

The Maverick Show Episode 24-2
Host: Matt Bowles, Guest: May Ling Lai

Matt Bowles: Hey, everybody. It's Matt Bowles. Welcome to The Maverick Show. My guest today is May Ling Lai. She is back by popular demand. If you missed Episode 1 of The Maverick Show, I'd encourage you definitely to listen to that one. That was part one and now we're back with a very exciting follow-up. If you have not experienced May Ling yet, she is an innovation specialist, investor, consultant, and business founder. In the last episode, we talked about how she started a nutraceuticals business at age 24 that she and her co-founder built up to \$2 million in annual revenue in just two years.

She then went on to manage over a billion dollars in assets as part of a hedge fund portfolio – one of the very few women in the world who has ever managed a portfolio of that size. She then co-founded an asset management analytics consulting company – acting as head of innovation – and where her work with C-level executives impacted over \$1.2 trillion in assets. Since the last episode, she has created a course called The Seven Skills of Speed Reading.

She has traveled to a whole bunch of additional countries. She's now up to 58. She speaks five languages and – oh, by the way – she retired at age 39 and she's now sitting on boards, doing freelance consulting with super cool companies by choice, and traveling the world to really exciting, interesting places. May Ling welcome back to the show.

May Ling Lai: Thanks, Matt. That's a great introduction.

Matt: It's really good to be back. We should set the scene here. We are actually currently in your apartment in Manhattan, New York.

May Ling: I think we're snowed in, to be honest.

Matt: We are basically snowed in. There's a blizzard outside, but it's super exciting and amazing to be here. I know that we both have a really profound love for New York City and it's really, really fun to be here with you together. It's our first time together in New York City.

May Ling: Yeah, it's cool and we've got some other nomads that are going to come by later. So, that's kind of exciting.

The Maverick Show Episode 24-2
Host: Matt Bowles, Guest: May Ling Lai

- Matt: That's exactly right. We're having a little reunion party later tonight after this.
- May Ling: Yeah, a little reunion, yeah.
- Matt: So, we thought we'd just turn on the mics and do another interview in the afternoon in the meantime.
- May Ling: Yeah. Back by popular demand, is that just your mom, basically or is there like—
- Matt: My mother's a big fan.
- May Ling: Oh, yeah?
- Matt: She's a big fan, for sure. But a lot of other people it's really interesting, a couple of my most recent podcast guests I was asking them which episodes they've liked and also some of the listeners who have listened to every episode. I asked them which ones did they like and what did they like about them.
- May Ling: I'm almost through all your episodes, by the way. You have some really cool people on this show.
- Matt: Awesome.
- May Ling: I mean I know some of them so I'm personally biased on some of these, but I must say they're very, very cool people.
- Matt: But it's really interesting because most people mention your episode. Then I ask them, "What did you like about that episode?" And what's interesting to me is that a lot of people pull out very different pieces that they liked about it. They're like, "Oh when she talked about this thing – even though it's in a totally different space than what I'm in – that really resonated with me and helped me with this thing in my life."
- May Ling: Oh cool.
- Matt: Yeah. So, it's been very interesting. So, a lot of people have pulled out different pieces of that episode one and they have really appreciated it. As the episode aired and as you and I have continued to hang out around the world and have adventures and

things like that, I also realized that there was a lot of stuff in that first episode that we didn't get to. I mean it was like a 90-minute episode, but there was a lot more of the May Ling Lai story that we didn't even have time to bring out, which I'm hoping we can do today. So, one of which is just to start with your backstory about growing up. I know you're a diehard New Yorker now and you're based in Manhattan, but you are not originally from New York.

May Ling: No.

Matt: Can you talk a little bit about your origin story, where you came from, and also your history with music in growing up?

May Ling: Okay. So, it's actually very funny that you describe me as a hardcore New Yorker because I always think of myself as a small town girl living in the big city. It's been 12 years in the big city and I think – even when I was growing up – people were kind of like, “Are you from New York?” So, even I think when I was living in Chicago, I think that might have been a question mark. But I was born in Ohio. I was the first Chinese baby –Asian baby I think even is the word they used – born in Lima County and I left there when I was 2.

But before I left – when I was born – I made the paper because that was just so this thing that had never happened. And then my parents ended up settling in Florida because of another Asian family, Chinese family. At the time, there were these things called Chinese tongs and they were family associations and there happened to be one branch that was in Tampa, Florida. So, there's a bunch of people in Florida that actually have my last name the way that I spell it, which is kind of a different sort of spelling in some ways. In other ways, it's really not. It's become more popular in recent times to always go with the Mandarin pronunciation no matter what.

But the last name is actually pretty common among specifically Cantonese folks. So, we ended up in Central Florida – originally right outside of Tampa – and then we moved into Pascoe County, which is also right outside of Tampa but it's the weird right. We're the left I guess if you were to say it. So, my parents opened a little Chinese restaurant and my brother and I became the first Asian kids to attend public school and we got in the paper for that too. So, I was very famous I like to say by age 5. I'd already been in the

paper twice. I feel really good about that. But to get to that – the singing part – I know what you’re trying to ask me.

It has to do with like, “Where did it come from? What was the deal?” My mother was actually a singer when she was very young in Canton. She’s very, very talented –more operatic style. She’s a belter kind of, so to speak. So, she was a very good singer. She really encouraged singing as a skill, but she did encourage piano and when I was very young, she was afraid that I would be very shy, yeah. I do, by the way – with that smirk on your face, trying to hold back the laughter–

Matt: How long did that fear last? Until you were what? At what point did that fear dissipate?

May Ling: No, no, no, no. Okay, so what she was concerned about – and I do still test introvert. There are a lot of introverts that have learned extroverted skills and it’s a good thing to learn. What it would look like on a test is – if you take a Myers-Briggs, for example – usually, the scales are 100 negative 100, but they call one end introvert and they call the other end extrovert. What it will look like is your score toward introversion will just lower to zero at any given point. So, mine tends to be always skewed towards introvert, but single digit.

So, she was worried that I would be this massive introvert because – And we had a restaurant. That wasn’t going to work because when you are in a family business, everybody has to tow the line. Do you know what I mean? You can’t be mean to customers, not enjoyable to be – all these things. So, she did the series of tiger mom things that – thank God she doesn’t listen to podcasts I’m going to share with you. I’ve subsequently done a lot of these tiger mom things, unfortunately, or fortunately to people who have worked with me because I do think that they did, in fact, work. But one of the major things she did is she had my brother and me performing as young as –

I think the first time I took the stage, I was 4 ½. Maybe I was 5. Jolly Old Saint Nicholas duet with my brother. I will never forget. My brother was an amazing piano talent. It always made sense to him. His first recital was Für Elise. It was a joke. I think he got bored in the middle of playing it, so he did a variation as part of the middle of unscripted. And then there was me and the other thing

that I think is really brilliant about my mother is that she understood childcare cost.

So, if she could get my brother – like my brother was getting gigs all the time because he was so cute – an 8 year old, plays Für Elise or whatever he wants – and we're in this area of Florida where there are a lot of these retirement homes that have evening entertainment. So, they would hire him all the time and my mother being frugal, was like, "Oh, so you're going to pay to take my kid for an hour, two hours, three hours? How about I got two? You want another one?" So, that's how that worked out. They were like, "Well, you know."

And my brother was like, "Oh, no, no. They play together. They play together." Right? So, that's how that started and I'll never forget. I was really nervous going on stage and my mom sometimes she says the darndest things. I mean I don't know that maybe I might also have this attribute. I don't know, Matt. You tell me. She's like, "Don't worry about it. Look, if you can't be talented, try to be cute." To this day, I'm still like, "Well, you know, that's actually not the worst advice even as an adult sometimes."

So, we did that and that first recital – I'll never forget – we practiced a lot so that I would be not nervous and you know when you're 4 ½, 5, I think I must have been pretty sure that's what I was because there are pictures from this period of my life and that looks about the right age. I remember my brother made a mistake. My brother's part was 20 times harder than my part. It was not even close. I just had to play the same notes – left hand, right hand.

So, he made this little, tiny mistake that only I could have noticed and I stopped playing and hit him and said, "You messed up." And my brother looked at me in horror and said, "Okay, let's start from the top then." And then we just started it from the top, but not before the entire crowd was in tears laughing. My brother is so talented. He just made it work and then we got asked back every year thereafter until I was about 10 and then we started to move away from the city.

Yeah, so we must have gigged anywhere between 25 to 50 times a year always practiced on stage and what have you and what that led to is a really good skill in public speaking because – once I

turned 10 and my brother, people realized how not nervous my brother was to speak in public – we then did public speaking skills classes. My mother – again, being frugal – “How about two” so to speak? “I get a discount for putting both of them in the class? How about that? If not, can she just sit there and watch?” I give her credit, man. If I had kids, I’d probably do the same thing. That’s smart.

Matt: That’s amazing. I mean one of the things that has been very prominent in my interactions with you over the last year or so since we’ve been hanging out around the world is your passion for singing and for karaoke. Literally, you and I will be on the nomad cruise and – no matter what’s going on, no matter what workshops or meetups or entertainment events or social outings – no matter what’s going on, you will first and foremost figure out when the karaoke hour or two hours is and you will attend that every single night as your top priority and then you’ll schedule all of the other things around that.

So, I know this of you and I know how passionate you are about singing, about music. So, I would love to hear more about the evolution of that background as a kid coming up in terms of music and what that’s meant to you.

May Ling: Okay. Well, karaoke actually, for me – just to answer just that portion of that question – it’s a chance to practice being in front of an audience and knowing that they may or may not like you because you know in business – or pretty much in anything in life – you do have to sometimes say some things and it does not matter what the audience says or how the audience is going to feel But if you think about it – with karaoke especially in an audience like a cruise ship or wherever I’m doing it around the world – you have an audience. You know nothing about them, right?

You go into a business meeting. Sometimes you have some context, but sometimes you don’t and especially if you’re going to be a speaker or a guest speaker somewhere in a big lecture hall. Public speaking is something that is practiced. Oddly enough, karaoke is the same skill that you’re practicing. So, that aspect of karaoke is extraordinarily interesting to me. You get a lot of exercise with trying to maintain a certain voice quality because it will show immediately if you’ve lost confidence and lost the ability to control the audience or lost the ability to do whatever it

is. All of that is practiced extremely well in my opinion in karaoke.

That's why I actually love karaoke. Now, the ability to sing is a different thing and – as many people know – the ability to sing and love of karaoke are not necessarily correlated in any way, shape, or form. I actually – when I listen to other people sing karaoke that maybe are not necessarily highly correlated love versus I think bravery might be more correlated in that regard – I love to see what other people do in their bouts of nervousness. I love to see whether someone with zero talent somehow manages to kill it and why – what they're doing on their delivery that just pulls the entire audience in. I mean that's fascinating public speaking knowledge that you can acquire and people do it in very unique ways.

There are probably similarities in some settings. In other settings there's nothing. So, that aspect of karaoke – listening to other people – is amazing. I also – because I think empathy is always a really important skillset – when somebody's dying on stage, I do think it's really interesting to see what you can do as a single, solo audience member to try to bring the audience back to that poor person who's suffering on stage. If you think about if you're in a corporate meeting or any kind of meeting and you've got some junior person who's presenting and you're the senior person, you have to try to keep them from losing confidence.

A lot of times, the words they're saying are just fine, but what can you do as the person there with your energy, with your just presence whatever it is, to make that person feel comfortable doing their thing that they're clearly uncomfortable with? That's why I like karaoke. I mean I'm sure no one has ever articulated it like that to others, but that really is why I go. That's really why I'm not – it doesn't matter how bad you sing – I will listen to it. I will not be negative, etc. You know? And I also think – and along those lines, yeah – not being negative no matter how bad that person bombs is a skill and you can practice it.

So, there's a lot to be learned, Zen and the art of karaoke, you know, what have you. I also love – as you know when I travel around – observing other people's cultural behaviors because I think you can tell a lot about a country, about a culture if there's something that you love to do and you're accustomed to being done a particular way on your home turf and they're doing it differently in another country.

Matt: This is actually interesting because I also want to preface this because I've been around the world with you in different countries. We've done karaoke and you are proficient in five different languages and you can do karaoke in different languages, which is really cool because – when you go to a Spanish-speaking country – and then you can just drop Spanish songs and they go crazy because they don't know what to expect, right?

May Ling: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Matt: This is an Asian person. They're from America. They speak English.

May Ling: What's going on?

Matt: They have no idea, but then you just drop an anthem and they just go crazy, right, in their language. But when you are let's just say at an English-speaking karaoke type of venue where you're going to do an English language song, what are some of your go-tos?

May Ling: Okay, I'm going to double back because I don't think I fully answered that other question.

Matt: Okay.

May Ling: Fully answered it completely.

Matt: Okay, yeah.

May Ling: So, what I'm practicing – personally, not when I'm listening to other people – is I'm practicing, "Do I understand the audience enough to select the right song and then sing it the way that it needs to go for that audience?" I've been practicing that since I was 5. That's to the right. And the way that maps back to any kind of skill that you're going to do in business is sometimes you have a presentation and that's not going to fly because your audience – some new person entered the room that actually matters more – or whatever.

So, I'm absolutely always – first and foremost – song selection. I am actually practicing actively that same business skill 100 percent. The second one is nervousness. Different audiences can

make you nervous in different ways – different size audiences, the rowdiness level, the energy of the audience, who went on right before you – you have to practice that too. So, that’s what I actually like. Karaoke is just an extension of my mother’s craziness for why we ended up on stage in the first place because she wanted me to not have this introversion skill become this massive impediment to being able to communicate effectively in business, in life, whatever else going on, right?

So, that’s a more complete answer. As a result – as you know – my go-to song then absolutely will vary depending on my audience. A lot of times you have to kind of feel the audience out for their demographic and what they choose. The best way is to not go first. If you can help it, strategically don’t go first, right? See what the other person does. Either the audience is going to go for it or against it. If they go for it, you choose it right down their vein, right? If they go against it, then it’s rolling the dice – Yahtzee – hopefully, you don’t fall flat, right? And if you fall flat, that’s also something that you have to learn.

Pick yourself up, get up, don’t lose confidence in the middle. Those are all real skills. The reason this question is like what are my go-to songs, it’s always a hard one for me because that’s what I’m doing. So, in every possible genre of music, I have a go-to song, right? So, if it’s rock and roll – if it’s like a rock song, rock song, rock song – I will usually pick Bobby McGee – Janis Joplin, right? If it’s the ‘80s, ‘80s, oh I do have a whole series of songs. I might pick the Bangles. I might pick Cindy Lauper. I might pick anything from any of those, right?

If we’re not doing ballads but we’re doing fast songs, I might pick Janet Jackson. If we’re going backward in time, forward in time, I might pick something, Rhianna. You have to have go-to songs that match the audience. I will say that’s really hard as you get older because you have to stay current with the current music, which means you have to actually know the song or you have to be able to fake it at least within a range.

Matt: Okay. So, based on the song selection for the audience, I am going to ask on behalf of The Maverick Show audience if you can pick a song that you can do now acapella–

May Ling: For The Maverick Show?

- Matt: For The Maverick Show.
- May Ling: “You better think. Think about what you're trying to do to me. Think. Let your mind go, let yourself be free. Let's go back, let's go back, let's go back way on, way back when. I didn't even know you. You couldn't have been too much more than 10. I ain't no psychiatrist, I ain't got no doctor degree, But, it don't take too much IQ to see what you're doing to me. You better think.. Think about what you're trying to do to me. You better think. Let your mind go, let yourself be free. Oh, freedom, oh freedom, whoa freedom, oh freedom.”
- Matt: Wow. Thank you for that. That was awesome. That was an amazing choice too— a tribute to Aretha, so amazing. Thank you. Let me ask you this actually in terms of attributing amazing women. What would you say if you were to – thinking back on your relationship with your mother for all these years – what would you say that if you could pick maybe one or two things in terms of her influence on you that you have learned from her or taken from her and really chosen proactively to embody in yourself? What would be the top one or two things that—
- May Ling: Oh, my God. I am her in so many ways. Come on. I am my mother's child. It's not even confusing to anyone who knows us both.
- Matt: Well, that's kind of why I'm asking about the conscious part of it, right? Because a lot of times we adopt things from our parents, some of them might be positive, negative, conscious, unconscious, that kind of stuff, but consciously – in terms of things that you admire and appreciate about your mother – that you have consciously learned from her or chosen to embody in your own life?
- May Ling: You know what? She's such a Tiger mother that there is no conscious learning. It just all got pushed into you when you were very young. There's a lot more conscious unlearning I think than there is conscious learning. I mean and it's every hope of every parent, I'm sure, for the child to be some improvement. I would say the one thing that I acknowledge about my mother that I love – and I love that I understand that it's possible one, and two, have really pursued it – is my mother's English is imperfect. She didn't
-

go to school. She just worked really hard and tried to make it happen when she immigrated over.

But she is funny in any language that she speaks. If you were ever hanging out with my mother and there was a crowd around her – which there always is because she’s not an introvert at all, not even close, people love her – my mother can make anyone laugh in any language and sometimes she does it on purpose and sometimes it’s just she’s just really funny, you know, so to speak.

So, I think that’s really important to understand when you’re speaking a foreign language or when you’re traveling abroad or whatever is that perfection does not help you in communication. Communication is communication. It’s independent of any kind of that stuff. So, whenever I’m speaking a foreign language, I kind of keep that in mind. “Go easy on yourself a little bit.”

Matt: Awesome. That’s a really good lesson. Let me ask you about this. Another thing – in terms of your background – that I’m really curious to ask you about is your marathon running.

May Ling: Marathon running, yeah. So, it was interesting because it’s something that I started doing for stress reduction. In all fairness, I had – in my 20’s – established a goal of wanting to run a marathon before I turned 35 and so I did achieve that goal. I’ll call it a wash because I achieved it at 35 versus before 35. So, we’ll just count it even though it was technically supposed to be before 35, but for everyone out there that’s turning 40 trying to do it on their 40th, I’m going to give you full credit all the way to 41, baby as far as that goes. It’s totally good by me. I’m in. So, I ran my first half and full when I was 35 or 34 and then 35 – something like that, the same year – and I ended up really liking it.

The interesting thing that I’ve learned subsequently is the reason I liked it is there is a thing called meditation in motion. For those that really struggle to meditate, it turns out that if you go to an ashram in India – which one of my dear friends did, so she’s the one that came back and told me that’s what was happening – they will tell you that if you can achieve a meditative state by being extremely physically active to where you jar – your brain waves hit the same thing, hit the same sort of meditative mind. I don’t know this gets really into science beyond my knowledge. There are articles on this.

That's what was actually happening while I was running distance was I was hitting the meditative state. Then, lo and behold, two years later my friend drags me to a meditation yoga retreat – which is so not my deal if you know me as a person – to just spend that quality time, but it is absolutely my deal to go away on a traveling trip with female friends to connect. So, that's how they really got me. But during the meditation session, I had – at that point – not realized how difficult meditation was for everybody.

So, more than half the group had dropped out and I think – towards the end of the meditation portion – it was down to me and this girl who I really loved dearly and wanted to – She was the person who had dragged me there. It was just the two of us and we were meditating away and then – at the end – it was like, “Oh, how nice.” And she does this little ceremony. She's like, “You know you guys are really good at meditation.” And that's when I realized that the running was what was allowing me to know what the brain was supposed to be feeling in order to them do meditation without the motion.

So, that's what the running was in a lot of ways all about. Subsequent to that first half in the full, I've probably showed you the medals. There are over 20 half marathons – probably closer to 30 halves – three full. I've done them in maybe a dozen countries or so. I'd really have to count, but I think it's at least a dozen if not more.

Matt: That's awesome. That's a really cool piece of the travel because I know you've also been continuing to take some really interesting trips and have a lot of really interesting experiences since our last interview.

May Ling: Oh, yeah.

Matt: I want you to be able to share some of those trips and some of those experiences. You just got back just last week from Rome, right?

May Ling: Yeah.

Matt: It was your first time in Rome?

May Ling: Yeah, it was cool. Vatican City is at least something interesting. I mean Vatican City it's weird because it's not spiritual in the way that other places are spiritual – at least from my perspective. It is holy and specifically the Sistine Chapel – especially if you get there before the crowd – is very profound, but it's a different sort of feeling than when you go to other places of great historical, spiritual significance. I think it's because it almost has mixed within it, like the Vatican, you have the spirituality but you also have this massive political feeling that also is the emotional state of the buildings that you're going to be in. So, it's a really unique place. They really did steal the best art globally.

I think that was really funny because you'd seen an obelisk and you'd be like, "Oh, I know where that's taken from" you know? "I saw that. That's actually – there's a copy of that now in Turkey" right or something like that no matter where you're at. And that is the unfortunate, but also the fortunate thing about traveling around having that cursive knowledge because you've been on so many tours where they'll be like, "And this used to be whatever. The actual one now stands in Rome. The actual one now stands in Florence."

You're like, "Oh, now I'm trying to read data back and fill this obelisk to that monument that I saw. Yeah, wow. Good condition" you know so to speak. They're not the only ones. I mean the Taiwanese took a bunch of the stuff before the communists came into China and in doing so they did – actually even the Chinese mainlanders will admit – save a lot of amazing artifacts from definitive destruction that would have happened during the Communist Revolution or the Cultural Revolution.

So, it's not the end of the world, but it is very – like some of the best art is in Rome and especially even you think Roman statues. If you're outside of Rome, a lot of them are defaced in some way literally. You're going to get full, complete sculptures there as they were intended to be seen. It's a pretty phenomenal place. Then I don't know they just somehow avoided a lot of the other ancient city destruction stuff. So, the history is profound even if you're not a history buff.

Matt: Yeah, that's awesome. I know you also – on the last episode which listeners will remember if they listened to it or go back to listen to it – when I asked you about your favorite cities in the world, the

one that came up first I believe to your mind that you named immediately was Kuala Lumpur.

May Ling: O, yeah. I love KL. KL is awesome, yeah.

Matt: Yeah, right. I know that since our last interview – and you and I have both spent a lot of time in KL and I know you try to go there pretty regularly – and when you went to KL after we did the last interview, you went back to KL.

May Ling: Yeah. I hung out with Dan Sloan. Do you remember Dan Sloan?

Matt: Yeah.

May Ling: Yeah, he was there.

Matt: Awesome.

May Ling: We hung out. We went to the speakeasy together.

Matt: That's awesome.

May Ling: Yeah, he's awesome.

Matt: You did do the speakeasy finally?

May Ling: Yeah, we did.

Matt: That's awesome.

May Ling: Of course I took your advice.

Matt: That's awesome.

May Ling: I pay attention to The Maverick Show. I know what you're talking about. Listen, friends, if you need speakeasy advice, I think Matt should post it. Can you post that in the links for the viewers?

Matt: In Kuala Lumpur.

May Ling: In Kuala Lumpur, yeah.

Matt: Yeah, we can post our favorite speakeasies in Kuala Lumpur.

- May Ling: All right. Done. Boom.
- Matt: But you also sent me an amazing story which I want you to tell, which goes along with advice that I always give to travelers and I always say to people that, “When you go to different countries and even different cities, you should always, always, always, always talk to your taxi driver or your Uber driver and have that conversation because it will often turn into one of the most interesting and memorable conversations you might have in the entire city.”
- May Ling: Oh, yeah. You have to talk to strangers if you’re traveling – especially if you’re traveling solo.
- Matt: Yeah, and cab drivers are an amazing way to do that.
- May Ling: Yeah, you’re stuck. And as long as they’re not creepy as a woman, you should totally talk to them. The one though in KL that I know you’re referring to is the sailor, yeah?
- Matt: You need to tell the story. You get into a taxi in KL and you start talking to your driver.
- May Ling: Oh yeah. So, I go into the taxi and driver and especially in Asia because if you’re this kind of driver – a popular car service driver – then you would necessarily speak really good English at a very different level than even the native population of Malaysia – which is the eighth best English speaking country in the world I think. You have to look. I’m sure they’re re-upping these things all the time. Anyway, I got in and this guy actually was on shore leave. He was a commercial –not a captain, the next level down – but very, very senior on commercial ships.
- And so I was like, “Oh, that’s cool. That’s awesome that you’re here in Malaysia just to give you something to do.” He was like, “Yeah, I get bored otherwise and I kind of like driving around.” I’m like, “Well, do you have interesting stories from the high seas?” He’s like, “Well, yeah. Have you seen this movie?” I still haven’t seen this movie and I was like, “No.” He was like, “Well, it’s about pirates held up this ship – Somali pirates held up this ship.” There’s this pass that gets you from Africa to Europe.

He was like, “Yeah.” I’m like, “Yeah, that’s crazy. That happened to you?” He’s like, “Yeah, it’s based on our crew.” I’m like, “Really?” He’s like, “Well, it might not be just our crew. I think there’s another ship also that was held, but they had to pay eventually a million dollars to release us.” I was like, “Wow, how long were you out there?” He’s like, “Three weeks.” I was like, “Three weeks? What was going on on the boat?” He’s like, “Well, they take your underwear.” I’m like, “Okay, so you’re sans souci I guess.” He’s like, “No, not the pants, just the underwear.”

So, they take his underwear. They take all the stuff so you fight it out for the first day, but then they do all these things to try to stop you from fighting. After the first week, that whole portion is done while they radio over and try to negotiate whatever is the captive thing. Yeah, then eventually after three weeks, they let him go. I was like, “What’s it like? Is it just scary?” “No, you know you just kind of go back to your business every day, but they’re watching you.” I was like, “Guns?” He’s like, “Yeah, they’re watching you with guns.” I’m like, “Well, what did you do to pass the time?” He’s like, “Oh, you know just regular stuff.”

I was like, “Would you karaoke on the boat?” He’s like, “Yeah, actually, we did.” Because you know I like to karaoke to see the different cultures. I go, “What was it like to karaoke with the Somalians?” He was like, “Well, they were more listening.” I was like, “Yeah. I think that speaks a lot to the Malaysian people being held up at gunpoint, will not stop the karaoke.” He’s like, “Exactly, girl. Exactly. I don’t care what’s happening. You can point a gun at me, I will sing no problem.”

But it was a pretty amazing 40, 45-minute cab ride into the city with this gentleman. He was brilliant. He was really smart. He gave me a lot of great restaurant recommendations because he was a local. Yeah, you have to talk to your cab drivers. Oh, man. There are so many good ones. What’s a good Uber story that you’ve had? What’s your best one?

Matt:

Oh, I don’t know. I always just get really interesting insights, right, because one of the other things that I’ll do – in addition to asking about stories and things like that – is also just to ask their opinions. So, for example, if you live in a place like Egypt and you ask their opinion of, “What’s your opinion of the political situation that’s going on?”

- May Ling: And they all go nuts.
- Matt: They're all lining up and you just give them a platform and they will tell you all of this stuff. Or "What's your opinion of this stuff?" But also the recommendations – like you said – you know I mean when I was in Nairobi, Kenya earlier this year and my ride into the city from the airport I mean you let them know what you're looking for. Oh, the best clubs are this and this and the other best restaurant, make sure you go here. And you let them know you kind of want the non-touristy places, you know?
- May Ling: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Matt: Like "Where do you go?" Do you know?
- May Ling: Go, yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Matt: They say, "Well, I go here." So, you really get all of that stuff and then they'll give you very candid opinions about everything from the political situation to anything else and it's just interesting to listen to that local perspective and have a really candid person who has no self-interest in what you care about their opinion. They don't care what you think of their opinion.
- May Ling: No.
- Matt: They're just willing to render it.
- May Ling: You're in their car, buddy. You're their audience for as long as that meter's running.
- Matt: Yeah. They love that you're willing to listen to their opinion on things and you're learning stuff – everything they're willing to tell you. So, I'll just usually open the questions and prompt responses. So, that's–
- May Ling: I love it. I had one guy who told me that he was retired in Florida – I was in Florida – and he had sold his business. The reason he was an Uber driver was his wife wanted him out of the house. She's like, "You have to go. You have to go find something else to do – not here." So, he liked to drive so he became an Uber driver – a Vietnamese guy – but they had moved from outside of DC and he

had a mixed martial arts business. But then he had – because he had made that so successful – it was running half a million dollars in revenues before he sold it and he wasn't even anywhere near cost because he paid off the buildings, whatever.

He ended up retiring very young as well. I thought that was fascinating, but the fun part of it was that – because he had done this mixed martial arts business for so long – he actually became a mixed martial arts agent. So, he still had that business going around and pieces of it and this is my Uber driver. You don't know who your Uber driver is. This is why if you didn't listen to your mama about always treating anyone that's working with you, for you, or otherwise, with respect and goodness, just realize – especially your Uber driver – could literally be anyone.

It could be whatever millionaire who's just like, “Ah, let me just see. I need randomness in my life. I own this car. Let me just drive around and see what's up.” And it's crazy. It's actually very interesting.

Matt: Yeah, totally. I've had podcast guests on my show that we were talking about how they were building their business and they're like, “Yeah, I was driving Uber on the side while I was building my business and I was giving out stuff for my business to my this _”

May Ling: You don't know who your Uber driver's going to be.

Matt: Now they're guests on The Maverick Show and have blown up and are doing super interesting stuff. So, yeah, no, it's always a really interesting conversation to have. So, that's one of my top travel recommendations for people is to always, always do that.

May Ling: Totally. It's a good one.

Matt: All right. Let's shift gears now because I want to talk about this new speed reading course that you have just put out and maybe we could start with your history with speed reading, why you taught yourself to speed read, the benefits of that, and maybe just start with that background and leading up into what made you decide to create the course.

May Ling: Okay. So, the speed reading course interestingly was a consulting

project that I was working on. This wonderful, very highly regarded tutor here in New York City – Katya Seberson – she and I had been working on a couple of different things that she wanted to know about our business and how to think about it. But ultimately – as a total aside – we started working on this course together. It came out that we were both – She, I knew, was teaching speed reading. That’s actually how we met originally.

She didn’t really know way, way at the very beginning. She didn’t know about my whole speed reading thing because we were friends or whatever and she used to tell me that she could speed read. I was like, “Okay, that’s cool.” But unbeknownst to her, I really did want to create a course for at least improve speed on reading. I didn’t actually even know what constituted real speed reading and what wasn’t real speed reading and then she said something and then I was like, “All right. Well, test me. I want to understand what you’re doing on the speed reading side.”

And she tested me and it was strange because it came up to 2,400 words per minute just on a couple of the different tests. She was like, “Whoa.” I didn’t realize that speed reading is anything really. I mean there’s not really a great definition for speed reading, but the way that we ended up defining it was anything over 500 words per minute. So, I’m well over speed reading at that point because at 500 words per minute, you’re at 60 pages an hour or something like that and you can read a book in four hours and you probably have a college level – like you’ve been reading a lot for college, etc.

That’s probably where I started was post-college and it’s really going to be in specific areas that you can read that speed, but I had no idea. Her reading ability was somewhere around on the low end she’d be like 700. On the high end, she was going to be 1,500. That would be a book that is in a specific sweet spot for her. So, when she saw my score she was like, “What the hell? What’s going on?” for lack of a better way to say it. “You really read.” So, we did the comprehension test and everything and I’m like, “No, no. I got – yeah.” But as I ended up working with her, I was like, “We should really do a project like this” because I didn’t realize,

No. 1, and No. 2, she made me aware after the test of what she had been dealing with, the types of chicanery that’s out there to teach speed reading and then the more that I worked on the course and

developing the course with her, the more I became adamant that it really should exist as a body of knowledge if somebody wanted to acquire it. So, a lot of courses think of speed reading as some activity separate from reading. It's not.

What you're actually doing is accentuating the existing reading skills you have, filling in whatever gaps the public school education failed to do for a lot of reasons – you know what's being done to the public school education system. I'm sure that for a lot of people it's very controversial. I'm not going to get into that controversy here, but no question in my mind we definitely teach people a bare minimum and then pray that they acquire the rest of it – as it relates to reading – magically through the ether. And some people do. A lot of people do.

This whole body of people that graduate from liberal arts colleges who must read at a minimum of two books a week plus in order to get through, that body of people 100 percent. But it leaves behind this whole trail of other people because that portion that actually goes the liberal arts way and not STEM way or whatever, it just gets left behind and the sad thing about it – because we are stressing STEM so much – is that we don't even acknowledge what that takes away from what people have access to in the way of knowledge, right?

So, if we're going to enter this new economy where thinking is going to be a major skillset – not coding in and of itself, not programming something really technical, not engineering – but actually thinking the art of having thoughts, the ability to take idea A and map it to idea B, right? Then something like reading as a skill for many reasons – which is hugely dependent on not long term memory, which you'll see in a lot of speed reading courses – but associative memory which has nothing to do with anything. It's the ability to take ideas, put them together, and then put them into working memory and do something with them, right?

That is actually exercised far more aggressively with reading than it is with all sciences period. In fact, what is the point of science if it is not applied to the human condition or human problems or others? Look, very few people are doing highly theoretical math with zero application in reality, okay? It turns out if you go through the history of pretty much any science or math and I mean I don't know this 100 percent but I'm pretty sure I can say this

safely.

All that science was inspired by someone trying to solve something and – in the solving of that something – they probably had to read a little bit about what had already been done, different ways of coming at the problem. Maybe they read other things that just were completely unrelated. All of that reading stuff is really important. Anyway, as a skill, it has a tremendous amount of value. Now, what does it actually physically look like as a skill that I cared enough to want to create a course about it even independent of meeting Katya – in advance of meeting Katya? It looked like basically, I go to a client.

In advance of going to the client, there's this huge history that predates the client, right, that is actually documented. Let's say they're a public company so I could – I'm going to use a fake example. Let's say it was Coca Cola, right? Coca Cola there are many books written on the entire history of Coca Cola from the time it was founded through the marketing that's been done, etc. There's also a mountain of filings that they've done with the SEC – all their financial papers, annual reports, etc.

At my speed, I can read – and I'm going to have to do this actually for a project that I'm on right now – I can read a 90 to 100-page annual report. It only takes me about 15 minutes to read. It's like a big nothing doughnut, snap. In fact, when I was at the Vatican, there was a wait time before going into the Sistine Chapel because I was early and there was a guidebook sitting there on the Sistine Chapel. It was about 150 pages long, but mostly pictures, 50 pages of text. I read the whole the whole damn thing in 10 minutes before I walked in and it was helpful because I'll tell you what, the guide itself only went through two of the four artists that are actually known to be main arbiters of that area.

There's also another set of artists as well that supported those artists, but that was all explained in the book. It was not explained in the six different plus or minus modules that were in the little ear thing. And the two together really gave me a great sense for the Sistine Chapel. Do you know what I mean? You can do stuff like that. That took me about somewhere 10 minutes or so. I was really sleepy. Do you know what I mean? So, you can do stuff like that when you are a speed reader no problem. Katya and I – when we were working together – did things like, “Well, before we do this

segment, let's read up on it.”

I would go to the New York Public Library – which is an amazing resource that every New Yorker has. I would look up whatever I could in the card catalog. For example, we identified one book about 170'ish pages, something like that, no illustrations so that's fair. We'll call it 170. I emailed her the pdf of the book. This was like noon. I went home, walked. It was a beautiful, sunny day, 30 minutes, had lunch, read the book, walked over to her office something like 4:00, right? We sit down and we talk about the book and how it relates to the section that we're about to create.

And the conversation isn't, “Oh, did you like it? I liked it. Did you like it?” No, the conversation was, “All right, page 68, paragraph two, the way that they say that seems to be better than the way that we're articulating. I think we need to incorporate that. What about you?” She's like, “Page 98, let's look at this because I really like this chapter right here how it's going through and laying out this.” These are real, full conversations, full comprehension and that's what I would have loved to have had for my team.

Even if they didn't get to 100 percent just having them feel the confidence that they could sit down and read 178 pages – even if they were half that speed – if they could read it in two and a half hours, right? Two and a half hours doesn't feel like you want to kill yourself, but a lot of people are reading closer to 100 words per minute. So, that book would have maybe taken then five, six hours. Don't quote me. I have to do the math, but maybe it would take them six, seven hours, something like that, you know? There are just a lot of use cases for it. I had one client one time tell me.

We were having a conversation and there was some way that I was speaking jargon-wise that was just completely in contrast to the way the team that he had built – with a lot of effort and thoughtfulness – was talking about actually database management. He acknowledged that there was certain subject matter expertise that I had that would be ideal for what his team was trying to do. To his credit, quite frankly, because the other thing that I was doing was really obnoxious was I was using the jargon and the way of thinking so the jargon overlap was mistaken.

I would use word X. It meant word Y to all these people. He told me after the meeting he said, “Look, I can't have you come back

and talk to my team until you read this entire book.” It’s written by Kimball. It’s an amazing data warehousing book, 600 plus pages long, 650 something like that textbook, right, big. He was like, “I need you to read this book before you come back next time to my office.” It’s like, “Oh, okay.” So, I bought the book and it took about two and a half hours to read it and then I came back and I was like, “This is a great book. I get it. I understand why your whole team is building around this and now I understand where what I’m saying is super confusing and completely just making your team wants to kill themselves a little bit.”

I actually made my entire team read it because if you look at my books, you’ll see that I’ve highlighted and tabbed them and the reason I tabbed them that way – and there are notes – anyways whatever. But I tabbed them that way because I knew that my speed might be a little faster than others and there were certain sections so “If you could not read the whole book, please young analyst Padawan, just be able to reference this one section and let that inspire you to read additional sections because I promise you –” But yeah, I wouldn’t have been able. That book might have taken a person 19 hours if they could actually read it straight.

See, this is the thing that’s deceiving is that speed reading is like marathon running, right? Running for two hours is a different prospect from running for five hours, right? You have different things to consider. If you’re running for two hours, you’re hungry at the end, but you don’t have to eat in the middle, right? If you’re running for five hours, you have to eat in the middle. You have a whole different set of concerns that will then necessarily slow you down. You have to carry stuff. Meb, he ain’t carrying anything when he’s running the marathon for the Olympics. He’s just going for it. He’s coming right there at two hours.

So, he can stand without food for two hours and run along. But the average typical person’s going to carry gels. They have all this extra equipment to make it work, etc., right? It’s the same thing with reading, strangely enough. If you can read straight for two hours, that’s a long time to sit and not have any water, but it’s not impossible. You can actually sit for two hours and do an activity and not pee, but can you sit there for 19 hours and not have to sleep at some point? Of course not. So, your 19 hours is not just 19 hours. It’s 19 hours plus rest breaks, plus pee breaks, plus food, plus etc. You may or may not ever get it done.

Also because it only takes me two and a half hours, I get one complete thought. You get the same thought chopped up over however long it takes you.

Matt: Can you talk a little bit about what some of the misnomers are about speed reading and some of the popular misconceptions about what speed reading is and how to go about trying to learn it and all of that kind of stuff and then the approach that you and Katya take in the course as an alternative?

May Ling: Sure. I mean I think the biggest misnomer is when it's presented as a series of hacks that you can do magically that will make you somehow brighter because it's not. It's actually expanding your skill for reading. You actually have to learn to read properly, which is difficult because a lot of people believe strongly that they can read properly – and yeah, you can – there's just a better way to do it. Just like everyone can run, but if you're going to then run a marathon, you're going to have to learn some things or else you may actually hurt yourself and never achieve the goal that you're trying to achieve. Okay, that's one.

Two, there are a lot of these hacks that are involved and these people that teach it are actually switching the material on you. So, they're giving you harder material and then – on the magical period and point that you're finally reading so much faster – you actually have something with a lower reading level and that's what's actually making you read faster. That's really depressing to me because that really is embarrassing for the fact that I mean it would be like, "I'm going to run you downhill now and see how much faster?"

That's not cool. That's just not cool because now you believe that you can't do it when you then realize that you've been tricked. Why? That sucks. Then there are a lot of what I call half-truths. So, some people have this finger method where they tell you to use your finger and that actually doesn't help you read faster. What it does is it focuses your major issue. It can – can, not necessarily depending on what other issues you have correlating to it – it might help you focus better.

It might not also too because it might be massively distracting. I will tell you though you read only with your eyes and – when I'm

at full speed – I could not possibly also do that finger thing because I would not have enough time to turn the page. So, I would get slowed down because if I had to do that and turn the page, I'm reading way too slow at that point. Also, it is not a tradeoff between comprehension and speed. That would be like Meb is trading off between miles and speed. That doesn't even make sense. No. It's not a tradeoff. Comprehension is comprehension. Now comprehension is not memorization. That's a big misnomer.

It's like this. You have a lot of kids. They can regurgitate the Preamble to the Constitution. They know what it means. They comprehend it. Okay. Then which one was it that you were trying to do? If you were trying to memorize it, yeah, that's not this course, right? If you were trying to "We the people of the United States –" You'd have to memorize it, right? If you're trying to understand it, yeah, you should not be failing to understand it by the time you're done reading it.

In fact, that's in skill No. 3 we start to talk about that, but then it's driven home by skill No. 7 as well as some of the strategies that we suggest you take. That's really the ability to take an idea from not just one word to another word, from one sentence to another sentence, from a paragraph to another paragraph and really hold that idea correctly in your mind to drag you all the way through a logical argument, which is a very advanced concept.

Matt: In terms of how you have the course structured chronologically and the types of skills and techniques that people should be working on in order – like from wherever they are now with their reading speed – if you can just give an overview of the course structure and just the general chronology of the types of skills and techniques that people should be working on in order to accelerate their reading speed?

May Ling: We divide them into two sets – the essentials and the mechanics – and the essentials are those core, basic skills that we know for a fact most school systems did not teach in their entirety. There are three parts to that. The first one is decoding, which is the ability to see the word and know that it is an English language word and what sounds it corresponds to. We're not even getting to meaning yet. Some people have difficulty with that – particularly those that have been diagnosed with dyslexia – and some people truly do

have dyslexia but some people just have a weak phonetic development.

They were sick when they were a kid, whatever happened. They just didn't have enough time to learn that skill when they were between ages 5 to 7. Most school systems cut it off at 7 any teaching of phonetics, which is crazy because we don't even teach complete phonetics to begin with in the majority of public school systems. Without phonetics though, you will not decode and without that ability, you will necessarily read slower because you're only reading with half of your major tools in order to read. You basically cannot. It's really kind of fascinating. The second one is vocabulary. \

A lot of people have an underdeveloped vocabulary – especially if you're like me with immigrant parents where vocabulary was something that you learned wholly from outside of the family unit. That's a big one. And then ever as you enter your workplace, a lot of times people are throwing around jargon, but you're too embarrassed to ask what that word actually means. And then over the course of months, everybody doesn't know what it means and so they're all using it incorrectly. You, the poor managing director, have to sit there and be like, "Guys. Let's actually go through what this word actually means." You're shaking your head so you know exactly what I'm talking about, right?

Use the word because everybody was using the word to sound clever – so vocabulary. The third thing is what we call structure and structure encompasses grammar, but it's also structure. So, if you have a sentence that begins with neither and nor, your brain can actually recognize that pattern to know exactly how to pull the essential meaning out of the sentence very differently than if you don't see "neither" "nor". This is actually interesting because one of the major exercises – and you are closer to my age so you might find this fascinating – one of the major, major exercises for structure is no longer taught as of –

It was pulled from the school system curriculum around the '70s and some people continued to teach it, but now it's not taught at all. It's called sentence diagramming. Did you ever come across sentence diagramming? They don't teach it at all now, period.

Matt:

Wow.

May Ling: Kids these days would not. The millennials if you know it, you're in the minority whereas you're about my age. You know what sentence diagramming is, right? You had to do it?

Matt: Of course.

May Ling: Yeah. So, sentence diagramming is actually a core skill to being able to understand really, really long sentences because really, really long sentences are not written in a basic format. So, it's going to be pretty much every really important author – or not important, that's not the right word – like the classic author. If you find that you can't read any of the classics without slowing all the way down, it's probably this skill right here. And then from there, the mechanics are things that have a feel to them. You just have to get it right. And then what you feel – just like in sports – focus is one of them.

Focus has a feel to it. It's hard to explain. The next one is visual perception. Oh, I forgot what we called it – perceptual span – and that has some components to it. That's like what actually is it you're supposed to be looking at and – if you can't do that – what does that mean that you have to exercise in order to develop that perceptual span? Some people here in the flawed courses or in the courses that I don't agree with necessarily will say that you just need to blink like crazy or move your eyes or keep them wide open or something. None of that is true. You're blinking because your mind is trying desperately to capture meaning. That's actually telling you something.

In that section, we'll describe what you do and how you interpret that and how you correct that. The third thing is subvocalization. That's talking in your head. You don't actually need to do that and – in order to train yourself – sometimes you'll do it for good reason and sometimes you won't. We'll talk about what's the right way to do it, what's the wrong way to do it, how you train yourself out of it. That's that section. And then the seventh is advanced pattern recognition and that's really how do you outline a paragraph? How do you outline a whole book?

You will work on advanced pattern recognition for the rest of your life and the degree to which you can do it will dictate your speed. So, when I started – oh, I never even got to this portion of your

question, which is when I started speed reading, it was because I was running a billion dollars and it was right into the economic crisis and I didn't have any answers. You can find tons of people to explain to you how to manage money when the markets are going up. When the markets are going down, everybody's got great guesses, but that's not helpful when you have to watch your P&L swing a few million dollars up and down every day.

You have market volatility, whatever, it doesn't matter. The point is, I needed some answers and I needed them fast. So, I just started reading. The only thing I knew of the people that I admired at the firm that I was at – Chilton Investment Company – was that they were avid readers. Warren Buffet is an avid reader and they would quote him all the time as to why they were reading. So, I just started reading ridiculous amounts of material and it was through that exercise my brain just started to develop pattern recognition differently.

I probably went from a 300 to 500 word per minute reader by the end of that two years – over the course of two years – I think I read close to 250 books to cover the gap of this goal that I had. But over that period, that doesn't include white papers. It's not the only thing I was reading at the time. I have stacks and stacks and stacks of white papers, then the actual material every day, Wall Street Journal, etc. So, I was just constantly reading and I wasn't sleeping much either, by the way. Anyway, during that period of time, I became a speed reader and I was probably close to 2,000 and then I continued to develop it over the next whatever period of time – university, etc.

Matt: How long is the actual course itself in terms of the actual video modules?

May Ling: It's divided into three modules and an intro currently – the essentials, the mechanics, and then a strategy section.

Matt: Yeah, it's eight hours of video courses. It's broken into modules.

May Ling: Yeah.

Matt: And so then if you go through all of the eight hours of video content, you'll learn all these different techniques and mechanics and skills?

May Ling: Skills, yeah, and then you'll practice a lifetime. I'm not trying to give you a quick fix, but this is actually how you would fix it if you were really legitimately trying to acquire the skill. These would be the skills and then some of them you have, some of them you might want to practice.

Matt: Right. And then what is the potential? Obviously, it varies by person and all that kind of stuff, but if somebody has a definitely a non-speed reading speed. They're 300 words a minute or something like that, whatever.

May Ling: Three hundred is pretty good.

Matt: Two hundred something, whatever the average kind of person is, for that type of person to accelerate their reading or double their reading speed or kind of get to the point where they can make significant improvements, what kind of practice time frame would you say would be on average?

May Ling: I mean it's hard to say. In a month or in a week, it depends how low. The lower your score – to the extent that there isn't a medical issue, such as you have true dyslexia – the speed at which you will double is much faster because it's just a lower number. If you're at 1,500, to get you to 2,400 I don't know the answer to that. That's just going to take systematic methodology of doing it. I think mine doubled within three to six months easily when I was first starting out and then – if I really – Right now, I'm a little bit slower, but I'm still not slower.

I'm like 2,000, 2,400. If I needed to re-up it, it would probably take me a week of just actually reading to get back there. It's just practice. It's really legitimately going to feel like a sport when you're through it. And then once you have that speed, your new reset speed is way higher. It would take so much for me to read under 700 words per minute right now and I don't mean that in any kind of cocky way at all.

Trust me, at 700 words per minute, I feel the same way that you feel at 100 words per minute if that's your slow speed. But I would say definitely you will see improvement. If you really do work at it, I could easily see it double in a month. If you have a true decoding issue though, you probably should see someone.

Matt: Right. Awesome. Well, we are definitely going to link up the direct link to your course in the show notes so people can go and check that out. Let me ask you this. In terms of your current business projects and things that you're working on – and maybe we should even just start with the workshop that you and I co-facilitated on the nomad cruise – which was super cool.

May Ling: Oh, yeah. That was fun.

Matt: We called it An Entrepreneur Hot Seat and we had anybody – any business owners or entrepreneurs – could come up and take the hot seat and ask you and me for business – They could basically pose their biggest question, challenge, or obstacle and then you and I would strategize with them about that in front of the group, which was the format.

May Ling: Yeah.

Matt: So, what were your reflections or takeaways on that workshop and what we experienced there?

May Ling: I think a lot of people have very interesting businesses, and I'm excited to see everyone try to achieve those goals. There's only so much that you can learn about a business in that format and more the other work that I do, I would typically take a lot more time to inventory and understand. The same thing for you too if you're trying to dig in, you really dig in. That said, it's really interesting once you see full cycle what can happen from the beginning of a business to the middle of the business to the end of the business what types of advice you give – like how you really think about it.

For the most part, a lot of the folks that came to the hot seat had never done a full cycle. They'd either never started a business or they'd been a part of the starting of a business but didn't know where it should go or what it should do strategy-wise. They were missing, therefore, then a whole mess of experiences on funding, on communication, etc. And it's just really interesting to think and see after you've already lived through the cycle how you think about it differently from the folks that are going to live through the cycle and be extremely accomplished entrepreneurs. Do you know?

Matt: For sure. I know you do a bunch of business consulting now and you're able to cherry-pick projects that you think A, are cool and fun and B, where you can add a lot of value. How do you self-assess your personal business skills? What are your top areas of expertise both that you're really good at, but also that you really like working in? So, when you're evaluating let's say a business consulting project, what makes you light up and say, "I could really help here and this is cool."?

May Ling: Yeah. I mean when you do a business consulting project there are a lot of different ways to think about it. For me, I don't ever want to do something where I'm not adding value. What's the point? I was an entrepreneur. I was on the other side. There's no way that I would take value for no reason. There are some people that will do that. I'm not just trying to extract my specific brand of value out. So, I always look for projects where I really feel I could add value. So, then what is the value that I add?

I think it's interesting because it's primarily strategy consulting that I think I do these days. The oddity of what I recently discovered is probably a secondary value as a strategy person is the analytical data background. It's kind of mixed with the fact that by whatever odd mixture of life happened, being able to see companies and actually investigating and forcibly thinking about companies doing an IPO and growing and thinking about what would make those companies lose value from running the short portfolio, the two directional, right, is really a rare, forced, systematic skill that I think people have the opportunity to be forced to learn – for better or for worse.

So, that really feeds into strategy in a way that might be very different from other folks. A lot of times too the types of roles that I end up being pulled into typically are consulting with C-levels or acting as an interim C-level person. In a lot of ways, what you're trying to do is talent management. So, you've got a company. You're missing a strategy or alternatively, you have a strategy, but executing it is difficult because the communication of that strategy it's just beyond the staff that you have, you know?

Staff and really brilliant and talented individuals are always going to try – in the absence of understanding what they're supposed to do – to pull the entire engagement of your business toward their strength. We talked about this a little bit last time. It's just a spin

on that. So, if you've got a really strong data person, they're going to pull your whole business into data like a sucking machine and – whether or not that ever makes any money – is a big question mark. If you've got a person that's really, really, really good at some kind of niche skillset, they're going to pull your whole business into that area whether or not it's the vision that you have or whatever it is you're trying to aspire to.

What you sometimes actually wanted from them was this beautiful, orchestration of multiple skill sets in the right mixture, in the right knowledge level combined for this other goal that you keep saying at the top of your lungs but they don't understand. That tends to be when you bring in someone like me. You might bring in a senior manager of some sort, COO, CIO, CEO, whatever it is – those types of positions – where you don't have the perfect person or that you do have the perfect person. They need some support. That support is hard to identify. Those are the types of projects that I end up on.

Matt: Cool. So, do you want to talk about any current projects that you're consulting on right now that are fun and interesting and exciting?

May Ling: Yeah. I'm just beneath being able to talk about it in full disclosure. It's a really exciting one to me because it touches foreign language instruction – specifically as it relates to foreign language accents. And this one has always been near and dear to my heart because growing up the way that I did, I know that a lot of folks that are extremely brilliant do get discredited for not having the perfect accent.

But hopefully, by the next time that I talk to you, I can talk about it because it is so cool and the people that are on the staff I mean they care and they are really brilliant and some of the things that they have done are just to be admired. To be admired especially in light of being aware that – for some of them – English, again, is not their first language.

Matt: That's awesome. All right. At this point, May Ling, are you ready for the lightning round?

May Ling: Again? I did so terribly on the first one. I thought for sure you'd be like – All right. Really?

Matt: I had to come up with new lightning round questions.

May Ling: New lightning round questions?

Matt: Yeah. They are all new.

May Ling: Yeah, but you know the first time, I got feedback from my own friends. “May, you don’t conceptually understand lightning round.”

Matt: Although I put forth the parameters that although the questions will be short, your answers do not have to be. So, I will give you–

May Ling: All right, all right the lightning round – lightning fast questions, super turtle-like, slow answers. Here we go.

Matt: Here we go.

May Ling: Cue the sound.

Announcer 1: The lightning round.

Matt: We are currently sitting in your beloved New York City. How would you describe what you love and why you love New York City?

May Ling: That’s a good question. The thing with New York that’s pretty amazing is that when I first started my sojourn – when I first resigned – I realized how much fun I was having in other cities and I was like, “Wow, what’s New York like, right?” And what I realized about New York is New York is New York. In other cities, you can come to the end of the city. You can be like, “All right, I’ve done everything. I don’t need to go back to X, Y, Z city.” Not every city, there are other cities that fit this, but there are very few others.

Now I’ve been here for 12 years in New York City. Maybe it’s more than that. I don’t know. Maybe it’s less than that. Call it 12, all right. I’ve been here for 12 years in New York and when I took this challenge – accepted on so to speak – I was like, “I wonder how long it’s going to take?” I’m not done. My Instagram feed still has plenty of stuff that I can post. It’s not repetitive and still very, very cool. That’s part of New York. Now is it your brand of cool

specifically haters of New York? I don't care so it turns out. But it is – for a lot of people – it is their brand of cool otherwise we wouldn't have a booming economy here in this awesome city.

Matt: You also travel a lot and you travel to all sorts of different places. You've been to 58 countries now. Why do you travel? What do you get out of travel? What does travel mean to you?

May Ling: Oh, I finally figured this one out. Actually, you helped me figure this one out. It's the curiosity thing. If there were any adjectives that must describe me, curiosity is definite. Would you say? Yeah. Curiosity is definitely one of them. I am curious. That's probably why I talk randomly to Uber drivers without solicitation of any sort. I want to understand. I want to know. And travel is the ultimate activity for a curious person. I mean where you go, it could be the most boring place to other people. I remember I was in Malmö and I liked Malmö a lot.

I ran the Malmö half there and I stayed at an Airbnb with the nicest human being ever and I took some pictures of Malmö and then I did what I always do – which is a little bit Photoshop, I'm not going to lie – and I showed it to him. I was like, "Your city's beautiful. What are you talking?" because he was like, "Why did you come to Malmö?" "Your city's beautiful. Look." And he's like, "You pimped my city." I was like, "This is how I see your city. What do mean I pimped your city?"

He just made fun of me for a while – a nice Swedish guy – the way that Swedes make fun of people, but such brilliant man, because he had a map of all the places that he wanted to go to and Malmö wasn't one of them – even though he had made it his home base and his city of choice – but yeah, curiosity for sure.

Matt: That's awesome. You – on the last podcast – identified when I asked you what was on the top of your list of places you most wanted to go, one of the cities you listed in the last podcast was Budapest.

May Ling: Oh, yeah.

Matt: Which you've already subsequently been to, of course.

May Ling: Yeah, Bori, I hung out with her. She took me to dinner.

Matt: That's awesome.

May Ling: Yeah. She's so cool. She's really cool. She's Queen of Hungary to me.

Matt: Shout to Vory.

May Ling: Yeah, Vory.

Matt: So, I want to ask you for one more city that is now – since you've done that and you've knocked it off the list – what is one more city right now that you've never been to that you are super excited you really want to go to?

May Ling: It's not a city. It's actually a country.

Matt: It can be a country.

May Ling: Okay. So, I almost ended up going, but I'm trying to do this whole stay put in New York for a little bit thing for just you know because if you're a nomad, it doesn't mean you just avoid places so to speak. New York City is a legit city, quite frankly, you know? But I almost ended up going to Lebanon. Dude, Lebanon looks so cool. I want to go. The food looks amazing.

Matt: Lebanon is amazing.

May Ling: You've been?

Matt: Yes.

May Ling: Oh yeah, you told me that.

Matt: Beirut is amazing.

May Ling: I want to go. And then the outskirts, that's why I couldn't just leave it to a city.

Matt: Yeah. And I have a lot of friends in Lebanon. So, I have a lot of friends that live in Beirut.

May Ling: Ah, good to know.

- Matt: And then I also have friends that live from the south of Lebanon as well, which they invited me to go and I wasn't able to go because they have olive farms and everything and it's just amazing.
- May Ling: I want to go.
- Matt: But the food in Beirut is unequivocally I mean that's really the culinary epicenter and the nightlife is also amazing and they also make – I don't know if you know this – but they also make some amazing wine in Lebanon.
- May Ling: Yeah, no, I saw that.
- Matt: The Château Musar and some of the stuff that comes is just a world class, world renowned, iconic wine. A lot of people don't know that.
- May Ling: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And then the sites look crazy.
- Matt: Yeah, it's amazing. It's amazing.
- May Ling: Yeah, yeah, yeah.
- Matt: So, I highly recommend it. I think it's a great, great choice and I definitely recommend people check out Lebanon.
- May Ling: Lebanon.
- Matt: So, awesome. May Ling, I want to ask you one more lightning round question and then we're going to tell people how they can get ahold of you. Knowing everything you know now in your life up to this point, what advice would you give your 18-year-old self?
- May Ling: Little, young May May, what would I tell her? Chill out. I mean still seriously like chill out. I came from such a small town. The situation at that time was unbearable. In my small town, Florida is not – Florida was ranked 48th at one point for education until Jeb Bush became governor. Additionally – and my area would have been a testament to why – that's the first thing. The second thing is my area all of the high schools that I went to when I was growing up that would have I think over 80 percent qualified for school lunch. Do you know what I mean? People were broke and I was

watching a huge portion of my graduating class – the women – get pregnant before graduating. I had to get the heck out of Dodge.

“It’s not going to work out. This is not the vision that I have for myself” and I was so aggressive about it for so long and I just think I would tell that person to chill. I mean I’ve worked on chill out. Trust me, the last two years of travel has been kind of fun I’m not going to lie, but I got it now. Chill out, yeah, right. And a lot of my friends are all about the chill-out, but definitely, 18-year-old self, chill out, man. Life is really, really short and what actually is valuable is something that you – yeah, chill out would be it. Even though you have a tiger mom, you have to try to find the balance there. You have to be respectful when you chill out and not freak that woman out. She’s got a heart condition, etc.

Matt: Awesome. Well, let’s tell people how they can follow you on social media, how they can connect with you, and how they can contact you. Some people might be interested in your business consulting services, some people may just want to follow your travel adventures on Instagram or another platform. So, what’s the best way for people to check you out and see what you’re up to and get ahold of you?

May Ling: Yeah. It all links back to my website www.maylinglai.com a very simple way to click through to pretty much anything that is me. And then my Instagram is @whereismayling. Currently, it’s just dedicated to travel.

Matt: @whereismayling?

May Ling: It’s mostly so I can figure out where I am. I think people think it’s for them and I love that anyone follows me at all – other than my mother who I know is following me to be nosy. I love you mom, again. You make sure that I’m still alive, etc. So, half my stories – by the way – if I’m at the airport I’m like, “This is where I am.” That’s actually for my mom because it’s too early or too late to get through to her. Yeah, those are all for you, mom, if you are listening. But yeah, @whereismayling is actually so I can remember where I was but – to the extent that you guys like the pictures or want to follow it – I’m so thrilled and so thankful and grateful for that.

Matt: That’s awesome. We’re going to link all that up in the show notes

so you can just go to www.TheMaverickShow.com. All of May Ling's contact information will be in one place there, as well as the link to her speed reading course and everything else that we discussed in this episode. May Ling, thank you for being here again.

May Ling: Yeah, yeah. We're going to get some New York pizza now I think or something like that, yeah.

Matt: Let's go and do that. See if it stopped snowing.

May Ling: I'm sending you out in the snow.

Matt: Send me out in the snow. I'll go. I'll go get on pizza duty. So, you were the first guest of The Maverick Show. You are also the first repeat guest on The Maverick Show.

May Ling: Yay. I feel so special.

Matt: Thank you for being here. It was awesome to have you.

May Ling: Yeah, cool.

Matt: All right. Goodnight, everybody.

Announcer 1: Be sure to visit the show notes page at www.TheMaverickShow.com for direct links to all the books, people, and resources mentioned in this episode. You'll find all that and much more at www.TheMaverickShow.com

Announcer 2: If you like podcasts, you will love Audiobooks and you can get your first one for free at www.TheMaverickShow.com/Audiobook. Whether you want the latest bestselling novels or books on investing, business, or travel, try your first audiobook for free at www.TheMaverickShow.com/Audiobook.

Announcer 3: Would you like to get Maverick Investor Group's white paper on how to avoid the seven biggest mistakes real estate investors are making in today's market? Just go to www.TheMaverickShow.com/AvoidMistakes. The report is totally free and available for you now at www.TheMaverickShow.com/AvoidMistakes.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 78 minutes