a recipe that works really well for me and I've seen it work now for millions of other people at this point. What I've learned is that by sharing this recipe, you're not going to follow exactly what I've done, you're going to find a few ingredients that work well for you and you don't have to call yourself a minimalist. In fact, that's the first thing I recommend not doing because then all of a sudden you set up these expectations and it may turn people off right away, but if you start simplifying your life without jumping up and saying, "You need to do this to," other people start to notice.

For me, when I first started simplifying, this was back towards the end of 2009 after those two events happened to me, I just started letting go and I didn't say to anyone, "Well, I'm getting get rid of stuff and I'm becoming a minimalist and I'm going to own less." I just started letting go and as I let go, it was interesting, about six to eight months in people at work started commenting. They'd say things like, "You seem a lot calmer. You seem less stressed. What is going on with you? You seem so much nicer." It gave me the opportunity to open the door for me to talk about how I'd simplified my life, how I got rid of the excess stuff, but it's also not about using and interesting word, it's not about sacrifice. The word I would use, I would say it's not about deprivation. Minimalism, for me, has never been about depriving myself of that which is essential or beneficial to my life. In fact, the opposite is true.

I get for more value from the few things that I own now than if I were to water those things down with hundreds of thousands of other items. By letting go of the weird paradoxes I actually get more value from the stuff because I have less of it. All the things that I have are very intentional. Although if you visited my home today, you probably wouldn't walk in and say, "Wow, this family ..." It's me, my partner Becca, and we have a three-year-old Ella. You wouldn't walk in and say, "Oh my God. These people are minimalists." You'd probably just walk in and say, "Wow. They're really tidy." You'd ask how I keep things so organized and I'd tell you the easiest way to organize your stuff is to get rid of most of it. Get rid of that stuff that's in the way. By doing that, by

questioning the things that are in my life, I've realized that I'm not telling other people to sacrifice or deprive themselves.

I will temporarily deprive myself from time to time to see whether or not something adds value to my life. I'll do these interesting little stoical experiments from time to time where I will live without a cell phone for a month or two or go without home Internet. In fact, I'm at an office here at University of Montana right now because I don't have Internet at home. I'll do these little experiments, not because I want to deprive myself, because when I bring the thing back into my life it allows me to bring it back in a much more deliberate way and be more intentional using that thing going forward.

Dave: You're kind of doing intermittent fasting for stuff that you wanted, but decided you could go without for a while just so that you'll appreciate it when you finally can eat again?

Joshua: Yeah, that's a great way to put it. Intermittent fasting for stuff, for sure. Letting go for a temporary period of time and then bringing it back in. It's a bit more nutritious, so to speak.

Dave: I was talking with Tim Ferris a little while ago and he was saying that he likes to once a month live in a tent, not change his clothes, wear a cheap T-shirt and eat canned beans for three days just to remind himself that life could be crappy and that it made everything else better and this is somewhat in alignment with that.

Joshua: It is. I think stoicism, if you go back to the 2000 years ago whether it's Marcus Aurelius or Epictetus or Seneca, this idea is not a new idea, but it's a reaction to a new problem. We're in an unprecedented postindustrial age where we have more access to more plastic crap than we've ever had in human history. We have more access to food, not necessarily good food as you know, but access to calories basically and we have more access to all of these things. Whether you go to the Walmart superstore that's going to be down the street from 98% of your listeners. You have access to these things and they're not making us any happier and I think the Stoic philosophy, or in fact, any major world religion. We'll have people when we go out on tour, they'll come to us and ... I was in Alabama last year, this young Christian couple came up to us, said, "It's so great to see a couple young Christians out here spreading Jesus's message."

Then, I was in Seattle a month or two later and someone came up and said, "It's great to see two guys out here spreading these Buddhist maxims." Then, toward the end of the year I got an email from someone who said, "Did you know that Mohammed was the original minimalist?" All this tells me is whether it's religion or Stoicism or Henry David Thoreau and Emerson, it tells me that there are these common principles, or what I would call common values, and while many of our beliefs may be different, we end up getting to the same path. This path of minimalism is really a new path that has been tread over the last 10-15 years, 20 years. You can go back to voluntary simplicity even in the '60s, which is slightly different, but not not considerably different. We realized that, you know what? We have a new problem that a lot of these old ideas work really well for.

Dave: I live really close to the ocean so what I can do is I just take all the plastic stuff that I don't want and I just put it right in the ocean to cut out the middleman so it just goes right into the fish. Does that make me a bad person? For listeners, if you're offended, you don't know me because I don't do any of that stuff. We're creating insane amounts of waste streams. Like you said, buying cheap plastic crap. At the same times, it's a hard. If someone gets minimalism, gets a fire lit under them for minimalism and says, "All right. I own too much crap. How do I decide what possessions to keep and which ones to get rid of." How did you do that when you first decided you wanted to do this.

Joshua: For me, I started small. I started with the question, "How might your life be better with less?" I think that's an important question to ask because you'll identify what the benefits are specifically for you and those benefits will keep you motivated. I'll be honest with you, decluttering for me is kind of boring. I don't get motivated to clean out my closet and so I need a bigger motivation. There are some people say who say, "I really love the clutter in my house." That's great and I envy you because I don't, but for most of us we need some sort of leverage to keep us going, give us that inspiration that we need.

I start with that question and then I decide to get rid of one item a day for 30 days just to see what would happen. Now, obviously the average American household, 300,000 items, getting rid of one item a day isn't going to put a huge dent, but it gave me the momentum I needed. Of course the end result was I got rid of way more than 30 items in the first 30 days because as you search your cabinets and your car and your hallways and your office and your bedrooms and closets in basement. You get this momentum and letting go becomes this personal challenge for you and that's what happened for me. In fact, Ryan and I, the guy I run The Minimalist with, we came up with something. We had tens of thousands of people play this now. It started with that one thing a day idea, but ramped it up a little bit. We call it the 30 day minimalism game.

The way that it works is it allows you to let go of some stuff and give you some accountabilities with some friendly competition. You partner up with someone. A friend, a family member, a coworker, an enemy. Whoever you want to get rid of some stuff with and you start at the beginning of a month. The first day of the month you each get rid of one item, the second day of the month two items, third day of the month three items. So forth and so on. It starts off really easy, gets you that momentum that you need, but it gets pretty difficult by the middle of the month because day 15 it's 15 items or day 20 it's 20 items. Whoever goes the longest wins so you can bet whatever you want. Bet a dollar, a meal or whatever you want and if you both make it to the end of the month you both won though because you've gotten rid of about 500 items and you've really started down this path of letting go of the things that no longer bring you joy, no longer serve a purpose, no longer add value to your life.

Dave: Then, where'd you end up? How many possessions do you have?

Joshua: I don't count myself. I did once as a joke because I saw all these people getting really extreme with minimalism. Especially when I was first turned on to it. I think we're all sort of voyeurs on the Internet. We see a picture of this person and the 52 things they



own and they're all surrounded by it. The guy I mentioned earlier, Colin Wright, he's in our documentary "Minimalism" and there's a picture from him early on where everything he owns is surrounding him and it looks appealing because you get that visual sense of minimalism. For me, I knew I was never going to win that game because I saw a guy who owned 15 items and I'm like, "Oh my goodness. I have more than 15 items on my person right now. How could I ever win this game?"

As a joke I wrote about the 288 items I own, but the way that I came to that was ... I noticed a few people who were counting their items. They were grouping all their socks together as one item. I'm like, "Wait a minute." I just grouped all my clothes together as one item. I grouped my books together as one item. The truth is that I continue to let go because my life continued to change. When I first embraced minimalism at age 28 my life was appreciably different seven years ago from what it is now. I certainly didn't have a three-year-old, I was single at the time because my marriage had just ended. Those things that I had in my life then, many of those things I still have, but the things that I brought in over the last seven years, I'm still being very deliberate about, "Okay.

Do I really need this? Is this essential? Is it going to augment my experience of life or is it a pacifier?" If it's a pacifier then ultimately it becomes an anchor. That word anchor is a really interesting word in our culture when we think about it, because we use it as a complement often. "Dave, you're such an anchored person." Then, you think about it for a second like, "Well, what is an anchor?" An anchor is a thing that keeps the ship at bay, it keeps it from going out into the sea and being free and roaming about and I had all of these anchors in my life that kept me from living the life that I wanted to lead. Some anchors are okay, they serve a purpose for period of time, but I don't want to be so anchored that I'm going to be stuck in perpetuity.

Dave: Do you believe consumerism is bad?

Joshua: I think consumption isn't inherently bad. I think corporatism or consumerism is inherently problematic and the reason being is we all need some things in our life that unless we're really trying to deprive, but when the thing ends up being the end goal. It's the same thing, if you're working only for money you're not going to feel very fulfilled by that decision long-term. There are many times where it's necessary in order ... For me it was getting out of debt. I had to continue working at a career I didn't love so that I could pay down the debt, but I had an in game in mind. I think the same thing is true with our stuff. Quite often the stuff ends up being the point, the purpose of these things and then we realize, "Maybe these things aren't making me happy.

Of course, I don't think happiness is the point either. In fact, I think sometimes the pursuit of happiness is the problem in our society, it's the reason we buy many of these things because we think they're going to make us happy. We mistake ephemeral pleasure for long-term lasting happiness or contentment. I think the point is actually living a more meaningful life, aligning your short-term actions with your long-term values and if you're able to do that I think happiness is just a really great byproduct of living a more meaningful life.

Dave: Choosing to do meaningful things matters a lot and one of the things that drives consumerism, which is oftentimes not meaningful, is advertising.

Joshua: Yeah.

Dave: People see like 5,000 ads a day, if they're an average person and there's about \$180 billion a year spent on advertising. How do you recommend that people fight the urge to buy more stuff because they keep seeing ads?

Joshua: I think we have to be aware. We're never going to cut out all the advertisements. Advertisement, again, are another thing where it's not inherently bad. I think quite often most advertisements tend to just ... They suck. They're not very creative, they're not informative, they're not really adding much to our lives. I think there are some people who can do ads in a way that is genuine, that aligns with their values. Those are few and far between though. I'm noticing a lot of podcast that do it in a way that is in line with their message. You're not going to be advertising for Marlborough anytime soon on your podcast. At least I hope.

Dave: It's a tough one because I get a lot of inquiries for radio for ads. At first I'm like, "I don't really want to do any ads," but at the same time people have no idea how expensive it is to host and produce a podcast. It is a very meaningful amount of time and energy and dollars and I like to break even on that.

Joshua: Sure.

Dave: I do get a chance to talk about Bulletproof coffee. There's also this mindset I have and Bulletproof content, I reach about 10 million people a month through all the different channels, so that's big. One of the top 20 health influencers out. That means though that if I'm wasting people's time that I'm essentially killing hundreds of people. Full human lifetimes. If I waste one minute of time for 10 million people, I don't know how many million minutes are in a lifetime off the top of my head, but it's probably around that. That means that if I have ads that don't serve people I'm actually wasting lifetimes. Just like bad red light settings in traffic lights waste lifetimes and lifetimes everyday. How people sit there doing nothing when they could've been playing with their kids or doing anything meaningful.

I worked really hard on that with my team. Our ads are there to help people make decisions that are going to improve the quality of their life, like make them better people. Otherwise, I wouldn't take their time and I wouldn't spend money on getting ads up. I do think a lot about that and I think a lot of people are just like, "How much do I spend on an ad in order to get how much money back?" It's like the perspective, "Are you giving back or are you taking? Are you using advertising as a way of improving things? Is it actually an act of service or are you using it as an act of manipulation?" Unfortunately, with some of the minimalist lifestyle there's that, "I just need to make enough money so I can live on a beach. I've got to play the numbers and run these scammy Internet marketing things." That just feels bad to me. How much of that is part of minimalism? "I just have to make enough money from some pathway."

Joshua: I don't think money is bad. I grew up really poor in Dayton, Ohio on food stamps and welfare, government assistance, WIC programs. I thought the reason that we were so discontented when I was growing up is because we didn't have a lot of money. While that was certainly a controlling factor, it was only one of many factors. I didn't realize that so when I turned 18 I didn't go the whole college route, I went and got the sales job and I figured out pretty quickly if you work 60 or 70 hours a week you can start making good money. By age 19 I was making \$50,000 a year which was more than I ever saw my parents make and of course ...

I thought the \$50,000 a year was going to make me happy, then while I was making it I was spending \$65,000 a year. I'm like, "Well, wait a minute." If \$50,000 wasn't going to make me happy, maybe I just need to adjust for inflation and so I continued to work my way up the ladder throughout my 20s and what I realized by the end of my 20s is that you know what? The discontent didn't come from the lack of money when I was growing up, it came from repeated bad decisions and by making more money throughout my 20s and becoming relatively wealthy in my 20s, for a guy in Dayton, Ohio making a couple hundred thousand dollars a year that's a big deal.

Especially for a guy in his late 20s. I realized all that did was compound the bad decisions I was making. I now had more money to spend on bad decisions. It's true, money doesn't buy happiness, but neither does poverty so I'm not an advocating a lifestyle of poverty. I'm advocating a lifestyle of being more deliberate with whatever resources we have. Whether that means you're below the poverty line or your wealthy, it's going to be important for you to use whatever resource you have. Including your money, your time, your attention. Use those as effectively as you can.

Dave: It turns out there's actually a number for how much it costs to buy happiness and I gave a talk at the third Bulletproof conference on this and the number \$75,000. There's a study that shows people's happiness level does go up a little bit with each dollar they earn up to \$75,000 because that's the point where you've covered health care costs, food, housing and communications and transportation. When you have your basic needs covered, additional dollars don't make you any happier, but if you're making \$30,000, making \$75,000 actually will measurably make you happier because you're less stressed and less worried about, "How do I put food on the table?" If you have a minimalist lifestyle, maybe the number is lower than \$75,000 because you've cut your spend substantially. Maybe the number's only \$42,000 or whatever it is, but there is a number. I'm struggling to make ends meet and if you're struggling, struggling is the opposite of happiness. You can be happy while struggling, it just takes a pretty enlightened person to do that and most of us aren't there.

Joshua: Yeah, I totally agree with that. We have a segment in the documentary about income and happiness and the correlation between the two. While I agree with you that there are many circumstances where money can incrementally improve your happiness, it's going to improve happiness based on the level of security that you already have with an existing lifestyle. I'll give you an example. When I walked away from the corporate world making a couple hundred thousand dollars a year, the first year I walked away ... My initial plan, by the way, was not to start theminimalist.com and go down this whole

path. That's been a really beautiful accident and I'm grateful for everything that I've been able to contribute and the growth that I've gotten personally from it.

My initial plan was to be a barista at a coffee shop two blocks from my house and make enough money so that I can write fiction full-time. I've always wanted to write literary fiction and that was my thing, I was just going to do that. The first year that I walked from the corporate world I made \$23,000 which is just above the poverty line in the United States and I realized that I actually had better control of my finances that year than I had most years throughout my 20s. I was being a lot more deliberate with the few dollars I had because I was making better decisions. Now, is that saying that I'm allergic to money? No, certainly not. The question is, "What am I going to do with that money as I get it?"

As I've been able to do now when we have different successful projects is I've been able to contribute a lot more, I've been able to invest in other people. We have a staff of people that help us through our various projects, but I've also been able to do a lot of cool things. Like last year, we did an entire year of contribution. We build=t an elementary school in Laos, we funded a high school for a year in Kenya, we built four clean water wells in Malawi. We've done a bunch of different US-based projects as well. Helping out at soup kitchens or Habitat for Humanity. These other ways to contribute beyond ourselves in a meaningful way that, to be honest, I wasn't doing when I had the the other resources to do that.

Dave: It's true that having experiences is ... They don't have any weight, but when you're done with them they take the money to do it. I'm really grateful that I've made decisions to prioritize quality of life and having experiences that are unusual over buying stuff. I drive a pickup truck, it's a nice pickup truck, but I also run a brain hacking facility in Seattle that's been something I wanted to do for 20 years where I can have better cognitive function. You can't put a price tag on that. That's going to be with me every minute of every day. Whether I'm sorting my sock drawer or giving a big presentation. It doesn't really matter, but my experience in life is better for having invested there than in buying whatever some other big expensive thing. It always does go through my mind when I think about stuff like that.

Joshua: For sure. How long have you been doing the center in Seattle? I wasn't familiar with that.

Dave: I've been doing it with partners for about six years, it's called 40 Years of Zen. I opened this about-

Joshua: Oh, yeah I know 40 Years of Zen. I didn't know that was in Seattle.

Dave: We have a \$2 1/2 million facility now and we're bringing executives through and I go there about once every month or two and my level of cognitive function ... We had to actually build new hardware and software. That's a crazy investment. It's like, "I want my brain to this. There's nothing to do it so we're going to do that and then I'm going to share it some people." That's one of those things where I'm so incredibly fortunate to be

in a position to do that, but the first thing I did was how do I share this? How do I get people through here? It's expensive, it's hard to do this. There's a team of neuroscientists. For me, that is an investment in myself and in the world rather than a luxury penthouse somewhere or something.

That provides experiential benefits that I don't think you get from acquiring possessions and also everyone that goes through there walks away and it's like a degree. No one can take your degree away from you. Like they can say, "You don't have ... Sorry, I went to the school." I have the knowledge. It's inside me. It doesn't cost you anything to carry that and that's why physically training yourself, mentally training yourself, meditating. All those things are investments of energy into yourself and I'm just like, "I want more out of that." It's a weird way of thinking though. I think most of the time it's around, I need a second home or a vacation home or whatever. This, for me, was actually a big financial risk.

I still make house payments, I have a salary like everyone else because I have professional investors in Bulletproof. This is the most important extremes I can think of for myself and for my wife and even for my kids so that's where I put energy, but is not minimalism. It's actually like more the Peter D Amanda style. If you have enough assets to make a difference, you have a moral obligation to make a difference. If you instead focus on, basically having less, what if that means you don't have the resources to achieve the mission that you set out to achieve. Do you ever think about that?

Joshua: Yeah, I do and I think it's important to realize that contribution ... When you think about just a small level, I think we're inherently wired to contribute beyond ourselves. To add value to other people's lives, basically. The easiest example for everyone to think about is when you listen to a podcast or you see an article online or you read a book that you really love or you try some type of food or a restaurant that you found value in, your first inclination is to share that with someone else you care about. "I'm going to forward this to you in an email."

Because your hope is that they will get a similar amount of value from that thing or that experience that you did and I think if you were to just tweeze that out and apply it to a grander scale, that's one of the things that minimalism has allowed me to do more than anything else, is contribute beyond myself to the world around me. There are two reasons it's allow me to do that. One, it's just freed up my time and resources to be able to focus more on contribution. Two, it's allowed me to grow immensely, grow more than I've ever grown in my life over the last seven years and the more grow ... It's an old apothem. The more you grow, the more you have to give, but that ends up being true. As you become a better version of yourself ... When you were ostensibly successful and at age 26-27, but only narrowly successful, didn't have the ability to to give in the same way because you weren't the most functional version of yourself, the most optimal version.

I think the same way now is I'm only as good as my weakest value. Whether that's health, or the people in my life, relationships or my creativity or growth or giving. Those are the core values in my life and if I want to be able to give I have to have something to

give and minimalism has allowed me to grow more than I ever anticipated. Again, that wasn't one of the initial benefits for me where I'm like, "I'm going to let go of my stuff so I have more to give." That was a hard path to travel down, but once you figure out that I'm less focused on the things that don't matter ... Well, what does matter to me? Giving matters to me. Well, then I can focus on it.

Dave: That makes so much sense. It's counterintuitive, but for listeners and when you think about it, if you have less clutter you have more energy, that does give you more to give back in whatever way you give back. Which can be a very local level and that's no more or less noble than giving back on a global level. You're doing what you're here to do. There's another kind of over consumption that has nothing to do with buying stuff and it's maybe more damaging. It's just technology consumption. We've got teenagers spending nine hours a day using media, people spend 50 minutes on Facebook everyday. People check their phones 8 billion times a day. Now, there's a new psychological word called nomophobia for people who have a fear of not having their mobile device on them at all times.

Joshua: Yes. I think we all have that to a certain extent. Have you ever twitched for the device? Reached for it and it wasn't there and had a slight bit of panic?

Dave: I don't get a panic response. Going back to that brain hacking stuff. I've pretty much taken my panic buttons away. I've reprogrammed the core neurological response because being able to be peaceful, even when really big things are happening, is the most priceless thing that I know. I do buy pants that have a pocket in the right place to keep the phone away from my main equipment, so to speak

Joshua: Same here.

Dave: The phone's always there and I have habits, like if I move, if I sit down I take it out because I don't want the phone transmitting against me and I put it in airplane mode a bunch of the time and things like that. I don't know that that's a bad thing given that the value that a phone provides, if you use it with awareness and consciousness, is much higher than the risk of distraction if you're in charge of yourself. I don't know the most of us are in charge of ourselves is the problem.

Joshua: You're absolutely right. For me, I did this experiment a few years ago and I've done it one other time since. I got rid of my phone for two months and it was shortly after I'd gotten rid Internet at home and gotten rid of my TV which, I think, most of us are addicted to TV. Even with all the Internet and everything else going on, I think the average person watches something like 35 hours a week of TV in an America which is unbelievable to me, but I get it. For me, it was just sort of on like a fireplace all the time, just transmitting bad news for the most part. Anyway, I got rid of my phone for a couple of months and I realized you're confronted with a special kind of loneliness once you've gotten rid of all these major pacifiers, all these glowing screens, not having Internet at home ...

By the way, I don't think Internet's bad. I just got rid of it for a month and it was the most productive month of my life so I didn't bring it back in so now I'll schedule time to go do that. With the phone I realized how much I was pacifying myself, but I also realized that it did add value to my life and so when I brought it back in I did so in a much different way. I no longer have Facebook on my phone or twitter on my phone. I no longer have I don't check email on my phone anymore. I don't have an email app on my phone and I actually use it now to message people and get directions.

Dave: Mostly for porn? What else do people do with their phones? I'm kidding.

Joshua: Shockingly, I can even make a phone call with it occasionally which is unbelievable.

Dave: They do that?

Joshua: I know, right? My phone still does that. Now, I'm able to use that more deliberately, but whenever I catch myself twitching for it ... I knew I had a problem, by the way, and the reason, the impetus of letting go of that for a while was I was at the urinal and I caught myself reaching for it. My phone wasn't there, I'd left it in the car and I felt that twinge of panic where I'm like, "Oh my goodness. Where's my phone? Oh my God, it's lost."

Dave: How do I Snapchat right now? [crosstalk 00:48:34].

Joshua: How am I going to piss without Snapchatting? Now, I do things like, right now, I don't have my phone with me. It's in the car and I'll do that whenever I go to someone's house or whatever. I make it so that it's accessible, but not necessarily easily accessible. I've also done something recently. I've been doing an experiment over the last couple of weeks. I moved the phone over to grayscale and it makes everything so much less interesting on the phone and so I don't twitch for it. I don't feel the need. You pick it up and you're like, "That's boring." This is just a dumb tool that does what I need it to do.

Great, because that's what I really need it for is to do what I need it to do. I think experimentation like that is important. Getting outside of that comfort zone, making yourself a little uncomfortable allows you to grow in that way as well. I call it the discomfort zone. Being in that place of discomfort allows you to figure out, "Okay, here's what I actually need this tool for and here are the other things that are just wasting my time.

Dave: It's an interesting conundrum. I read a lot on my phone because I have little kids and I have a really intense schedule. Some of the other podcasts recently, I just was talking about this, but I use my calendar. Every minute of my calendar is filled up. I work with an assistant who helps me do that. I have, "When am I going to do yoga? When am I going to do biohacking? When am I driving the kids to school? When am I having lunch?" If it's not on there. I'm just not going to do it because there's so much external pressure and just internal ... I have really big goals for Bulletproof and I'm disrupting the big food.

I don't want to waste even one drop of energy in a day. That means though that if I'm going to get a chance to read either the latest news and then share it with a hundred thousand people with some commentary that might be helpful to them, it means that I'm probably going to look at Facebook while I'm peeing. I used to be like, "I should pee mindfully." I'm like screw that noise." I actually am getting more benefit from reading this stuff and taking care of a biological function that didn't require mindfulness than I am by just taking a deep breath and focusing on the oneness with the pee.

There's a limit to the level of piece that you can have when you actually consume information that is useful and fun and interesting, but I'm also not looking at Kanye West's latest song or whatever. I trimmed all that stuff out of my feed, I don't even know who the celebrities are for the most part. Maybe that's a part of consuming less is maybe consuming consciously so you're spending your attention on stuff that benefits your stuff you care about instead of something you don't care about. How do you reconcile that aspect, where instead of being minimalist you're like, maximum value per unit of energy spent?

Joshua: Back to the reaching for the phone at the urinal. That was the opposite of conscious. It was out of habit, it was just this twitch of reaching for my ... Because I had this trigger of unzipping my fly, now I need to reach for my back pocket and it's like, "Well, wait a minute. I don't have to do that," but could I do those things consciously? Sure. I think in your world what you've talked about is you have prioritize your day through scheduling and I think that is very effective for someone who's in a situation like you are. In fact, you look at my calendar and it's going to be fairly similar.

It's going to be regimented in a way that works really well for me. Greg McKeown talks about this in his book "Essentialism", he talked about priorities and how that word wasn't a plural until the 20th century. When you think about the word priority it just literally means the thing before or the first thing. Now, we talk about our first things, our priorities. In fact, when you see the sort of gross exaggeration of this, the United Nations a couple years ago had a list of their 163 priorities. Well, if you have 163 priorities it tells me that you probably don't have any priorities at all.

The truth is the reason that you have your schedule so regimented like that is because it allows you to say no to 99% of the inputs or requests or these discrete bits of information that are constantly coming at you. You're being barraged with all this information. You get to say no to all of that because, here's everything on this device that says yes. I'm going to say yes to these things that are in my calendar, they're very deliberately chosen. This is a form of minimalism, but it's about saying yes to these and knowing that if you say yes to any of these other discrete bits of information you've actually got to say no to these most important things that you've outlined your day with already.

Dave: When people say safety is the top priority, like car manufacturers always say that. Actually, let me just say this is straight forward. Getting there was the top priority. The safest thing to do is don't get in the car. We lie to ourselves about priorities at all I feel like there really is a stack waited thing and I've told my team, my executive support



team, "Look. Here's the list of priorities stack ranked in order." Number one is health, biohacking and biohacking is not the same thing as health, but bottom line is if I'm not doing things to make myself beyond healthy, to make myself stronger and better every day or at least every week I'm going in the wrong direction. I'm going to live to 180 years old, that requires many small behavioral changes. You've got to make time for those. That comes first, not last. When I was younger that came last. That was like, that'll take care of itself.

Joshua: You forsake it.

Dave: Yeah, and number two is family. Because you're not going to really spend quality time with your family if you feel like crap or if you're tired all the time because you didn't invest in number one. Then, number three is Bulletproof and it's work. Because if I put my job in front of my family or in front of my physical biology, I'm not going to do a good job at work. It seems like there's a dependency there and I finally just spelled it out really quickly because it's so common. Even amongst the guys with ... Hundreds of millions of dollars ... I've had the pleasure of training their brains or just hanging out with them, getting to know them.

A lot of them are desperate from a health perspective and they have unhappy relationships with their drinking. They're not happy and I think it's because they put others before them. You put your company before you, you put your family before you. Look, if you don't take time to relax, and to your point, to pay attention to what matters most you're not going to have the energy. You're not going to have the focus and the awareness to be nice to your employees. To do the right thing you're kind of walking in a fog. It sounds like you experienced that. I certainly experienced that. I want to hit 300 lbs. I was not just 300 lbs, I was a 300 lbs asshole. There's a big difference there.

Joshua: It's funny you mention that. You call those priorities, I would just call those values.

Dave: Yeah, there you go.

Joshua: Because I didn't know what my values were because I was so focused on that other stuff. By clearing that access out-of-the-way, letting go of that which was superfluous, I was able to figure, like you, my health. Number one priority. Second for me was relationships, because I forsook the people closest to me because I was spending all my time with networking buddies and executives and coworkers and they weren't inherently bad people, but that meant that I didn't have any time left for the people closest to me. The people I said were my priority, but they were really just lip service priorities. The third thing for me was passion or creativity.

For you, you said Bulletproof. That's your creative vehicle is Bulletproof. It's how you're creative with your book and with your podcast, with your website, and the products that you create that value to other people's lives. I didn't feel like I was truly creative in the way that I could be. I wasn't being my most creative self. Those are the values. Ryan and I wrote about those in our first book, it was a book called "Minimalism: Live a

meaningful life" and it started with the stuff getting out of the way and then saying, "Okay. Here are my values or priorities. Here's what's most important to me."

Dave: I would encourage anyone listening to do that. Sit down and figure out what's most important to you. One of the coolest exercises that really got me started thinking about this was back in business school at Warden. One of my professors, we graphed out how much energy we put into these various things like your health, your social life, your family, your career. All these different domains of life and you're like, "How much energy did I put in there and how satisfied am I?" It becomes glaringly obvious. It's like, "I spend 80% of my time on areas that suck and I don't get any response. I'm not getting a return on my investment." His take on this is that, then, what you should do is do something different.

Ask the stakeholders, "What should I do differently?" Find activities that give you benefits in multiple domains. I've been making a practice of that for quite a while and it really helps because it's part of this minimalist thinking here. What am I spending my energy, my focus, my attention on and how do I spend less of that in order to get more happiness out of it?" For me, that's why I focus in that order on those three things. On health and biological wellness, family, and Bulletproof and the big mission there. Because that's where the most return happens and if I don't ... I don't know how to cut anymore out because otherwise I would.

Joshua: I think ultimately, you're right. We are what we focus on at the end of the day. If we're focusing on ... Well, if it's consumption primarily, well then you become a consumer. It's how businesses talk about people. As consumers. If we focus on creativity, then we are creators and it's really up to us to decide what we need to focus on.

Dave: What you're pointing out, pretty eloquently here on The Minimalist, is that, "Look. You're not getting much return at all." You buy something, you get a dopamine hit and you throw it in the closet and then next week you find something else. If that's working for you, where else could you invest that? If you did, what would the impact on your net picture of what makes you who you are, what would it be? I think it's pretty meaningful which is why I wanted to have you on the show.

Joshua: I think that the price really goes way beyond the price tag as you just alluded to. We buy the thing and just in the United States alone, we have \$12 trillion worth of consumer debt. It's hard for us to even wrap our mind around \$12 trillion. The stat I saw was, if you were to spend \$1 million every day, you could've done that since the birth of the buddha and you'd still wouldn't have spent \$1 trillion by now and we have \$12 trillion in debt.

The average american has four active credit cards in his or her wallet, one in 10 Americans has 10 or more active credit cards. The price beyond just the actual cost is like, "Well, now I have to take care of the thing. I have to store. I have to clean it. I have to put gas in it and change its oil and feed it." Whatever it may be, we don't keep in mind all these other additional costs that weigh on the back of our mind and ultimately end up costing us way more than the thing itself costs.

Dave: Very well said. Now, if someone came to you tomorrow and they said, "Based on everything you've learned I want to perform better at every single thing I do just as a human being. Not at work or sports or anything else. I want to be better at everything." What are the three most important pieces of advice you have for them?

Joshua: The first thing I would say is, with respect to stuff, let it go. It's just stuff and it has only the meaning that you give it. Things don't have meaning unless we give a meaning. Second thing I would say is, it has to do with the people in our lives. You can't change the people around you, but you can change the people around you. What I mean by that is, you can't try to change someone. Make them, mold them into what you want them to be, but you can surround yourself by supportive people with similar interests and values. They may even have different beliefs. I look at me and Ryan, we have radically different personalities, we have different belief systems, different political leanings, but we have similar values. I surround myself with people who make me a better version of myself. The last thing I would say is try to love people and use things because the opposite never works.

Dave: Yep. That's really good advice. Using people and loving things is pretty unattractive I would say.

Joshua: Yeah, definitely.

Dave: Really nice piece of advice. I've never heard that last one, but very eloquently put. Thanks a lot, Joshua, for coming on Bulletproof Radio. Where can people find out more about your podcast and your books and things like that?

Joshua: We keep it pretty simple. Just go to [theminimalists.com](http://theminimalists.com) and we're at The Minimalist on all the social medias.

Dave: That minimalists with an "S" at the end, right?

Joshua: Yeah, [theminimalists.com](http://theminimalists.com). Yep.

Dave: Cool. All right. If you enjoyed today's episode, you know what to do it. Head on over to iTunes and this will take exactly 0 additional consumption for you to show gratitude by leaving a five-star review. Reviews tell other people that this is worth listening to, this is time well spent, that it wasn't basically a waste of your energy and your time and you actually did consume your commute or your workday with what you just heard. If it was useful, please say thanks just by leaving a review. Have a great day.