

Mimetic Desire Shatters the Myth of Why You Want – Luke Burgis with Dave Asprey – #865

Announcer:

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Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today is going to be a fascinating show. Because as an author, I actually have favorite authors who aren't me because I don't have that big of an ego at least. I like to think that my ego is smaller than yours. Which by the way, would make me egotistical in case you missed the joke there. But Ryan Holiday is one of-

Luke Burgis:

And mimetic by the way.

Dave Asprey:

And mimetic. There you go. Ryan Holiday is, if not my favorite, one of my top several favorite authors. He does the work, right? And I respect his writing greatly. And some of his books have nailed things that are very hard to put into words. And he recently hosted my guest today, who is Luke Burgis, on his Daily Stoic podcast. And they talked about Luke's book called Wanting. And also Adam Grant, who's been on Bulletproof Radio endorsed Luke's book. And it talks about why you want what you want. And this is fundamental. Some of the nuggets of this are sprinkled in Game Changers, my book, where I interviewed four or 500 people who've done big things to find out what were the secrets.

But I think this is a worthy topic for us today. Because if you want things you don't actually want, the way I ran my life until I was about 30, let me tell you, it will suck. And it will suck hard. And the sooner you get that lesson in your life, whether you're 70 or 17, it doesn't matter. You got to get this. And I think there's really cool knowledge from Luke today about something called mimetic desire. Luke, welcome to the show.

Luke Burgis:

Thanks for that intro, Dave. It's good to be with you. Good to be on.

Dave Asprey:

You're interesting in many different ways. But part of it is that you started four companies in wellness and consumer products and technology. I don't know, I've only started like six or something.

Luke Burgis:

The mimetic rivalry has already started. Yeah.

Dave Asprey:

Right. Not at all, but just similar path. And you thought you had everything you wanted, but you didn't. And so, you apparently got bored and I don't know why you would do this, but you looked at French scholars, which are some of the most annoying ones. Sorry, if you're from France, but your scholars suck for the most part. And René Girard, Girard, however you say in French.

Luke Burgis:

Girard.

Dave Asprey:

Girard. I live in Canada, but I don't speak French. I'm a bad Canadian, apparently. And you said, oh, this is a person who's said, okay, we actually just imitate other people's desires, and it changed your life, and you wrote a book about it. So, when did you know that, oh, gee, being a successful entrepreneur with tons of money and all that kind of stuff, that that wasn't what you wanted?

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. Well, you mentioned until around the time that you were 30 sounds like you had been chasing some desires that brought you some pain. And that's about the age that I had the same realization. I had started a few companies, some successful, some not successful, but I had standard totems of success. But I was absolutely miserable. I was in the worst shape of my life, I was on the hedonic treadmill, and it just seemed like nothing was going to make me happy. And I had a blown-up business deal with Zappos.com and Tony Hsieh. And it basically forced me to take a freaking break and rest for the first time in my entire life. I had just been go, go, go, up until that point, and I hadn't done much self-care. I hadn't done much introspection, much reflection, I just sort of checked the boxes. Like life was like a video game and you just beat the level, and you get to the next level.

That grade out of college, it was like I would get my first job. And before I'd even started, I'd put the job on my resume and thought about how I could leverage it and parlay it to get the next job. And it's just sort of a miserable way to live when nothing's enjoyable in and of itself. Right? Some things are just meant to just be enjoyed for what they are. And I just didn't experience that until I had kind of a forced timeout. And I took a few months, I traveled a lot. I started taking care of myself, I started reading stuff that I claimed that I read in high school, is total bullshit. I never read it. Classic literature, philosophy, which I had always been interested in thinkers and philosophy. You mentioned Ryan Holiday in the beginning. The stoics are fascinating figures. And what Ryan was able to do, is just write about them and get across their ideas so that more people have access to these ideas. Sort of very similar to what I'm trying to do with René Girard.

But I read for the first time in a long time, and I started taking care of myself. And one of the thinkers that I came across was this thinker, René Girard. He's somewhat influential in Silicon Valley's circles, but that's not how I stumbled across him. I'd stumbled across him through a wise old sort of spiritual mentor, who suggested that I read some of his work and said, this might help you figure out some of the stuff that's going on in your life. So, I did and I was immediately struck by the insights. And I couldn't believe that I'd never heard of him before, or that he's just not somebody that people talk about at all. But you said it yourself. He's a French academic, a French scholar, and he's languished in the obscurity of academia, up until about a decade ago, or so. He's fascinating for a number of different reasons. One, I think he was one of the last really, really great interdisciplinary thinkers that sort of studied all different kinds of things.

A lot of people are just hyper siloed these days. And I think when we're hyper, we have hyper siloed knowledge, we're not able to make connections between different fields of inquiry. But you can connect business with philosophy, with the science, with... That to me, there's not a lot of people that are able to do that. And Girard was able to do that. And he had this fundamental insight into the nature of human desire by reading classic literature. Now, that might sound a little bit weird. Girard was not a literary person, his degree, his PhD was in history with a specialty in medieval history. But he was thrown into teaching literature classes at the university that he was at. And he started reading these classic works. And at the time, the sort of mode of inquiry among sort of English and literature

intellectuals was that you always have to separate the work from the author, and that you should never sort of try to find patterns between different works, they all need to be taken completely on their own.

And Girard sort of being an outsider, not having been part of the academy, just didn't even know about that, or just through that completely out. And he said, "Well, that doesn't seem quite right." Because if books are written by humans, then it seems like we shouldn't detach the author from the work itself. And different books by different humans might hold some key to understanding the truth about human nature, that the humans are embedding in the writing that they themselves might not even know that they're embedded in the writing. In other words, he set out to try to find clues about human nature from the text themselves. And he wanted to see if there was a pattern between the text. This is very much like, there was a historian that basically found the lost city of Troy, because he was the only one that actually read the Iliad and the Odyssey, and thought that there was anything worth paying attention to, right?

Everybody else was like, "Oh, it's just mythology." And he said, "No, I'm actually going to... I believe there's probably truth embedded in the text and I'm going to follow it wherever it goes." And long story short, he ended up finding Troy, what we know as Troy.

Dave Asprey:

I remember reading that when I was 14, about that guy, and going, "What a genius!" He's the guy who did what everyone said you shouldn't do. And I was always attracted to him. It's cool that you brought that up.

Luke Burgis:

Super cool. So, he's like the model for Girard. And he was anti mimetic. In other words, everybody else was looking one place, and he said, "Well, I'm going to look in the one place that you all don't think is even worth looking at. Right? And there's a lot related to entrepreneurship there. Right? So, Girard, with a pattern that he found in the text was that the way that characters in these texts desired things was by imitating the desires of other powerful characters in the stories. So, none of them just wake up and spontaneously desire some goal or a career path or to pursue a woman or something like that. The desire is always modeled for them by another character in the novel. And he said, really bad novels really bad fiction, the desire is completely spontaneous. But the best fiction, the reason why we're so attracted to it, you look at Cervantes' Don Quixote, Dostoyevsky, the characters in those novels desire mimetically, meaning they're always imitating the desires of other people. And he said, it's striking when you read these works knowing that.

And he stumbled on this clue about some secret about human nature, that we're just now starting to be able to validate scientifically. We're now discovering there're reasons or things in the brain that make us imitate not just surface level things, but even people's intentions and desires. And that discovery made something click for me. And I realized that throughout my life, throughout wanting to having to go to a certain school, having to get jobs at certain companies, having to get name certain things by certain magazines, it was all driven by, first of all, what other people's expectations of me were. And those expectations were given to me by the models in my life that were modeling desire for one thing or another. And at no point that I stop and ask myself, why I had chosen to pursue the things that I was pursuing. I just convinced myself that it was the product of my own individual sort of decision making, when in fact, I was like a puppet with a puppeteer, meaning the social forces in my life that were pulling me in all different kinds of directions.

Dave Asprey:

I remember, I was absolutely convinced that if I could make a bunch of money, that I'd be happy. So therefore, I want to make a bunch of money. And I made six million dollars when I'm 26. And I look at a friend and go, "I'll be happy when I have 10 million." And then I lost it all by the time I was 28. I'm like, "What a jerk move?" Right? On many different levels. But it was exceedingly common, because I wasn't alone, there were hundreds of other people that made way more money than we should have in our 20s and early 30s, early tech company. And everyone had the same sort of thing, more and more and more. And then I said that same thing, I'll be happy when I'm famous, and I was in Entrepreneur Magazine for selling the first thing ever sold over the internet, and I'm like, "Oh, there are a million people seeing my picture." And I felt good for like 20 minutes.

Am like, "Wait, nothing changed." My phone rang one more time the next day. But it was like an orgasm. I almost had an orgasm, but it didn't really sound... It wasn't like I was looking for it there.

Luke Burgis:

It didn't feel as good as it was supposed to.

Dave Asprey:

Right. And so fame doesn't make you happy, and money doesn't make it happy. What that gets left in it, it was pretty traumatic for me to do it. And I started doing a lot of personal development work. And that's been a basis for the neuroscience side of what I do and some of the books I write. But for you, it seems like you went into more of a religious direction. I mean, you're at Catholic University, and ActivPrayer was one of your startups. How big of a role is faith and Christianity in your take on mimetic desire? Because I don't want to separate you from your book, because then René would be pissed at me if he was still live.

Luke Burgis:

You can separate out, so mimetic theory is a unified theory, okay? It starts with this fundamental idea of mimetic desire, that humans don't want completely autonomously and independently. That sort of a lie of romanticism, he calls it the romantic lie. So, mimetic desire, we can separate that out and talk about that all day long. And it plays out and sort of mimetic movements in the stock market. People wanting certain stocks or certain cryptocurrencies because other people want it, to dating. Mimetic games are played in dating and romance all the time. But the other parts of the theory are sort of spiritual in nature, because then you can ask the question of where does desire come from in the first place? Right? What is it? Is it just mimetic desire all the way down? So you almost have to start asking some spiritual questions, right? And I think Eastern spirituality, Western spirituality would answer the question differently, different sort of understandings of desire.

But in my journey, it was an important part of it. And I studied classical philosophy, I studied theology in a Christian context. And part of this for me was it was about my vocation, right? So, I have a fundamental belief that I do have a calling and a vocation. Not everybody believes that, right? But if that's true, and if I have a mission, something that I'm sort of meant to do in this world, because I'm situated in a certain place and time, then the mimetic forces are the things that could... Well, there's two ways to think of it. One way is we all need models of desire in our life, and they could help me understand what my mission is in the first place, and kind of where I'm going. And then the flip side of that is, they can also really pull me off track if the wrong models come into my life and make me forget what it was I set out to do in the first place, right?

Like, here's this social good, this thing that I'm trying to do in the world, and all of a sudden, somebody with a shiny new car or the new business shows up, and I start... I lose sight of the path that I

was on. So that works in both directions, but for me, is a huge part of it. And then one of the parts of mimetic theory is the role of scapegoating in society. And I like to separate the discussion because it's just a lot when you try to tackle it at one time. But Girard says that mimetic desire leads to conflict. Basically, it's the source of conflict, because we're imitating the desires of other people, that brings us into conflict or rivalry with them. And that conflict is typically diffused by finding somebody to blame for the conflict, and it's usually not ourselves. So, this mimetic theory has a lot of different paths that you can go down. And I tried to touch on all of them in the book, just to show people kind of the scope of mimetic theory, even while I focus on the mimetic desire the most.

Dave Asprey:

That makes sense. So, you're able to work it in with Christianity. But I do have a question. And I fully buy into the idea that we want what we're taught to want, because it's going to make us have something and all of Buddha's philosophy, all of Lao Tzu's philosophy, is that, "Oh, if you think you'll be happy when you're wrong." Always, 100% of the time. And if you're earlier in your career and you're listening to this, or you're in the Upgrade Collective, we've got people from their teens all the way up into I think their 80s. And you see, the people who've been around the block, usually, like you said, by the time they're in their 30s, they've kind of at least started to get a sense of it. But then, no, you're not going to be happy with. So then one of my favorite human beings who has been on the show a couple times, who's taught me a lot about entrepreneurship is Dan Sullivan.

He runs a company called Strategic Coach, and I have more friends than I can count with \$50 million plus companies because of his coaching. And this is a guy who's I believe, is in his late 70s, and is planning to live to 150 something. But he says straight up if you're in one of his classes, and he says, "Why do you want that?" And people go, "I want it because of this, because of that." And he goes, "There is no reason. You want it because you want it." Desire is an emotion, it's not a thought, right? And if you want a BMW, it's because you want to BMW, it's not because it's going to get me there faster. It's not because I'm going to get laid. It's just because you want it.

So there's just an inherent, I don't know why I want it because it's emotional. And that doesn't jive with mimetic desire, which is a rational thing. Oh, if I have this, I've been taught to want this, if I have this, it's going to give me something, therefore, I should want this, therefore I do want this. And then you're kind of trapped in this matrix of illusions. So how do you reconcile, I want it because I was taught to want it? Which is a mimetic desire. Because I see others wanting it, therefore I want it, and I just want it because I want it?

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. So, I would say that mimetic desire is not a rational process at all, it's actually the opposite of rational. Because the social process that Girard says forms our desires, happens subconsciously. So it's not like... When I was basically... When Tony Hsieh of Zappos, the late Tony Hsieh, rest in peace was my mimetic model. It's not as if I realized that at the time, right? And all of the little ways that I was changing my company culture, I didn't realize that I was imitating him that way until months, maybe even years later. So, at the time, we're socially influenced in a way that is pre rational or subconscious. And I think that's one distinction that I would make. I didn't know that Sullivan teaches that, that's fascinating that he straight up says that in the class. So I would be interested in his take on where desire comes from then, because that is very different than Girard's idea, right?

He would call that the romantic lie that we always think that our desires are spontaneous, that we just want things when we want them. Well, I'm just curious, what is his understanding of the seed of desire. Right? Is intellectual? Is it in the will? Does it just arise?

Dave Asprey:

I think he believes it's emotional. So it isn't even in the will. But it drives with some of the other stuff. So, I've had a professional dominatrix on the show, I had a recent podcast where the guy who did the largest survey of fetishes and fantasies in the world. I don't know, a huge number of people in this survey. An academic did a proper study of all this stuff. I don't think you can rationally say why that person wants a spanking and that person is into Swiss cheese or whatever the heck. People are weird, right? So, I don't know how much of that is mimetic, but maybe it's all mimetic because you saw something when you were to and cheese sandwich was really attractive.

Maybe that's all in there. But it seems like there's some level of I have no idea why. And there isn't a why, but I still want. Why do I like the sunset? Right? You can't say why. Why does that painting speak to me and that painting doesn't speak to me? But those are forms of desire, but I don't know, are they mimetic because someone told me actually like that painting?

Luke Burgis:

I think that mimetic desire exists on a spectrum. And that there are some things that can't be explained medically at all. Something beautiful like a sunset, or like a beautiful woman that I'm attracted to. There are very clear scientific sort of physiological things going on there. Right? So, let's make a distinction. I should have said this right up front. Mimetic desire exists on a spectrum where sort of those kind of like hardwired physiological things like thirst and hunger, those have been met, right? And we're sort of now in a more abstract world. Take fetishes and things like this for instance. Where did anybody get the idea to do some of these fetishes in the first place? Right? To the-

Dave Asprey:

A French guy. His name was Marquis de something.

Luke Burgis:

So, by the way, if anybody wants to go really deep into this, in Girard's magnum opus things hidden since the foundation of the world, there's a whole section dedicated to sadomasochism.

Dave Asprey:

Is there really? That's so funny. I was randomly bringing that up. That was not that I've read his book, but I do want to say something. I'm kind of making fun of him for being French. Because well, that's just what you do when you're in Canada. But he taught at Stanford, right? This is a very well known, well respected guy who passed away only in the last, I think, six, seven years.

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. 2015.

Dave Asprey:

Okay. So, this isn't like 17th century stuff. So some listeners who are unfamiliar with him might have gotten the wrong impression from me.

Luke Burgis:

Yeah, we should situate him in time. He came to the US right after World War Two, and was in the US the rest of his life. He spent a lot more time in the US than he did in France, and taught at Stanford for the last, I think 15 years of his career.

Dave Asprey:

So, that that adds maybe a little bit more relevance for some people. And we've also had Scott Barry Kaufman on the show who I'm forgetting his university, I want to say Wisconsin or something. I don't know. Don't quote me on that. But he studied Maslow's works, including all of his unpublished works about the hierarchy of needs, and said, "Oh, he didn't get to finish his book. His last hierarchy was for transcendence." which maybe ties in with some of the Christianity side of things like that connection to something bigger than yourself is hardwired in our biology.

Luke Burgis:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dave Asprey:

And it's funny because René's work, which is where I know you're Wanting book is rooted in, he does say, "Okay, let's get past the drive for food and sex and shelter and security." And that desire happens after your basic needs are met. Except it seems like a lot of the desires, I desired the foie gras, but my need for food was met by the apple, right? I desired the hot sex, but I could have gone and masturbated, I desired the big house, but I have a tent, right? Whatever the thing. So, I'm having a hard time really following where I draw the line between these two concepts. But it might be helpful for everyone listening.

Luke Burgis:

I think, desire has infiltrated practically everything now. We're not hunter gatherers, right? Where now your desire for some particular sort of cut of steak, you have a need for food because you're hungry. We have a need for food, but the desire for a particular brand of water, or a particular cut of food at a particular restaurant-

Dave Asprey:

Or like a type of coffee that I used to recommend.

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. I have it in my cupboard, just so everybody knows. Has to do with desire. And without... You've done a... Frankly, every good entrepreneur or advertiser knows that there needs to be solid models of desire for a product. Most people are not going to buy things just on the scientific evidence alone, very few people take the time to actually do the investigation. And if there's somebody that you trust, right? Who's modeling that desire, think of it almost like a shortcut. It's like a heuristic or a shortcut that people take in order to... I mean, the world is full of objects of desire, there's too many than any human being could ever pursue. So, this is where Girard's idea of models of desire come in.

In a world without models of desire, we just go fucking crazy or something, right? We wouldn't have... We sort of need some kind of signpost, some people outside of ourselves that we look to, to be able to cut through some of the noise, the information overload, you name it. There's a lot of noise out there. And desire exists on this spectrum. So, sometimes we can desire things in a highly mimetic way,

and sometimes just less mimetic, right? There's not a lot of mimetic desire involved with me wanting to have sex with my wife, right? So, I think thinking of this on a spectrum-

Dave Asprey:

Unless a lot of other people wanted to have sex with your wife, then it would be mimetic, right?

Luke Burgis:

Then it could be mimetic. There's-

Dave Asprey:

It's so confusing.

Luke Burgis:

There's a famous psychologist, who was a good friend of René Girard, his collaborator, and he would have a woman come to him for instance, and say, "Look, my husband doesn't want to have sex with me anymore. He doesn't seem attracted to me anymore at all." And this is pretty controversial, right? I'm not recommending people go home and do this. But this psychologist, having understood mimetic desire would say, if that's what you want to do, then find some attractive man at work that desires you and let your husband see that. Let him see that you're desired by somebody else."

Dave Asprey:

So, find a pull boy, was his advice?

Luke Burgis:

Find a pull boy. Yeah. Essentially, this is basically what he said. And it was one way to sort of change that dynamic, right? This is not normative or moral advice. This is what he recommended for people that couldn't understand the way that desire... Because desire relies on models, and it ebbs and flows depending on the kinds of models that we have in our life. And there's something to be said about wanting the things that are already in our life. You'd mentioned the word transcendence earlier. And transcendence in Girard's view is what desire at a fundamental level is. Desire, it's our way of always wanting to transcend where we're currently at. Right? Desire almost is transcendence, right? It's our need for transcendence. And that can be problematic when we're in a relationship, or we have children, we have a family, do we always need to go beyond? And do we always think that the thing that we want is somewhere other than what in our own home, or what we already have in our life?

Dave Asprey:

Okay, I get it. And perhaps what's most illuminating is you have a picture of Maslow's hierarchy of needs without the final step there because that actually isn't in his official hierarchy of needs, but you map it out towards power, prestige and glory. And what would you say to someone who's saying, just get it going, you early 20s. And we all have this power, prestige, glory, I'm going to go make my mark in the world and all that. What advice would you have given that you've studied all this and you've lived a similar path? That to me, been there, done that. What would you say?

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. I teach college freshmen too. And it's sometimes people just need to do things themselves, right? Nothing I say, they'll never believe it right until they just walk that path. You know the Aesop's fable with the sour grapes? Right? Where you have the fox that can't quite reach the grapes. And at a certain point, he just says, fuck it, the grapes must be sour because he can't reach them. So he tells himself the story and he walks away, and lives his happy fox life, right? The problem with the story, or the one thing that I would call attention to, is that the fox was alone. If the fox... Forget about the fox, right? When you have a bunch of other people in your life, who are your peers, who are the same age, that deeply desire something, whether it's good for you or not, it's not that easy to walk away, because you're not alone. Right? You have these very powerful model, and you describe how that affected you in your early years.

And that's challenging, right? So, they're. And I can stand up there all day long and say, "Look, I pursued these things, I achieved these things, and I was miserable, what was missing?" I try to help them think about the things that they can cultivate in themselves, things like just basic virtues. Right? I think there's a lot of classical wisdom. Certainly the stoics talked a lot about it, right? Things that nobody can take away from you. Parts of your character. So, some of them are surprised to enter this introduction to business class, and realize that we spend half of the class just talking about the kinds of the things that... The internal framework that they can build that nobody can take away from them. How do we choose goals in the first place? Where did your idea of being an investment banker come from in the first place? Right? Like, who's your model for that?

Dave Asprey:

That's self-hatred. Isn't that what drives that?

Luke Burgis:

What drives that. I mean, it was a strong one for me, believe me. And you know what? When I saw... They would come give us talks at NYU, right? Here's my life, and they'd look like they were totally exhausted and miserable. And I would say, I'm working 80 or 90 hours a week, and I just thought that they were... There was nothing. And I remember one of the guys came in, and he said, "Look..." He goes, "Don't think that my life is necessary...." He was an analyst. He was like, "Don't think that my life is necessarily what you want. I don't want to do this forever. I'm exhausted. And the money's just not worth 90 hours a week. I'm not even taking care of myself right now." And I remember thinking that that guy was just a weak... I just... Nothing that he would have ever said to me-

Dave Asprey:

I had the same thoughts.

Luke Burgis:

... would have convinced me. I just wrote him off completely. And sometimes, I think there's probably a tendency for younger people to be dismissive of people that are a little bit older that have earned their stripes and are trying to say, "Listen..." Probably the more that I tell you that you don't want this thing, the more you're going to want it, it's kind of like kids, but that's what they need to struggle with and work out.

Dave Asprey:

So perhaps, finding a mentor and actually following through. I was way too stubborn to have mentors or trust anyone. Like, "I'll do it all myself." Insert karma's voice. And, man, I wish I would have listened

because the people who were willing to listen early on, let's see, Marc Andreessen, Mark Zuckerberg, these entrepreneurs who do stupidly well, it's because when they were 23, 24, they found someone 20 years older and listened, right? And suddenly they were able to accelerate because they didn't make a lot of mistakes, certainly the ones that I made. And that could be a part of it. And it's funny.

I noticed by the time I was 30, that every investment banker, graduate I knew and every management consultant, these are all 90 hour a week, they were all miserable, they all hated their lives, they all quit, or they made partner in five years. And if they made partner, they basically made huge amounts of money, and then alcohol, drugs and divorce. They've ruined their lives over this. Blah, those are gross, but they look like kind of fun jobs, but I'm not wanting to do it. So, maybe I had some wisdom there, but no mentor told me that. It might have just been inherent laziness. Which brings me to the point. What is the role of laziness in mimetic desire? The desire to not waste time doing stuff that you'd have to do?

Luke Burgis:

The desire for laziness, or the desire to not be lazy?

Dave Asprey:

Well, the desire to actually not waste time on crap. Right? So, laziness means I didn't want to do it. I wanted to do less work. And I feel like a lot of people actually want to do less work. You didn't want to do the investment banker thing, right? Because you wanted to do less work. At least at a certain point you got there.

Luke Burgis:

Right. Yeah. And that... I think this comes down to balance and health and balance in life in general. But I didn't have a model for a balanced life in my early years, right? There was simply no model. I went to undergrad NYU Business School, which is notoriously brutal, right?

Dave Asprey:

I did [crosstalk 00:33:41]. So, we've got our similar here.

Luke Burgis:

Yeah, I doubt it's very, very different. And here's the thing, I don't know if you have this experience as an entrepreneur, and I don't know what your company, I don't know what Trend Micro was like, but when you're in the corporate world, there are kind of very easily identifiable next steps.

Dave Asprey:

Oh, yeah. There's a ladder that everyone does. Yeah.

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. And as an entrepreneur, as a founder, as a CEO, it's not quite so clear. There are obvious things, right? You want to be profitable, you want to increase the valuation of your company, there are certain things that you want to do, but it's a little more ambiguous. And I think it requires a lot more discipline, frankly, to just say, when is enough enough? What am I really out to do here? And for that, I didn't have any kind of models of health. I didn't have any models of healthy family life, for instance, until I got to be in my late 20s. And how it took that long, I have no idea. So, one of my pieces of advice for my students,

for young people is, don't just wait for a mentor, somebody that you really respect holistically, not just in one domain.

Sure, we can have like role models in different areas of our life, one for our work life, one for our family life, whatever. But you should also have a holistic model. And don't wait for it just to fall into your lap, you should actually be intentional about going out there and trying to find it. Because for me, it didn't come into my life until I was 29 years old, which was about 11 years too late. My parents are great, but I left, went to college and they were there... I found every model imaginable, but not the kinds that would help me understand how to be an entrepreneur and be healthy at the same time. And there's a real problem with that, right? With mental health, with just not knowing how to balance these things. I know I don't have to tell you that, but I just didn't have anybody that modeled that for me.

Dave Asprey:

There are vanishingly few happy entrepreneurs. Right? And it's taken me a while to get to that point, it's a lot easier when you're happy. But man, I remember the first time I sat down and I go... I just raised a bunch of money and I go, "Holy shit, my net worth just crossed \$10 million." And you're like, "Wow, that's awesome." And by the way, guys, you can't believe anything you see on the internet, the internet thinks I'm a billionaire. And that is so far from reality. But I'm remarkably comfortable compared to where I was 10 years ago, and I'm freaking grateful for that. But I sat there. I'm like, "Who am I going to tell?" Right? And the bottom line is, you're surrounded by people with mimetic desire. And there's another name, maybe not for it directly, but it's mostly envy. I can't get to go bragging about this. Right? Of course, here I'm talking about on the show, because I believe in full transparency. But it sounded like, "All right, who do I share this with? How do I do that?" So there's a loneliness that comes with financial success.

There's loneliness that comes with being at top. And they didn't teach me any of that in business school at all. And that's the hard stuff. So what you find is entrepreneurs, they'll kind of band together and we go to these stupidly expensive masterminds, just because if it's stupidly expensive, it means that the other people in the room are probably at a similar level of success, and it might be a safe place to talk about stuff that no one in your family would understand. And none of your friends from college would understand. So yeah, that loneliness is built in and no one ever says anything about it. What's your recommendation? You talk with freshmen in college all the time, you've been there as much as I have. How do you deal with that?

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. I think that envy is a taboo subject to talk about. And that's why you never hear anybody talk about the word. Girard famously said, "The reason that everybody talks about sex today is because nobody wants to talk about their envy." And I think there's probably a little bit of truth to that, right? These secret desires that we have to bury that are underground. I think there's a difference between jealousy and envy. And one of the ways that I think about it is like this, right? Jealousy could be a positive thing in the sense that Dave has something that I want, it's this good thing, this relationship, I should want that, right? That's an example of healthy mimetic desire, right? But the envy, sort of my definition of envy is not wanting somebody else to have something good that they have, right? So it's not about me just wanting to share in some good, it's about me not wanting somebody else to have something. That's one way I think I draw a distinction between the two.

So many entrepreneurs that I know, spend so much time, and not just entrepreneurs, we just happen to be entrepreneurs. But I think this applies to anybody. Also, I have one foot in academia. So, I'm at a university and this is bad inside the education system, probably worse than it is among x

entrepreneurs. And the constant looking to what other people are doing or saying or wanting, or achieving, is just the fastest way to be miserable for one thing, but also the fastest way to miss opportunities, because we're just constantly looking to our right and our left rather than forward or up. And it's destroyed more companies than I know. I mean, people think like a lot of companies don't make it because of competition from the outside. I think that I literally know more companies that have failed due to internal collapse, because there was just internal problems that people couldn't solve. Right? C founders couldn't get along, there was jealousy and envy.

And that is something that I really encourage the handful of younger entrepreneurs that I mentor and my students to understand what... They'll come to me for instance, their freshman year with high, high, high anxiety about what internship they're going to have that summer. And I'm just like, "So, where did you get the idea that you need an internship?"

Dave Asprey:

I was the mimetic desire classical example. I know I want it because I was told I had to. Right?

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. And my heart kind of goes out. Right? And it's like... And I try to say, if you continue to look at what everybody else is telling you that you should be doing this summer, there's really no end of that game, you'd be doing it when you're 40, you're just going to find more ingenious ways to play the same game. So, you're going to have to learn right now, it's never too early to learn how to not play that game. And to recognize the... See, because there's two different kinds of models. And Girard talks about this. There are the kinds that are far away from us, that sort of like that we typically refer to them as role models, they're kind of in a different sphere, we don't really... They're not close to us, we don't come into contact with them. But then there are the people influencing our desires that are very close to us. They could be in our family, they could be in our company. They could be whatever, fellow podcasters or something, right?

And we're just... We're usually less likely to acknowledge the second kind, which Girard calls internal mediators of desire, because they're inside of our world and we don't like to acknowledge the internal influence that they have on us.

Dave Asprey:

I think there is a core nugget in what you're saying there. That, yep, that is what's really happening. And in *Wanting*, you go all the way back to early childhood, which made me really happy. Because a lot of the work that I do with entrepreneurs at *40 Years of Zen*, this is my neuroscience thing, you're going for a brain upgrade to make your brain perform better. And you realize that a lot of the voice in your head, a lot of things sucking energy, are very old programming that you're not at all conscious of. And some of it is wanting, some of it is trauma. And you go in, and there's states where you can edit this stuff. But you talk about some things that are really interesting, that we only learned over the past few decades around the mimetic theory and things like joint visual attention. What is joint visual attention? What is the role of early, early infant childhood and wanting stuff as adults?

Luke Burgis:

Sure. The world's leading thinker on this is Dr. Andrew Meltzoff, at the University of Washington. And he runs a neuroscience and childhood development center at the university with his wife. And he's got crazy multimillion dollar machines where he studies the electromagnetic field around infants brains, right? We actually have a magnetic force.

Dave Asprey:

An MEG. Yeah.

Luke Burgis:

Yeah, MEG. And I can't pronounce whatever it stands for. But it is very impressive. And he's been studying the brains of infants. And fascinating studies. And there's a couple of things to note here. One is the role of imitation in children probably starts before the children are even born, or the second that they're born. And to give you one example, the children of mothers who speak different languages come out of the womb, quite literally crying in different ways, because they're imitating the intonations of their mother's voice that they heard during the last trimester while they were in the womb. So, the child of a Chinese woman will come out of the womb crying differently than the child of a German mother. Because Chinese is a highly tonal language.

Dave Asprey:

That's fascinating.

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. So, they immediately have already learned to imitate things like language and voice and intonation. Within minutes or hours, they perform what's called joint visual attention. And Meltzoff has studied this extensively, where the child follows the gaze of the parent. And the studies that was usually the mother. So, if the mother looks at something, the child's eyes look at the mother's eyes because pretty much, the baby just knows how to stare up into the mother's eyes, right? But the baby notices that the mother's eyes are looking at some object, okay? And immediately starts to learn that the baby should take an interest in that object too. Obviously, this is not a rational process, but that joint visual attention, the child takes an interest in an object because the mother had an interest in the object. So, that right there is a little early indication of what might develop into mimetic desire as adults.

Dave Asprey:

Isn't that the paired with a smile or some other indication that it's good versus bad? Because if you'd look at a tiger, and you'd look at candy or whatever and one of those is more attractive than the other, so they're reading the whole face, right?

Luke Burgis:

They're reading the whole face and all of the cues matter.

Dave Asprey:

Oh, wait, hold on, they're not doing that anymore.

Luke Burgis:

And the fascinating thing is they don't do this with a nonhuman, it has to be a human. So, the same thing if they're looking at a robot, or they're looking at an animal, they don't gaze follow, it has to be a human. So, Meltzoff says that it seems like we come out of the womb recognizing that this creature is like me, even though they've never seen themselves before, they've never looked in a mirror, they somehow already sense that we're the same. And they only gaze follow with the mother. And this is

fascinating because if in Proust, Marcel Proust, in his novels... By the way, I've never gotten through any of his books extremely difficult to read.

Dave Asprey:

Thank you. Thank you. My wife loves Proust, I have never gotten through more than a chapter, I want to put them in a wood shredder. It's like the worst waste of paper ever, if I can just say that, but you might love them anyway.

Luke Burgis:

No, Proust is one of those books that people like to say that they've read, because you're supposed to have read it or something like that.

Dave Asprey:

It's horrible.

Luke Burgis:

It's brutal. But I only know this because I did a ton of research for the book. In his novels, he always has this... He always takes note of a character's eyes and what the character is looking at. And then another character picks up on what that character is looking at, just like the babies do. So, this is one of the books that Girard said he sees mimetic desire all over the place. It almost seemed like Proust had some implicit idea of kind of how we work, right? Lots of other studies that Meltzoff did, and I think one of the other fascinating ones is within a matter of months, babies can read beneath the surface level. So they can not only imitate external things, facial expressions, language, if you stick out your tongue at a baby, it can stick out its tongue back at you. But they start reading beneath the surface actions and can seem to read desires or intentions.

Dave Asprey:

Hmm.

Luke Burgis:

So, in a famous study that he did, he took some adults, put them in a room with a bunch of toddlers. And he had the adults act like they were trying to basically do something, but they failed to basically do it. So, when they left the toddlers alone in the room, is like pull the ends off of a toy dumbbell or something like that. And when they left the toddlers alone in the room, they didn't imitate what the adults did they imitated what they knew the adults were trying to do. And other studies have shown that the toddlers are able to read way beneath the surface actions, and imitate basically, the intentions or the desires.

And Girard's hypothesis is that as adults, we just do this at a far more sophisticated level. When people say, what people show us they want, we can usually see right through them. Right? And this happens in sort of dating all the time, right? We can read beneath the surface. I think women are probably better than men doing this, frankly, right? Read beneath the surface and intuit the intentions or the desires no matter how hard we try to mask it.

Dave Asprey:

That's why I like to have at least half my senior executive team be women. Sorry, men and women are different. It's kind of weird, but I believe that.

Luke Burgis:

It's just the principle of complementarity. Right?

Dave Asprey:

Yeah.

Luke Burgis:

We make each other better. And I try to follow the same rule.

Dave Asprey:

You talk in *Wanting* about the mesmerization of Steve Jobs. And of course, he's one of the most worshiped entrepreneurs of the recent history times. Tell me about mesmerization. What is that?

Luke Burgis:

So, that word comes from A guy named Mesmer. Who... This is a fascinating story. He basically would... He had patients and tried sort of a new form of therapy, where he would literally try to mesmerize them through literally manipulating their bodies in sort of physical ways and placing different magnetic objects around them to try to affect their psychology. And this has been sort of disproven, but the term mesmerize sort of implies that there's almost like some force that's almost physical like gravity. There's almost some kind of a force that's acting on us that mesmerizes us on the basis of hypnotism, right? It's almost like we can't help ourselves. There's a force that's acting on us.

And in the book, I tell the story about how Steve Jobs met a guy in college at Reed who became one of his best friends Robert Friedland. And the first time that he met Friedland, he listed his typewriter for sale. And the guy that bought it was Friedland and he walked into this guy's room, he didn't know him at the time. And Friedland was just having sex with his girlfriend on the bed. And Jobs was kind of mortified at first. He's like, "This is far out, I've never seen anybody..." Because Freedland just seemed very casual. He just said, "Well, why don't you just come in and sit down and wait until we finish?" And Jobs-

Dave Asprey:

This is in his 70s, obviously, or 60s or something like that.

Luke Burgis:

Yeah, I think it was in the 70s. And jobs describes himself as being totally mesmerized by Freedland. And he's just kind of this larger than life figure that just seemed to play by different rules than anybody else. And Jobs later friends would say that Freedland exerted this crazy mesmerizing force on Jobs. And it was that... The relationship with Friedland made Jobs realize that he could sort of begin to do the same thing for other people. Okay? And it's when they said that he sort of invented the reality distortion field that sort of Jobs is known for, right? He just seemed to be living in a different reality. And other people that came into contact with him, were kind of caught up in the reality distortion field and probably projected all kinds of things onto him. He's kind of a mythological figure, right? Who knows who... Walter Isaacson

wrote a great book about Steve Jobs. But I still don't know if I really understand who Steve Jobs was, right?

He's just this mythological, mesmerizing figure, and the make for powerful models of desire. You It's like Elizabeth Holmes, right? Steve Jobs was a model for her. Her trial started this week. And she in turn mesmerized a bunch of other people to the tune of \$700 million. So, people play these kind of games, personality, sort of cult personality games all the time. And in the book, I just talk about how these people make really easy models of desire, because it's like, "What does this person have that I don't have that makes them either so confident, so sure of themselves, they don't seem to care about the things that other people care about?" They seem to desire differently. And that's what makes them such fascinating figures.

Dave Asprey:

It is interesting, because you talk about how the Gnostics. And by the way, a lot of people don't... In fact, I don't know if I've ever talked about this. I was one class away from a minor in religious studies in my undergrad. And that was simply because I was studying computer science and I kind of sucked at it, and I could get A's in religious studies, because how hard could it be? It's all debatable and computer science was not debatable. So, I was patting my GPA with religious studies classes, just fully straight, but I learned a lot. And I was fascinated by the Gnostics in the 14th century to 16th century if I'm remembering the dates right. And they just thought that there's predominating ignorance, and if we evolve our consciousness, that's great, and that there's messengers of light who would do this. There's more enlightened people who will kind of [inaudible 00:53:34].

My path ever since then, I know people who are more enlightened than me. I seek them out, I interview them on the show. Sometimes they're experts and sometimes they're guys like, Dr. Barry Morguelan. This is the first podcast he ever did. I'm like, "The direct oral lineage of Lao Tzu handed down through one monastery." I'm like, "Okay, that's cool. I'm going to learn from Dr. Barry." And there's just countless people like that out there. And so my path has been, guys tell me what to do so I can save time and energy because I'm not going to do it all myself. So, call me a modern gnostic. And you write about that in there. And you call it the cult of experts. And now I have to ask you the real money question here. Because I want to read two sentences from the cult of experts part of Wanting.

Do you drink regular coffee? Then you obviously haven't read Dave Asprey, who knows that the beans you drink are covered in molds that produce mycotoxins and you should buy us Bulletproof Coffee to save yourself from the fate of plebeian coffee drinkers who are ignorant of it. Now, was that actually there as a cult of experts, or were you just trying to get on the show?

Luke Burgis:

Trying to try to get on the show. I'm glad we made it happen. Let me-

Dave Asprey:

I'm totally messing with you.

Luke Burgis:

No. So, let me frame that up. And I didn't know that about you about the religious studies. That's fascinating. So there are many people mentioned in that chapter.

Dave Asprey:

Oh, tons, tons.

Luke Burgis:

Tons. Right? Tim Ferriss, Dax Shepard. I could have named 1,000. Right?

Dave Asprey:

There's tons of experts there. Yeah.

Luke Burgis:

There's tons of experts out there. So, here's kind of what I'm trying to get at. The pandemic, I think has really exacerbated this, right? Because it seems like people are very sort of confused about authority and who to trust. And there's been a loss of trust, right, and credibility. And it's like everybody kind of has their own experts, the people that they look to. And the experts are sort of mediated to us through layers and layers and layers of stuff, right? It could be the internet, it's not exactly known as a source of trustworthy. First of all, it's information overload. So, there's layers and layers of mediation. It used to be experts, the word expert basically comes from a Latin word that means someone who's experienced at their craft, right? So, you're like a woodworker, I could sit there and watch you carve wood or stone and be like, "Well, shit, that guy's an expert." You know what I mean? I'm looking at it with my own eyes and I can see that this person is an expert.

In 2021. It's not like that. Okay? And it's one of the... Anybody can basically sort of claim expert status. And I think it's sort of... We don't have the... There're so many layers and layers of mediation, right? And it's basically sort of like, left everybody in sort of a state of confusion. Who are the models to look to? And one of the things I think we need to do, and there's sort of a lindy effect here, right? Time will tell.

Dave Asprey:

Yep.

Luke Burgis:

Time will tell who the experts are. And the encouragement in the book is, "Listen, do the work." So if there's a person out there who all of your friends listen to, or trust, you should also take the time to do the work to investigate the claims, to find out where this person is coming from. Basically, don't trust the news and don't just give them authority, because other people give them authority. Authority is fine. We need people with authority, but how do we give it in the culture that we live in? I think oftentimes, authority is given mimetically. It's mimetically derived authority, and I think we need to sort of cut through that. And people don't want to do the work, because it's easier to just sort of trust the crowd.

Dave Asprey:

I don't know that I'm with you on that. Like you said, there's information overload. There was a time in the early days of the internet, where I actually knew the whole internet. I could read all of use net, because it was small. And I was in college, and I had lots of time working in the computer labs, okay. And I got really stressed when the growth of the web, when the first browsers came out, it was faster than I could read. I'm like, "Oh, my God, what am I going to do? I don't know everything." That was pathological and dysfunctional. But we're still to that point. So, I cultivate friends who are experts, I have

a friend, he does every bit of ridiculous research on tractors and pickup trucks. So, I called him and I said, "I'm thinking about getting a truck."

And he goes, "Oh, you need to go buy the Ford F150 with this engine, and that..." Great. And I went to the dealer, and I said, "I want to buy this truck for this much money." And I saved myself like 40 hours of research, because he was believable and trustworthy. And that believability score is something that comes from... Jeez, I'm forgetting the guy's name. The guy runs like the largest investment bank thing out there. Someone in the Upgrade Collective is going to tell who I'm talking about. I've talked about his book, Bill Gates likes his book, and I'm blanking on his name. Anyway. Believability scores is okay, how believable is a person? And someone with high believability because they're an expert in the field because they've done the work can save you so much time that it's okay to place trust. Where I think the frictions happened is there's actually, run by a friend of mine, a training course called the Expert Academy, which is to teach you how to be an expert.

And I've always been kind of stuck on that because if you're not an expert, and you learn how to be an expert, you're still not an expert. So, step one, have expertise. Step two, learn how to share expertise. But if you go straight to the front line and say, "I'm going to share expertise, it seems like that's what's happened online." So, you don't know if that's a real Instagram account. You know anything. And I'm confused by it all, but I have enough resources to do the research myself. What do you recommend for someone who's 20 and is completely stuck with this? How do you know if someone's believable and trustworthy?

Luke Burgis:

The word belief is really important. And I'm glad you mentioned that because I think we believe people. We believe people bottom line. Belief is between people, not information, not data. We believe it because of a person, right? Because of where it came from. What you just said about sort of the expertise and skipping the line, it's kind of funny, right? You want to be considered an expert, because you did the work, not because you took a class on how to be an expert, right? It's like the people that want to be humbler than everybody else. Right? It's almost like there's this ironic contradiction in terms, right?

Dave Asprey:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Luke Burgis:

You get to be humble, or you get to be an expert, because you went through this long process, and you earned it. You didn't just hack expertise. And I'll give you... This is a great example. I just remembered this actually, I was thinking to myself, "When's the first time that I ever tried Bulletproof Coffee?" And I have it in my cupboard right now. And it was six years ago, that is the first time that I drank it. And I'll tell you exactly who recommended it. It was my friend, David Jack, who's a pretty well-known fitness trainer personality works with Reebok a lot. He's in men's health-

Dave Asprey:

He has perfect name. He's like, "I'm literally jacked."

Luke Burgis:

David Jack. He looks like Captain America, man. He's like six four, he is jacked. He's incredible. But I believe him. And I went over to his house in Phoenix, and he pulled a bunch of weird stuff out of the cupboard and said, "I'm going to make you bulletproof." I had no idea what he was talking about. And I watched him make it and I was fascinated. And I've drunk it ever since. Right? Not every day, but I drink it. I have it in my cupboard. I should. But it was because of him. It was because of him. And I believe David because he did the work, and he does the work that either I don't have time to do, that I'm not invested in doing or whatever. And I trust David on. I trust him on a lot of most domains of life. And health and nutrition and fitness, sure is one of them. And that is I think an example. And to this day, have I ever investigated mycotoxins or any that? No, and I don't really feel like I need to.

Dave Asprey:

It's not your highest and best use of your time, right?

Luke Burgis:

No, it's not. So, I think we're actually saying something pretty similar, right? We do rely. And how do you become believable? How do you become trustworthy? What's like a whole body of work? You can't earn my trust or my belief in a day, right? It's something that happens over a long period of time.

Dave Asprey:

It's a consistency thing, and I'm with you there. So, I know the people that I go to, a lot of the university researchers and all. And this is something that they didn't teach in my undergrad or anywhere else, but it's something that I think you've come across, and I would love to share with our listeners. And it doesn't matter where you are in life. Cultivating the Kolbe score, which Dan Sullivan talks about is called fact finders. And there's four keys. This is one of the many different things like Myers Briggs, but the Kolbe score will tell you, some people, and who knows, maybe it's based on mimetic desire. But some people in order to make a decision, they have to have a lot of facts, right? And to scale from zero to nine, I think, or maybe 10, whatever. But the bottom line, some people don't need any facts to make a decision. Some people just naturally have to have everything.

I have a few friends who are the ones who just go out there and vacuum up data and process it, and know their domain of expertise, and they will save you hundreds of hours and keep you from making stupid mistakes. Because if I went out to research trucks, I would not have come up with as good of an answer as my friend and it was ready. Right? So, I consciously do that. I know the people I call. And some of the have been on the show, like my friend Mike Koenigs, who wrote a book I think I interviewed him about cancer and surviving cancer, even though he's a very powerful entrepreneur and media marketing guy. Well, if I need video equipment for my studio, I just call him up because he knows it. Right? And likewise, people say, "Dave, I want my brain to work." I have my domain I talk about on the show, and I've done 10 years. We're going to our 10 year anniversary. At this point, I'm either believable or I'm not.

But if I was starting new, it would take me years to get to that point. And so I just want everyone listening here to say, "All right, how do you know?" And one of the things I do here is before you get on the show, "Okay, go through your book, do all the research." So, I'm hoping that just by spending an hour with us today, you're saying all right, a degree of filtering happened that you don't know about, but what I don't know here am I casting a mesmerization field the way you talk about in the book? Because I'm an expert, walk me through that, because there are other experts who listen to the show too. Are we all doing this and we don't know it?

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. Joe Rogan comes to mind. Right?

Dave Asprey:

Oh, yeah.

Luke Burgis:

Just listen to Joe Rogan, and you'll get everything. No, that's a joke. But who knows? Right? There's certainly something going on. People matter, personalities matter. There's aesthetics things that influence the way that we take in information. There's a level of show business to these things, right? And if I'm going to give a TED talk on the topic of mimetic desire, I'm going to make sure that it's a production, because it does change the way that people sort of perceive it. It doesn't seem sloppy, it seems like I know what I'm talking about, right? I think the challenge is knowing... Well, knowing sort of how to separate the wheat from the chaff is one thing, right? But how to see through bullshit, but separate almost the cult of personalities, or aesthetics or show business-

Dave Asprey:

Or celebrity.

Luke Burgis:

... or whatever. You can make a good... Or celebrity. Yeah, you can make a documentary that's beautifully made. Very good cinematography, production and writing, and it sounds very authoritative. That's just total bullshit. Right? And that's just very manipulative. In almost every documentary made these days has some kind of agenda. If you look under the surface, it's always presented as we're just-

Dave Asprey:

Like What the Health and Game Changers. Those are animal rights propaganda. God damn it, I'll just say it.

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. We have as mature adults, I think we've got to be able to... Beauty is a funny thing, right? Because beauty both can, I think lead us to truth. And beauty can lead us astray when it's... Glamor can deceive. So, beauty is almost a double edged sword. When I say beauty, I just mean the aesthetics, right? In Italian we call it the bella figura. And some people can get by and go a long way in life with just the bella figura. Right? But there's not a lot of substance there. So, I just think that's a skill that they don't teach you in school. One of the things I do with my students is we literally watch commercials. And they try to get under the surface of what it's doing to them in real time. Real time sort of feedback about what's going on emotionally and psychologically as they're watching this.

And there's a skill that we can develop, call it a call it a habitus. A habit, where we can sort of see what's going on in us as we're listening to somebody or absorbing something. And then we can create some critical distance where we can actually evaluate when we're not maybe, let's say, under the influence of all of those other factors that might bend our perception of reality. Does that make sense?

Dave Asprey:

Yeah, it does make sense. So you got to watch out. Is it celebrity, or is it true expertise? And when you ask your favorite baseball player about their political pick, honestly, who cares, because they're probably not an expert. But people still do that all the time. But there's a little known story from ancient Rome. And there was a little known author researcher, who is out there saying that there's mercury in pewter, which is making people's brain sick. And it turns out one of the theories about what brought Rome down, and there was a more famous guy named Johas Roganus, who went out there and said that it couldn't possibly be true because he was selling a competing mercury free pewter. Now, in this environment, he went out to cancel the mercury guy, and went after public reputation, all that sort of stuff. And the reason I'm asking this, is about bullying and cancel culture, right? Because it gets used.

And when we're talking about mimetic desire, it feels like there's a kind of... You put someone on a pedestal, and then someone sometimes big media will do, sometimes big pharma will do, sometimes a celebrity like Johas Roganus will do this in ancient Rome. But whatever the situation is there, what's happening with the sudden flip? Where suddenly someone who was there and was an object of desire or a credible person gets just flipped? What's your experience from looking at René's work?

Luke Burgis:

Hmm. I thought the Johas Roganus was a joke, I thought that was literally the guy's name. I thought that was a Joe Rogan joke.

Dave Asprey:

It totally was. Joe Rogan came after me and tried to cancel me when he invested in a company copying my shit. And even deleted all three episodes when I was on his show when he went over to Spotify. He's trying to hide it, but I have them recorded. It's all fine, but no, it really was. So, you got the joke.

Luke Burgis:

I got the joke. Okay, okay. I started questioning myself. I was like, "Wait a second."

Dave Asprey:

Yeah, that's my sense of humor.

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. Because that just shows what kind of a history nerd I am. I'm like, "I'm going to go read the story of ancient [crosstalk 01:10:30] Rome." I lived in Rome for a few years. So you set it up really, really well. Here what I think is going on. This is Girard's take too. Mimetic desire sort of creates outliers, right? And those outliers are created because of this sort of convergence of desire. Contagious desire creates an outlier, or a king, or a president or a whatever. And think about it, right? So, mimetic desire is contagious desire that converges on someone or something, and it accelerates. And when things go wrong, when there's a crisis, it operates the same way. So, the blame converges on one person or one group. And this is called the scapegoat mechanism. And it works through that mimetic process. And it's kind of why outliers are the easiest people to converge on. Because they're the first people that you sort of notice, or that people notice.

That you can point to them and say, they're not like us, and they're converged around and canceled. So, it could be somebody says something that's threatening in some way. And very quickly, there's a convergence of accusation around that person. And the people that are caught up with the

accusation are doing it mimetically. They haven't... They may have not been offended personally. Right? Maybe they wouldn't even know about this, right? Unless they'd sort of somehow caught this anger by contagion.

Dave Asprey:

Is it joint visual attention sort of thing? They see someone they trust looking and frowning, and so they do it too, or is it another layer?

Luke Burgis:

I think it's fascinating to think about how that works on social media with retweets. We've always had cancel culture. Okay? In the ancient world it's called-

Dave Asprey:

Okay, there you go.

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. And the first stone is always the hardest one to throw. And why, because it's the only stone without a model. The second stone has one model, the third stone has two models, and so on, and so forth. So the 10th 11th and 12th stone are really, really easy to throw. And now jump forward to 2021, when we just have social media, cancel culture, by the time you get to the 10000s accusation, or whatever, or block or cancel, it's incredibly easy to do. It's almost just like a knee jerk mimetic, kind of... For some people, not for everybody. But you have to wonder how much of cancel culture is driven by mimesis, even while the veneer is that we're just serving justice here. Right? Well, that's what everybody thinks that they're doing, when they commit violence against somebody else, right? And they always think that is proportional to the crime. And that's an illusion.

Dave Asprey:

This is kind of a summary of chapter four of *Wanting*, where you talk about the mimetics of stoning, but it's such a good example, and the invention of blame and all of that. So, in terms of developing self-awareness, it's a really interesting book. It is like, "Oh my God, there's a lot of stuff that I'm doing that I don't really know why or how, but it all made sense until I thought about it." And then it suddenly collapsed. So, I actually really appreciated that one. That was why I asked the Johas Roganus question to set you up. But that whole chapter I found fascinating in it. So let's get down to brass tacks as we get to the end of the show. You're somewhere in your life and you're saying, "You know what? I acknowledge that three quarters of my desire is mimetic. It's stuff that someone taught me at some point in my life without my knowledge or permission to desire and I'm done with this shit." What do I do to stop desiring things that I didn't decide to desire?

Luke Burgis:

Hmm. Yeah, how can you develop some anti mimetic machinery in your gut to help do that. I think the first thing is just awareness. And hopefully everybody who's listening to this conversation has some awareness so that this is real, this is part of kind of human nature, I would say, that's my argument in the book. And if you are willing to accept that as part of human nature, that we are imitative creatures, and that we're mimetic, then you probably are mimetic in a few different ways, right? This is not a monolithic thing. There's probably positive ways that you're mimetic, right? You have a positive model for wellness in your life. So, you got to separate them out. Those, you might want to lean into that,

right? Or if you don't have a positive model for wellness, you might want to get one, because it's really hard to desire it without a powerful model in your life, somebody to help you, whether that's your spouse, or a good friend or community.

Dave Asprey:

A vegan endurance athlete, or something like that.

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. And that's why I think communities like yours are important, right? It actually helps. It really helps when you're dealing with other people. But you probably have some negative ones too.

Dave Asprey:

Yeah.

Luke Burgis:

Right. And today there's... Politics just comes to mind, right? But everybody has to answer this question for themselves. In what cases am I being pulled along and getting angry or upset, or whatever it is, without having been fully in self-possession, and intentional, every step of the way? And when you just increase your awareness.... You just have to identify the domain of your life where this may be a problem, right? So, maybe it's not politics, maybe it's something totally unrelated. How can you catch it early, because it's a lot easier to catch it earlier, when you sort of feel that it's almost like physics, you almost feel the tug of mimeses on the front of your shirt.

But not a lot of people recognize the feeling. And there's something to be said about recognizing the feeling and extracting yourself from that situation. It could mean literally not being on certain social media platforms, not reading certain news, cleansing yourself from some of the things that are exerting tremendously negative mimetic forces on you. And almost just taking yourself away from that. And that's when I described earlier in the show, those three months that I had, part of the reason why that time was really important. For me, it was because it was the first time that I'd created any distance for myself from all of the forces. So I stepped back, I went on a silent retreat, I meditated, I did a lot of things.

And I was able to see for the very first time, the way that I was being affected and influenced in all those different kinds of ways. So, I'm a big fan of however you want to do it, of taking some time to pull away and gain some perspective, because it's really hard to do while you're caught up in it. You almost have to create physical space in order to be able to see it.

Dave Asprey:

Yeah. Sometimes to having thinking time is important. And now I haven't interviewed, but I've chatted with a few times. And it's a book called *The Road Less Stupid*. This guy has been a board member, like you and me started multiple companies. And he says, "Look, non-negotiable an hour a day of thinking time." He has a special chair that he goes and he sits in. And that's where he does his thinking like to your point, that at some point, you have to have a way to have that self-reflection to step back.

Luke Burgis:

Yeah. At least an hour days is what I do. And in fact, one of the things that I like to do is just my personal thing, is every once in a while my wife and I... my wife works in food. And we both like to cook and we

enjoy. We eat together all the time. But every once in a while, I love nothing more than to just take a meal alone. And I find it's where I have these... I don't really believe in the saying never eat alone. I have like these huge bursts of creativity because I'm sitting there with sensory stuff going on, I can just observe stuff going on. And I always have a notepad with me, because that's just seems to be for me when I'm able to unplug, and my brain starts making connections. But if I'm constantly trying to engage in conversation, it's like I'm missing something.

Dave Asprey:

Well said, I love it that you brought that up at the end of the interview. Keith Ferrazzi, who if memory serves as the author of *Never Eat Alone*, is a friend and a really interesting guy. But there is a case for what you just said. And there's such a thing as sitting meditation, there's also a walking meditation and then eating meditation is something that you actually experience if you do art of living. The breathing technique from India, which is a precursor to a lot of the modern breath work that we all talk about now in the West. And one of the things I'll do is, here's a great. Close your eyes, meditate and actually taste the grape. And so what you're doing there is fascinating. And you're saying, I'm going to do that even though social stuff is great.

I fully support that just full presence, while your mind is doing its thing. I wanted to leave or to finish the interview. You have 15 tactics in your book *Wanting*. And we're not going to go through all of them, but the final one, I think is maybe the most touching, and most relevant for listeners right now. And the final tactic of all the tactics you can use to not be controlled by your mimetic desire. And as you write it, it's live as if you had a responsibility for what other people want. Just recognizing that the people will want what you want. And that's a really powerful statement. And what I want to know is, how did you arrive at that? And that was your final kind of capstone on the book. Tell me a little bit more about the meaning of that.

Luke Burgis:

This came through many years of just kind of thinking about this question of mimetic desire, and what does it ultimately mean in terms of how I live my life? I think one can sort of learn about the mimetic desire, and immediately the instinct is kind of to hack it, or how do I use this to see mimetic trends in the markets or whatever. Just to use it, right? But almost in an egotistical or narcissistic way. Right? But the whole point of mimetic desire is that we're social creatures. And that, rather than just thinking about what I want, and how I can change my desires, or understand what I want better, that's cool, that's important. But the point is that we're inter-individuals, in that we affect one another and one another's desires. And rather than see somebody who wants something that I don't want, could be anything, it could be a policy, it could be a lifestyle, whatever. And immediately view them as a threat or not understand? How could they possibly want to do whatever they want to do.

I think the more mature approach is to say, "Well, in what ways have I affected, or am I affecting what this person wants?" Because we're all connected here in this web. And if there are people out there, and you don't like their politics, or you don't like whatever it is about them. Think to yourself. Well, maybe there's a reason. What are they reacting to? Or what have I done? So the thinking of desire in this way is, I think, incredibly powerful. And this happens on the micro level, and it happens on the macro level. In my day-to-day life, I just try to think about even the small interactions that I have as affecting what I and the people around me want, right? The things that I do to with my wife before the end of the day is going to affect what we want to do tomorrow in terms of do we want to wake up and work out?

Do we want to... Her desires affect mine and vice versa. And it's easy to see in a marriage, it's a little bit harder to see in a company or in a community or in a country or something like that. But we have to realize that we affect each other's desires. And the phrase came really from CS Lewis, who wrote an essay called The Weight of Glory. And he basically said, there's no encounter that you have however big or small, where you're not kind of nudging another person in one or another direction. There's no indifferent, there's no neutral interaction. All of these little, tiny... You may never know how, but all of these tiny interactions of the day are affecting people at some profound level. And it could be that 20 years from now, somebody will tell a story about how a little interaction with you for whatever reason affected them deeply, and they remember it. And when you live with that awareness, that constant responsibility is the word I would use. Our responsibility for desires, not just our own, but also the way that we're affecting other people's.

It just sort of... There's a gravity that it brings to life for sure. But there's also a beauty of that. There's a deep sort of personalism that everybody that we encounter is a person who is affected and affected by us. And every teacher, I hope knows this, every coach knows this. But in the business world where you and I have spent a lot of time, people don't usually think this way, but for me, it's just been a nice mindset and mental model for living my whole life.

Dave Asprey:

Well, you nailed it, because it would have been really easy to say live as if you had power over what other people want, which is the way of business people look at it. And you go back to Peter Parker, with great power comes great responsibility. And it is a responsibility. And this is why you can use marketing to do great evil. And we're looking at you big pharma right now. You also can use marketing to do good. And yes, there was a global shortage of grass-fed butter in 2014, after we started putting it in our coffee, and that drove more pasture land. And I think that was a really good thing. So, I do believe we have responsibility for other people on. And even went to show, if we wasted everyone's time on this, there's 250 million downloads, that's 250 million hours, and that's hundreds of human lifetimes. Either you're a mass murderer, with the little interactions you have with all the people CS Lewis talked about, or you're nudging people in a good direction, at least to the best of your ability.

So thank you for calling it a responsibility versus a power. And that's why I think it spoke to me, and the whole book is just really cool. I would challenge you, if you liked the show, pick up Luke's book called Wanting and read it and go, "Oh my God, I had no idea that I'm running on autopilot half the time." And this will help to shake you up a little bit and maybe put you more in charge of yourself. And there's great knowledge, a huge job of distilling this, you can tell you're a teacher, because when you know how to teach, you can write a book that actually informs and some books are less informative than others. And you nailed it just from a professional, here's how to get lots of knowledge in a small amount of time in the book. So, I want to thank you for writing in and helping to make people aware of the stuff they're doing that they don't know they're doing. Because that's the last human frontier of being better human beings as being more aware.

Luke Burgis:

Absolutely. Well, thanks so much for having me on, Dave. It's a pleasure.

Dave Asprey:

You're most welcome. You can go to Luke Burgis, L-U-K-E-B-U-R-G-I-S.com. And of course, Daveasprey.com/podcast, there'll be show notes and transcripts and all that kind of stuff. And if you are a member of the Upgrade Collective, you have been live in the audience here. And I actually asked all

the questions from the audience members. So, thanks guys for being here with me. And if you'd like to be a live audience member on the podcast and learn all of my books, and get a call with me every couple of weeks and a call with the coaches in a big community of people who care a lot and have mimetic desire for good stuff, we look at good stuff, we ignore all the bad stuff. Our upgradecollective.com, I would love to see you there and get more time with you. Guys, the book is called *Wanting*. Luke Burgis is the author, great interview. Great stuff to learn. Read the book, be more aware.