

The Maverick Show Episode 32
HOST: Matt Bowles GUEST: Michael Thelin

Matt Bowles: Hey, everybody. It's Matt Bowles. Welcome to The Maverick Show. My guest today is Michael Thelin. He is a Cleo and Emmy Award winning commercial and feature film director. His work has been shown theatrically on broadcast and cable television networks as well as top tier film festivals such as South by Southwest and Tribeca. He has directed projects for brands ranging from Amex, Coca Cola, Ford, and BMW.

His debut feature film, which he directed and co-wrote, Emily, opened theatrically in 2016 and has since become one of the top rated thrillers on iTunes and Netflix having received critical acclaim from *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and many other sources earning it an 88 percent rating on Rotten Tomatoes. Michael is also a location independent entrepreneur. He is the founder and owner of MTP, a film and television production consulting firm, which has overseen the production of over 50 original shows and 20 films for Google as well as producing content for Universal, Warner, and Fox.

His team has overseen the production of Google's premium streaming content that is currently competing with Netflix and Amazon. He has scaled his company to a team of over 20 people. And he can run his business and manage his team completely remotely while traveling the world, which he has done quite prolifically. He has been to at least 20 countries. And we are now in Lisbon, Portugal recording this interview in person today. Michael, welcome to the show.

Michael Thelin: Thanks, Matt.

Matt: So good to have you hear, my man. You and I have hung out in a few different countries over the last couple of weeks. We were on the nomad cruise together. We hit the Canary Islands. We had the day in Casablanca, Morocco. And we're now hanging out in Lisbon, Portugal. Just to set the scene, we have opened a beautiful bottle of Portuguese red wine from the Douro Valley, which we're going to be drinking through during this episode. So, cheers to you, my man.

Michael: Cheers, brother.

Matt: Good to be here. Let's start off with just sort of your background to give folks a sense of where you grew up and how you initially got

- interested in the creative side of film, commercials, and that whole thing. How did that come about for you?
- Michael: Yeah. I grew up right outside of Chicago and then, moved into the city in high school. And just spending my younger years always with those big, hunky VHS camcorders. Do you remember those? So, I would always make I would say an old school version of those SNL parody commercials or SNL digital shorts before that was even a thing. They for sure were not as good but it didn't matter to us. We just had a blast doing it and we would do it as much as we could. And then, reality sets in and I've got to go to school and college and get a job and all of that. So, that kind of endeavor kind of faded in terms of going to a prep school.
- They want you to go to a good college. And you go to a good college, and they want you to probably do finance, which also was interesting. But at the end of the day, it looks like it wasn't my actual calling but it was stuff that really helps me until this day. So, yeah, I got away from it for a little bit but it was good to dive back in at the right time. And I'm just glad that I did make the move when I did.
- Matt: And so, you're talking about when you were a kid, you're talking about those giant camcorders that we used to have and hold on our shoulder and walk around filming stuff on VHS tapes?
- Michael: Yeah, exactly. And you wouldn't be editing as a 6-year-old so you'd have to record, stop and then, turn around and then, record, stop all based off of the visual memory or copying stuff that you see on TV. It was fun.
- Matt: That's awesome. And I feel like as kids, we put our creative energies out there and we get passionate about stuff. And then, a lot of times, as you said, "real life" sort of sets in and then, there are all of these social obligations and expectations and things like that. But you were also actually legitimately interested in the finance and trading and that kind of side of things, right, in terms of your choice to go in that professional direction?
- Michael: Yeah, exactly. I think I wanted to trade since I was in high school. Every father that I knew, it's a predominantly male field that was doing it at the school I went to, their hours were great. It was like 8:00 to 3:00. And they were always home when we got home. And they were really cool guys and they always were able to afford nice
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things in terms of going on trips and they traveled a lot. So, I was always fascinated about in terms of seeing other families that have benefited from trading.

And so, ultimately, I thought that was something I wanted to pursue other than going the standard finance route that a lot of my friends did, which they're doing really well, too, in terms of consulting or I-Banking. It's just the trading end always seemed more fascinating to me.

Matt: What was that environment like? And maybe set the scene a little bit in terms of the years that you're talking about that you went in, what you were trading, where you were working, and give us a glimpse into what was that environment like?

Michael: Yeah. So, you kind of had to know someone in order to get into the CBOE floor. So, it was the Chicago Board of Options Exchange. I was actually a market maker for a period of time. But you have to clerk for about a year or so first. And you have to know someone just to clerk. And then, you're someone's bitch. You are literally at the beck and call of the market makers. We were hazed like no other. And, at certain points, it was tough to take but it's not an easy business and it is a business. And it is the real world. This wasn't like hazing in college.

This was like they wanted you to know how hard this was going to be and that, mentally, you've got to stay strong. Shit is going to hit the fan. You're going to lose a lot of money probably before you're going to make a lot. So, they really hazed all of us. And I thought, to me, it worked in terms of getting us ready to actually start trading. And the floor itself is literally I would say very similar to a sports locker room in terms of there's a lot of joking around, a lot of pranks because, again, there's a lot of down time. Not every single moment has you buy, buy, sell, sell. It's not like that kind of hyper fast environment.

Now, it is sometimes. And when it is, there's nothing like that. You get chills almost like you've got to have it on auto pilot because you have to think so fast. And that means you have to have prepped so well beforehand because you have no idea when the storm is going to hit. You typically know at the beginning of the day and the end of the day might be a little busier but you don't know if someone is going to come in with a massive order that you

have to take down. And so, just always being hyper aware of your surroundings. And the environment itself was filled with a bunch of practical jokers that were, honestly, half of them seemed like they could be stand up comedians they were so funny.

So, it made actual work life enjoyable, in terms of just going in every day knowing that you're going to hang out with some friends that are all competing for the same thing you are. But yet, you've got to go about it your own way.

Matt: And I would imagine that, in addition to the adrenaline and the excitement, it was also a very high stress, very high pressure environment. How did you navigate that and deal with the stress and the pressure of the environment?

Michael: Yeah. I think, ultimately, the hazing I'm talking about really preps you to curb that type of excitement that I was mentioning earlier because when the shit does hit the fan, you actually can't get super excited in the moment. You just have to stay super disciplined or you're going to make decisions based on emotion versus actual analysis. So, you need a sociopathic mentality to that particular work because imagine if you woke up and someone said you lost \$50,000.00 today That would probably make you pretty stressed out. But say you lost \$500,000.00 today. Both need to be treated the same but then, you say the opposite.

What if I just told you that you made \$1.2 million today? Are you going to start spending it? No. What if you made \$20,000.00 today? Or what if you made \$300.00 today? All of those need to be treated somewhat similarly because if I made \$1.2 million I'd be a lot happier than \$300.00 but you also have to be extremely disciplined with your emotions because the higher you get or the lower you get, you're not going to make it. But that's gambling then because, even today, they think traders are gamblers. And floor traders, market makers, are the opposite, good ones.

Matt: And what are those sort of skills and lessons and techniques for the emotional management and other things do you think that you developed there that were then applicable to the other future aspects of your life when you went back into the creative side of things, when you went the entrepreneurial route, when you started building businesses? Because those were also really high stress in different ways but high stress environments. So, what were the

lessons or the personal growth takeaways that you were able to extrapolate to other areas of your life?

Michael: That's a great question. It dovetails into this quite nicely in terms of starting your own thing you've got nothing. And so, you've got to grind. And when you start getting clients and you start doing well or you aren't doing well for a certain period of time, you can't get too low or high. When I had some success at certain times because it was a different industry and I had started my own business, I would get so high. Not literally but it was just the best feeling but then, knowing that's just one job, that's one project. You don't know how long that's going to go. You've got to slow down.

And so, trading really helped me in terms of the mentality. So, I never got super high or low. I was able to keep a level head and just know this is awesome but I need to find what the next thing is. And then, also hey, this has been a slow part. It's okay. Just keep hustling because you're going to hit some kind of pay dirt because you know you're good at this and you're working 24/7 and grinding as hard as you can. Eventually, it's going to pay off. And so far so good.

Matt: And can you talk a little bit now about what was it that made you decide to do the transition away from trading and to go back into film and production and the whole creative side of things?

Michael: Yeah. To be blunt, I just wasn't a good enough trader. But then, the other side of it was I had an opportunity to actually produce something visually for a disease called cystic fibrosis. And that went really well. And based off of that, I had created some other videos. And I also just love doing it. And I didn't know if I could make money doing it though. And that's a hard thing to balance. But soon thereafter, I did create something that NBC picked up as a daytime show that was called Taste. And from there, it was just never an issue. It was now I'm just hitting the ground running as hard as I can.

Matt: So, what was the step by step in terms of the transition process? Because I feel like there are a lot of people that are in a job and they're doing it and maybe it's okay and maybe they're making decent money at it but it's not where they're really called to be or they're not passionate about it. They think they'd like to do

something else. They're more passionate about something else and they want to take a different path. They want to pivot. They want to transition. For you, when you transition from trading back into the video production thing, what was that process like for you in terms of when you felt that you wanted to go that route?

What were you doing? How were you transitioning? At the same time that you were working at your job, were you doing stuff on the side? What was the actual transition process like for you?

Michael:

Yeah. So, I was trading and I made that video and it did well and that was great. I realized though that the trading world was not going to be long for me. And I don't think that was the right fit in terms of I'm not like a quant. I do think I'm somewhat smart but I'm not as smart as the MIT and Stanford guys next to me. I also kind of knew it was all going to end up upstairs. And most of the smart guys are working as hedge fund either traders, consultants, or owners of their own. So, that's great. And I'm sure they're doing well. The rest of us would have been just left to the side. And if I was there 20 years earlier, that's a different story.

So, I kind of saw that as the writing on the wall. And the fact that I was able to do a project that not only made me happy but seemed to be well received, I went all in, essentially. There was a bit of overlap but I, essentially, was kind of unemployed for a whole year on unemployment. So, it wasn't like I was – again, we all like to condense time in interviews. But it was a grind. I grinded for a whole year. And ever since then, too, until even this last trip, I was still working. I actually have never taken a full vacation. So, I want people to listen to this and say if you do your own thing, don't ever plan on taking a vacation.

That's the other thing. You can take days off but I still, in 14 years now, I probably haven't taken a day off. I'm still thinking about it even on a Saturday or Sunday or even on a trip that Matt and I met on. So, that's one thing people should take away is how do you do this so you can have all of this time to travel the world and everything is great. It's like yeah, but in the back of your mind, when you have a company and it's successful, you're always thinking about it, literally. I grinded for a while and I had nothing. And I was living on unemployment as long as I could. And I just kept my head down.

And every single day was just trying to come up with ways of creating content that mattered. And when I finally was able to do this presentation pilot, NBC bought it. But that was after a long period of time of doing and thinking nothing about that. People say luck is opportunity meets skill. And I just happened to have the right skill set that met the eyeballs of someone over at NBC and they bought it. And it was a small, little show about food and wine that was great. I cut my teeth from a documentary standpoint and I learned a lot. I also learned how to manage, essentially, a show running this thing at 24.

So, I had to manage budgets. I had to manage editors. I had to manage a whole production staff. So, as much as I was directing, I was doing more of the show running duties, which is managing a bunch of people, running a company, essentially. That's the other thing is every one of these projects and this is why I love them is almost starting, building and then, wrapping an actual company because it comes from your brain, pitching it to a client. And then, you have to mobilize upwards of 50 plus people for X amount of time.

And then, it's got to scale down to 10 people and then, finally 2 people and then, no one. And you have to do all of that within X amount of time. So, there's a lot to ramp up and then, collapse in terms of being efficient with your time and money so that you can do a project creatively that makes sense and then, also fiscally, it pays off.

Matt: So, and you're particularly interesting, I think because a lot of people are very let's just say creatively talented and they're creative minds. They're artists and this kind of stuff but that in no way correlates per se with them being a good business person, with them being an entrepreneur.

Michael: One hundred percent.

Matt: But are both a talented creative in terms of writing, in terms of directing, in terms of your creative vision that you're able to do as an artist. And then, you are also an entrepreneur who has been able to build a successful business. Can you talk about the differences between those two things that you just agreed with me on but then, also how you personally have chosen to and figured out how to merge them for your life?

Michael: Creatively, I used to think if I could just do creative stuff that would be great. But I would be lonely just knowing me. And some people are cool with just all doing creative. And I think directing isn't just one creative. Some people can think of it that way but it is really wearing a lot of hats and being able to manage time and, essentially, money if you know what money actually means on set as well as the creative and the other artistic aspects. So, for me, it has really always been a hybrid. The creative side is super exciting but it never exists without the actual budgets and the time and the scheduling.

So, I don't know. I'm not a painter or something that I can just go out and paint or a musician, which I envy those people because I think that's an impressive creative field. But when it comes to content or film making, it's such a collaborative effort with so many different people. It's kind of exciting to work with these other artists so you actually can thrive from their creativity. When a DP tells you about how they want to light a scene and you get super excited. And then, as a director, you're thinking how long is that going to take.

And then, you're thinking are we going to be able to get all of my shots though. And then, the productions editor comes in and is like I want to do all of this and you're like holy shit, that's amazing. And you're like how much is that going to cost. I know there's a producer side but even a director is like can I do that because is that going to take away other aspects of the process that's then going to pigeonhole me when I'm trying to edit this thing. And it's like well, you really wanted that waterfall. And it's like oh, yeah, I guess I did. But that then left you a day short of this. So, I always kind of approach this hybridlike.

At least the way I direct things is from a hybrid standpoint. I'm always thinking about time. But, at the same time, it's so exciting to come up with the creative and think about the psychology of these characters that you're – even if it's a commercial, there's still a character there.

Matt: And I know you've done super low budget stuff and you've also done, obviously, high budget studio stuff. And so, maybe just starting from the very beginning. Your first project that was bought by NBC that you just mentioned, which is really what launched

you, if that was a super low budget thing, can you talk about what the actual process was like for that in terms of creating something of that value that it's going to be purchased by NBC on the budget that you had at the time. What was that like? How did you do that?

Michael:

Yeah. I think it helped to have a distinct visual style that felt fresh at the time. I think everyone does this now. I'm not saying I originated it by any means. I ripped off Tony Scott left and right. And he was one of the people I looked up to. So, I didn't reinvent the wheel with the style at all. But I think it was that mixed with this was like Food Network wasn't as big as it is now. And there was no Chef's Kitchen, which is an amazing show. So, it was kind of a predecessor of that not that, by any means, our stuff looked as good as theirs. We also didn't have as much time.

We had about an hour with each chef and wine expert but we knew how to be efficient with our time. We had an excellent DP. It was very much run and gun docu-style. To be honest, we kind of tried to create a consistency to it. As much as we wanted it to be – we'd love happy accidents and that was what we would always strive for.

But that's what they needed to be because we had to go in and we knew this is exactly how we need to shoot this because, otherwise, without a plan or without some kind of consistency, we'd have so much footage and we just didn't have the time or budget to sift through all of that and try to create a story or something compelling enough that people would want to watch. So, that was my mentality. Think of something creative based on the content of that person like a really famous chef. We'd do our research. We'd think about what do we actually want to get from this chef and then, sit down, ask really good questions.

I had an amazing host and she was an EP on it with me as well, Jen Weigel. Her dad was actually a sports caster like the local one, which, at the time, the local ones were way bigger than ESPN. And so, she already had a pedigree and she was so good on camera and still is. Jen is great. So, she and I would really collaborate together in terms of how to approach this. She trusted me with the visuals. I knew she was really good at pulling stuff out of people and being very personable like yourself. So, once we came up with that strategy then, it was about how to executive but how to execute on a consistent basis.

I know it sounds like a factory and it sounds kind of like oh, but it wasn't. You just have to know that your guys and girls know exactly how to approach each situation so you don't have to relearn it every single time.

Matt: Right. And then, after you had that first success and you sold the show, can you talk about what it meant for you, what that demonstrated that you were able to do that and sell it? Was that like a big kind of threshold for you to pass? And then, what were your next moves? What did that prompt you or springboard you to do next?

Michael: Yeah. I think it definitely was big in terms of feeling like somebody actually liked what I was doing. But this was no runaway hit. Let's be honest, people. If you Google it, I don't even know if it's Googleable. So, it's still a small show but it definitely propelled me into the next phase, which is big, one off things like big concerts, 20 cameras, 30 cameras. And that's where a lot of Universal and Warner stuff came in. And I happened to be doing a lot of the higher end content for, especially places like Atlantic. And I still work with them to this day because I just have great relationships with some of the people there.

But we'd film people from [inaudible] [00:22:16] pilots to Bruno Mars to Ed Sheeran. And we really focused a lot on music but not music videos. And then, based off of that, we ended up doing a lot of one off television specials. And it went from there to working a lot with our branded side, which is where Google comes into this. And the next thing we know as a company, I'm pivoting to strictly provide internal production service oversight for a company like Google while they're creating their badass team that they're going to create around my smaller team. And they did. They surrounded it with really good people.

And that's where that kind of transitioned to where I'm at now from having a staff of one or two people to now upwards of twenty plus and a team that oversees so much content on a daily basis. It's just been a whirlwind. But it's been great.

Matt: So, a step by step, can you talk about as an entrepreneur or when you were aspiring and starting to become an entrepreneur and starting to build a business and starting to get more clients? You

created something. You sold it to NBC. You had your creativity validated through that. What was your next step in terms of actually getting those clients? So, if you were going to do something for Bruno Mars, if you were going to do something for someone like that, how did you personally secure your next client, your next business? How did you do that?

Michael:

Yeah. That's a good question. It's all based on relationships. Your work will speak for itself for the most part. But that work will introduce you to other people and then, people will want to work with you based on your work kind of but really on the relationship. So, 90 percent relationship, 10 percent of the talent. I wish it was the other way around. And you have managers and stuff like that that help try to cultivate the awareness of your abilities. But, ultimately, it's about if people want to work with you. And so, you have to meet as many people as you can and you have to charm them.

And you have to be as genuine as you can because people can tell if you're full of shit. All of my clients know. I don't bullshit any of my clients. They're very good people. I don't think I honestly can say I don't think I've ever worked with a client that I didn't like. Now, some of their clients maybe were a little bit harsh to deal with but it's a relationship game. Maybe that's cliché but it's in a lot of industries but especially this one. But, obviously, the content really does speak for itself in terms of they're seeing such a breadth of work that that's where we ended up just succeeding.

There was an opportunity there. We take all of these opportunities very seriously because you never know. When we were working with even Bruno Mars, we shot his first ever showcase in LA, super tiny. And then, he's performing at the Super Bowl three years later and he's amazing. He was a talent from the word go and you're like oh. The same with Ed Sheeran. You don't know how big these opportunities could become other than if I was shooting the Super Bowl halftime, which we are not. But would we like to? Sure. That would be interesting.

But, at the same time, all of these opportunities, you just never know how big they can become before you even start shooting them. For me, I just took everything very seriously, not like oh, God, who is this Ed Sheeran guy. And it's like no, I love his music. Maybe he's not as big as he is now. And so, we had a whole series

called the Live Room. And he was in this little studio in Chicago. And he was pretty big at the time but not as massive. The guy couldn't have been any cooler. But it's just like working with people like that and projects like that that you have no idea how they're going to go.

And they just end up almost mushrooming like your career in terms of certain aspects. And that brings awareness to you and then, you meet more people and there you go. Meeting people. It's all about meeting more people. So, a step by step process is to meet more people. Be good at what you do but keep meeting more people and then, try to get them to see the stuff that you do. And that's the combo, I think, for almost any industry but definitely the one I'm in.

Matt:

And can you talk a little bit about the entrepreneurial mindset that you had to actually build and scale a business that you don't have to actively work in every single day yourself? Because I feel like one of the things that people fall into is sort of the self-employment trap. And whether you're a creative or whatever it is that you do, you do the stuff and you put in the time and you get paid for it. So, you do this and you get paid for it. And then, you want to do your own thing and, okay, you can do your own thing. But you've got to put in the work and then, you get paid.

That's very different from having an entrepreneurial mindset where you're building systems and processes and building a company and hiring people to run things and managing them. And so, can you talk about for you, along this journey, where did the vision for MTP come from and the vision to build it and scale it to the extent it is now? And what were those steps like for you? How did you gradually build a business out of this?

Michael:

Yeah. It's a great question because a lot of our artists, especially actors, they have they call them a shell company or whatever. And that's essentially why I formed MTP is I was directing. It's like I would rather have you pay my company. And that's where it stops for I would think 90 percent. It's like you just pay the company, not me. And it's a smart way of doing it, by the way. But, ultimately, I just got more interested in servicing clients in more than just one way. And as a result, we kind of pivoted in the last four or five years of just really looking into production services and oversight and from a consulting standpoint.

And so, the last four years really I pivoted and I went away from just having a company that was, essentially, overseeing the shoots that I would do personally as a director. And then, I would look at it from the standpoint of an EP and how can I look to hire specialists that I've either worked with or have been referred to me. And that's kind of how I built this team is this team is full of what I consider all stars. And they're just really good people though. And if you built a company with all stars that really like each other, you definitely can take a step back. And that's how I've been able to be location independent when it comes to my particular team.

Matt: And what was the process for beginning that though? You're solo at the very beginning of this thing. you're a creative. You're a director. You want to start doing stuff. You want to start putting a show together, putting content and value together. And then, when you start building the business, what is your first hire? What is your second hire? How do you go about the actual business building process?

Michael: It's all about necessity. So, what I saw is there was a necessity for the client to have a certain – they asked for a team. They didn't know how big or what the team was supposed to be. And so, I built it out of necessity. And it was based on professionals that had already done it. And what I mean by done it is they were coming from the other side. My team is, essentially, a bunch of production executives. And I only hired though from people in the production world. And I typically still do. And then, the client insulated my team with amazing leadership and people with just thoughtful ideas.

And they're also just really nice people, the actual leaders that Google put in place. I think that's a big reflection of my team is that we reflect the leadership that Google has put in place. And as a result, it's kind of like a little family. And, ultimately, I was there on a daily basis at the very beginning. And I've been removed now for a while, which is now what makes me truly location independent. But that was only based on the amazing leadership from a client standpoint and the fact that I was able to bring a team in of specialists that were open to that kind of environment versus – these were people that were coming from typically telling people what to do.

And now, essentially, they could try to tell the other side, which are the vendors, the production service vendors, what to do. But they don't. They try to work alongside them because that's what our leadership wants. So, I've just been blessed to have a client with great leadership skills that really translates into a cohesive team that I've put together. It's been very successful to date in terms of the work environment and the communication that my team has with them.

And it's just gotten bigger and bigger because there's more trust in me and more trust from me to them in terms of I know I want to bring in more people to work for people like them. And that's not always the case. Again, I don't think every client that people listen to this are going to fall under the same category as Google because Google hires really smartly but they did. And they continue to do that. And they treat my team members like they're a fellow Googler and that's important.

Matt: Can you talk a little bit about specifically what Google is doing now and the production you guys are overseeing in terms of the You Tube premium and some of the stuff that's coming out now in terms of the premium streaming content?

Michael: Yeah. So, I think about four years ago, this all started but now it's starting to bubble up to its own thing. It always ramps up and takes a while. But they have amazing leadership at the top overseeing, I think, some of the fun, smarter shows that are coming out on the streaming platform in general. Cobra Kai was a big hit. And if you haven't had a chance to watch it, Matt, you should watch it, especially if you liked Karate Kid. It's the Karate Kid 20 years later.

So, they take Ralph Macchio and the guy who played Johnny, "sweep the leg Johnny", and the writing is so good and the show is just so well intentioned as well in terms of its – and they have other shows on there, too, a lot of good, unscripted stuff. And like I said, they're making really good moves, I feel like, where they're making a mark. But they may not be a household name in terms of competing directly with Netflix. But everyone knows You Tube and whether they know the You Tube Premium or not, they will. It's just a matter of time. But if you actually checked the shows out, they're just very smart.

And it just goes to show what the leadership of the kind of stuff that they green lit is just, again, they're surrounding my team with some of the smartest minds, I think, out there. And it takes some time. It took Hulu a lot of time. It took Netflix before they started doing anything real. Let's be honest. And Amazon just threw – and now, they're both throwing a bunch of money at content. But Google doesn't do that. Google has probably one of the tighter budgets. And whatever that budget is, I don't even know, but it's a lot less and they do so much more with it. And at least from what I know, they're not taking on a bunch of debt.

Do you know what I mean? So, we won't go down that rabbit hole of that business model but the point is I feel like my team is at the precipice of a really interesting digital streaming platform that, to me, seems ready to take it to that next level and compete with the people that are trying to spend billions. I think that's interesting.

Matt:

Yeah. It's really interesting how all of the original series shows the quality evolution of those shows. It's interesting. I sometimes find myself in these different nomad circle. And, of course, there's a giant age range in the nomad circles and stuff like that. And sometimes when I'm talking to people that are like much younger, early 20s kind of age range, I'm like before the late '90s, almost all television, dramatic television anyway, was horrible. There were no actors that would want to be in a television show if they could be in a movie. It was clearly the substandard genre that you would only be in if you couldn't be in a big feature film.

Whereas in the late '90s when you had HBO come out with the Sopranos and then, they came out with The Wire, this changed the whole concept of the potential for what an original series could be and that it could be as good or better than a movie because instead of an hour and a half, it could be 13 hours long and you could do these character arcs and develop these plots. And if the acting and the writing was as good or better than a film then, why wouldn't you do that? And sure enough, all of a sudden, Netflix said hey, we want to create original series.

And now, Hulu, as you mentioned, I just watched Looming Tower, which was one of Hulu's first original series where they really put serious resources into the writing and the acting and the directing and everything. And that was quite a show as well. And I'm so excited. And now, all of these A list movie stars want to be on the

TV shows because that's where a lot of the best content is coming from.

Michael: And all of these A listers are working with Google. Check it out. Will Smith, Jordan Peterson, Weird City. He's EP'ing it. That's one of his ideas. Will Smith did The Jump. The A list talent that I would love for one of my films is easily doing one of the You Tube shows because they know that's the future, man. I feel like the eyeball is already there. The eyeballs are already on You Tube. It's just about why don't you shift a little bit to the left here sometimes because they also want to support all of their actual You Tube creators. They're very – it's talked about every day.

It's not like let's just try to think of our own premium stuff and good luck to the rest. They are always No. 1 preaching. It is all about their actual people on the platform. But, again, if Will Smith can come in and do something different and do something different in terms of, as you said, for I think it was for his 50th, he bungee jumped from a helicopter in the Grand Canyon. Are you kidding me? And it was all over You Tube. And they're streaming Coachella right now. And they could do a lot more than I feel like Netflix.

So, they're doing stuff like streaming Coachella right now, which is something that Netflix can't do and Amazon is trying to get into as they're doing some Thursday night football stuff. But, again, it is interesting to see these A list people. It's exciting. But the film side that you just kind of mentioned is, again, where most of my creativity lands today.

Matt: Yeah. I want to definitely talk about that as well because I know you've won Cleos for some of the commercial work that you've done. You've won Emmys for some of the shows that you've done. And then, you also now have your first theatrical debut in terms of a feature film, which I'm super excited to chat about as well. Let me first ask you though about the commercials and then, we'll go into the feature film stuff. How did you land clients of the caliber, the Fortune 500 caliber, that you landed to do commercial work for? How did those relationships come about? How did you build those?

Michael: Yeah. I think, again, we said earlier but it is based on the working relationships. So, based on those relationships, I think, is how I got

almost all of that work. And all of it is really some kind of long form content in one way or another. And that's where the Emmy and Cleo came in in terms of doing this unbelievable cool interactive campaign for the state of Tennessee based on a relationship of someone that used to work for Warner and now has started his old thing, sold back this really cool idea to shoot at three very unique, iconic Tennessee locations.

These artists, we would shoot them front to back and then, we put up this double sided almost what looked like these flat screens but putting them together, it looked like the actual person was standing in the square. So, when you were in front of the screen, you could see them performing. And then, you walk around to the back, and you see behind them. So, it literally looked like they were virtually but in HD. It wasn't like one of those hologram things. And the catch was is they could actually see the audience. So, they could say hey, I'm in Tennessee but this was like Chicago.

And they'd be like, "Hey, you in the red hat, what do you want me to play next?" And they would freak out because you're like what. And the fact that you could go around to the back side and it looked like you were looking at them from behind. So, it looked seamless. It was a really cool campaign, man. And we won those awards on that. So, I think based on work like that, word of mouth and then, relationships in terms of how I got work like that. And it's like I never thought when he called me, he's like, "Hey, man, do you think you could pull this off?" And I was like, "Let's do it. I don't know."

But, of course, I said yes. By then, you're like I don't know how we're going to. And it was literally the only – you need a certain bracket for this to hold the camera because you have to put the camera a certain angle like a specific angle. And there are only two brackets in the whole United States that have it. And the first city we did this in because you had to do it in three of them over three straight days, the bracket didn't show up. And there are only two. So, we had one that worked and the other one we had to just improvise. And we made it work somehow and then, the bracket came in like four hours later.

So, we had it for the other two. But only two brackets, which seems bizarre, in the whole United States had this exact thing for the degree that we needed for the cameras. But that's what you

deal with. That's what I kind of love and hate at the same time. The producer in me hates it so much. The director in me kind of loves it because it's like all right, I'm going to figure out a different way to do this. But the producer side wins out a lot in my head where I'm like what the fuck are we going to do. And I start wanting to freak out.

Thank God there is not a thought bubble that follows me around on set because I don't think anyone would ever like me because it's so tough to stay calm in situations that are constantly fluid. And that goes back to my trading days, I think. You've got to stay the course but you also have to be – you're a leader out there so people will reflect your energy. So, if it's negative energy that you put out, it's negative energy you're going to get back in. And I'm not really into too much of that kind of speak but I do believe in energies and I do believe that you have to stay calm as a leader and you also have to be a hard worker. I feel like if you're lazy as a leader then, everyone else thinks that you can be lazy, too.

So, that's kind of my philosophy at least the short answer of my philosophy on set.

Matt:

Can you now talk about your film, Emily? I'm super excited to get into this because this was your theatrical debut. You co-wrote and directed the film. It was released in theaters. It's super popular now on Netflix and on iTunes. People can watch it anywhere. And it has gotten incredible critical acclaim from all of the top sources. And it is currently sitting at an 88 percent positive critical reviews on Rotten Tomatoes, which is not only an incredible accomplishment for any film but I think particularly the genre that you're in, which is the thriller almost horror kind of genre that is so rare and unusual.

It's such a stand out. So, I wonder if you can take us just from the very beginning. Just the whole story for how did this come about, how did you conceptualize it, and just the writing process all the way through from the beginning?

Michael:

Yeah. I met the writer who wrote this with – well, it was actually a short film idea, a short script that someone that I had hired to work on other projects which had just shown it to me. And I was like this is amazing. We should really push forward with this. And so, from a story standpoint, that's where I kind of took over. And

that's kind of how I do all of these – we have more than a couple of other projects right now that are all in development but it's the same process where it's like has this story been done. So, we did some research to make sure this story is actually original. And a really messed up babysitter coming in and thinking about one of the kids. It's never been done.

People will say Hand that Rocks the Cradle. That didn't take place over one night. There's this amazing French movie called The Inside. It's not the same thing by no means. So, it is actually an original film with a really simple premise that's really scary as shit and can happen to anybody, especially now on social media where you just assume whoever shows up is that person if it's someone new. You're just assuming it's them. And based on that, we were able to hook some really savvy producers that took a leap of faith on someone that hasn't done a feature. So, hats off to them.

Then, I approach all of my films this way is very analytically in terms of what the structure is of the story I want to tell. So, it all starts out almost like an architect. I need to create certain pillars. And a lot of people have different shortcuts for this stuff. And there's save the cat and there are all of these different philosophies. And they're all good. And they're all right in their own way. And you just have to make it your own. And so, you populate this story with a beginning, middle, and end, and some in between parts. And then, for me, I start to think about where the character is in the beginning, middle, and end and what's their arc. Is there any real arc?

And does it feel like a manufactured arc or is it something that actually is based on the character? And that's difficult to marry those two. Story is another book that's great about film structures. And there are actually a ton on You Tube, too, that are just absolutely great at breaking this stuff down. But I break it down from an analytical standpoint. So, as much as I want to be creative on it, there's a lot of – the same with architecture. There's so much beauty in it and you're like oh, my God, you're so creative. But there's so much math and so many other elements that make a building or bridge or whatever so beautiful.

And I really think it's similar to film. You just don't come up and the idea is just there. There are all of these small almost mathematical or tactical elements that add up into one hopefully

great feeling at the end that you've learned something or experienced something. So, that's my mindset at the beginning is to start off with this structure. And then, we populate that structure to go a little more in depth. And then, once we have that then, there's a vomit draft. And you just get it all out and it's shit. It's always bad but it's never that bad. You just always think it's the worst.

And then, you just grind out through every scene as you go through all the way to the end for that second draft. And then, you can start showing it to people or I think you can. And then, you get notes and you start making adjustments based off of maybe one or two sets of notes. And then, typically, you're ready to have actually managers, agents, actors, whatever read it. And then, you have to have producers that have faith in it, will find funding for it. When it comes to a feature standpoint, I'm purely a director at this point. I'd like to produce certain things if I get behind it. But all of this stuff we're developing, for the most part, is me as a director and a writer.

But I also like working with writers. I fancy myself definitely more of a director that would like to produce bigger projects but I write out of necessity. I think what makes a project interesting for me is that it has the nuts and bolts and characters and/or arcs. One of the three, hopefully, maybe two of the three. You never get three out of three. Spielberg barely gets three out of three. So, the top tier directors are always going to get the best scripts. And so, sometimes we have to go in and rewrite from scratch or at least from Page 1 and collaborating with either the writer or just taking it on yourself but taking the same approach.

I always get right in. I break down either the current script or a new script and go through the whole process again. For me, it's just a means of telling a story that I want to tell as a director because I feel like it's something that people will enjoy. I don't get too esoteric with my content because I actually want to watch stuff that I love and I love a lot of different things. I even like some of the more esoteric movies but I don't think that's ever really going to be my style. I want someone to kind of feel what my characters are feeling.

So, if they're feeling what my characters are feeling, which is uncomfortable or awkward, all of the things that I feel on a daily

basis then, I think I did my job as a film maker. And, ultimately, I've got a really dark sensibility so hence, Emily. Yeah. It's not the most family friendly movie ever. That's for sure.

Matt: Can you talk a little bit about your writing process? So, once you select a project that you're super excited about and you're going to write or co-write or substantially revise a script and that's the mode that you're in, how do you go about that writing process? And also, just in terms of your work day structure. Is this something that you will just binge on and totally immerse yourself and put your other work to the side while you're doing that? Or do you kind of like have just certain blocks of each day where you do it periodically? What is your writing process? How do you write a great script?

Michael: So, I think the process of starting a new project, especially when, obviously, it has to start on the page, it all boiled down to, to me, what's the hook, what's the character. What about the characters are unique or interesting or relatable or something that's going to make it worthwhile for me to try to tell their story? Because if I have no idea what these characters are or what they're trying to be or say, maybe that's not the right project for me. But then, I also want there to be a hook to the overall story. I actually like stories that have some kind of hook to it.

Again, there are other film makers that are able to do meandering films that somehow land somewhere and connect with people in an audience. And I think that's amazing. I kind of like something that has somewhat of a hook that will keep you going and that has stakes. That's the other thing I look for is where are the stakes. What's important? Why do we care? Why are we watching this? Do we want to turn it off after five minutes because you haven't really established any kind of characters? So, Get Out is a great example of the characters in it are so rich and you just want to keep watching.

And I don't even think you know what the true stakes are until deep in the movie. But because he's created such great characters, it turned out to be an amazing film. So, I think the same philosophy in terms of what are the characters about, what are the stakes, how do I structure this in a way that makes sense to me and that I come out with an end result that feels satisfying. And then, I fill in the blanks and then, I guess, I do a vomit draft and a second

draft and the notes draft. And then, I start showing it to more people wide.

But in terms of how I structure my day around it, I never dive so deep into something where that's all I'm doing the whole day. It will get a couple of hours in a day but then, I have other things to do. And, ultimately, those other things also inform probably some of these characters because I'm doing other things that – I'm interacting with different types of people and potential character aspects of these people that could make it into the film. Someone I'm talking on the phone from customer service could all of a sudden be like that person said this or that that kind of would make sense for this character.

Whatever it is, it's small. I really like the smaller things in life to inform the things I'm trying to write because I feel like that's who I'm trying to write for is everyone, not from a general standpoint because I think that's super luke warm. But it's the small idiosyncrasies of all of us where it's like I never even noticed that. So, I do a lot of people watching. So, in other words, I'm kind of a creeper without actually being a creeper. I look a lot at a lot of things and I just wear a lot of sunglasses so people can't see my eyes.

Matt: So, there are a lot of things that go into a film. And I feel like sometimes, there can be a really good script but it's not maybe cast properly or it's not directed properly or it's not edited properly or whatever it is and it doesn't come out well. Or there are great actors in the movie and they attach incredible talent to it. But the script or the story is not good enough. It seems to me that movies fail for so many different reasons. And to actually get a movie released that just succeeds on every level and is able to get that 88 percent on the Tomato meter is just so rare, so unique.

So, when you look back on the whole process, you look at the writing, you look at the directing, you look at the casting and the production and the acting and everything, can you talk just about how you were able to put all of those pieces together? Because it just seems like there are so many components to making an amazing film. And if one of them fails, the whole film can fail.

Michael: Yeah. I think very well said and, I think, extremely true. And that's why it's always super impressive to me that anyone can make a

film because there are all of those elements. So, you think oh, I've got Brad Pitt in my film. It's going to be great. Not every film that he does is great. Or Quentin Tarantino is going to direct this film and it's his writing. A lot of people think all of his films are great. I don't think all of them are but he's extremely talented. And he gets A list people. And I just don't think every single one of his films is as good as other ones that he's done. So, that's a very wise observation from someone that isn't doing this.

So, all I can do, from my standpoint, is just do the best at each thing that I can. Make sure I hire the best cinematographer that I can and the best production designer and get the best words on the script and do some sort of rehearsal and try to get the best actors that I can. And then, you've just got to make a film. And nothing ever is going to be bullet proof. So, I know they try to make all of these Temple movies essentially bullet proof because I feel like a lot of them seem to be kind of a producer's baby than anything. But I'm sure the directors do a lot.

Without a doubt, I know they do. I just am saying there always seems to be a common trait, which is the same producers. Different directors, same producers. And then, the movies kind of feel somewhat the same. Recently, they've been changing up and taking some comedic directors and I thought it's been effective. And Guardian of the Galaxy and Thor are good examples of that where the directors are inherently really smart about timing and comedy, not just action.

But it's like jumping without a parachute and you've just got to hope there's something down there that's going to break the fall because if you knew that you had the parachute and it was going to go down exactly like that then, it probably wouldn't be as exciting. But you just never know. I wish I could tell you. Even on the short form stuff, it's like a microcosm of it but it's very similar. You do have a little more control and there's not as much in terms of a film. So, it comes out typically somewhat the same. But a film, you've just got to ride the wave of what you've created and just stick to your guns.

And hopefully, you have producers that want to make the same movie as you and you can trust them and they come out the other end. And you end up with a movie that you thought you were going to make. But yeah, there's no answer to that. And it's not if

one thing fails because, actually, there are a bazillion things that are going to fail on a movie. So, it's not oh, that failed or that failed. There are always a bazillion failures but there's also a ton of happy miracles that no one talks about that hopefully, you caught on camera. So, yeah, I think it's balancing all of that and then, getting to the end and then, that's what you have.

I don't think there's – that's the scary thing about making a film is you never know if it's really going to be as good as you are thinking it's going to be in your head.

Matt: Can you talk a little bit about productivity, tactics, and how you structure your work days? You do a lot of stuff. We just talked about the creative stuff you're doing. You're writing, you're directing, you're on set, you're doing all of that. You're also building relationships with clients or maintaining relationships with clients. You're managing a team. You're running a business. You're doing a lot of stuff. Can you talk about how you structure your work day, optimize your productivity? Do you have morning routines? Do you have things like that? What does your day look like to do everything that you do?

Michael: Yeah. Typically, I have a meeting with our development executive that works for me that we get on the phone right away and we talk about a bunch of stuff. And I try not to check my phone as soon as I get up but it does happen. And I try to actually get some work out in the morning going. That makes me kind of feel – I try to get up early enough where I can get a work out going, especially if I'm on the east coast because my west coast clients then won't really be affected. And that way, I just feel healthy and more aware of what I need to do. And then, I dive into the actual work, which, again, goes in spurts.

An hour here, an hour there. And there are some days where you can't get a work out in because you're like oh, I'm going to start this. And it literally is nonstop whether it's the phone, emails, or focusing on certain things about the business or a script that you just can't get away from and you just didn't realize it. And the next thing you know, it's 8:00 at night. And I'm not a big night owl worker. I don't work at night. I don't work until 4:00 in the morning or 2:00 a.m. or any of that. I'm not productive then. So, I've never done it. I'm productive in the mornings and after a good work out or something like that.

I'm very productive. And I think those things drive me. Being healthy so that then, I can make informed decisions on projects and then, trying to execute on those projects and then, trying to find some down time, some good down time. Whether it's meeting with friends or have a glass of wine or whatever it is to kind of wind down the day. And then, going back at it the next day. But the other thing is there are no Saturdays and Sundays for me. I do the same thing on Saturday and Sunday that I do on Monday and Tuesday. So, I'm not like TGIF. That doesn't exist for me.

Matt: And how do you deal with stress and managing stress, business stress, entrepreneurial stress? I'm sure all kinds of things go wrong on set and things fall through and the bottom drops out from underneath you and this kind of stuff. So, as a business owner and as a creative, how do you manage stress in your life, in general?

Michael: Yeah. One thing I'll say about these – Emelie wasn't an expensive film so it was very short. But we had enough money. We made it. So, one thing I like to tell people is it's like sprinting a marathon. Can you imagine sprinting a marathon? You kind of feel like you're going to die. I thought I was going to die. I was like I'm going to probably die in this for sure. Yeah. Fuck it. Let's just keep going because as long as we get it in the can, maybe just resuscitate me near the end. But no, it's like literally all stress at a 10 the whole way. And it's my first film so hopefully, the future films will be a little bit more at an eight.

But I think, ultimately, there are multiple reasons that were the case. And it's not always that way but whatever. That's what you deal with. The other thing that's great and I think this is good to hear, either the film makers or people listening or watching other films, is that no one gives you a film and says yeah, but remember Day 3, we didn't have that kid for that long. And so, we weren't able to get that shot. No. You just give them the film and they watch the film. There are no asterisks on a scene. Remember when there was nothing going right that day and fucking the electricity didn't work?

No one gives a fuck. No one cares watching it. They're like I just want it to be good, man. So, you deal with all of this stuff and you just can never tell the real story or the drama behind whatever it is. And there are DVD sections of people that sometimes dive into

that shit. But I wish they would really throw out – and I'm sure some shoots are amazing all the way through. But they're not. They're lying. And it's so much drama on so many other levels, whether it's different staff that are dating and not dating anymore. And I don't get into any of that, thank God. But I find out after the fact.

And by the way, this is all fine. I don't judge it. But it's like I didn't know they broke up in the middle of the shoot and that's why I couldn't get so and so to show up on time anymore. And you're like okay. And producers have to handle that shit because they have to shield you from it because you just can't know. There was so much shit happening, I think, behind the scenes on mine that I had blinders on. And I was one of those horses in Central Park. And it was just like just keep walking forward. Just keep going forward. Oh, yeah, all of that shit is falling away. I'm just keeping on going forward. Do you want to keep coming with me?

Yeah, sure. And my DP was amazing. He had to deal with some of this stuff, I guess, that I didn't know. But Luca, my DP, he was – because they put eight of them in the house. It felt like it was a Real World probably in one house. They put eight production folks in a house for three weeks. What could go wrong? Well, they could all start dating and it's super weird. And then, they come to my set and I'm, of course, away from all of that in my own little hotel room. And by no means is it fancy but I'm purposely separated so I can just focus. So, it becomes a thing. But it's okay. Everyone is going to deal with something.

And I think, again, if you have good producers in place, they'll shield you from it and also field a lot of that and juggle it. And then, you'll get a film out of it. So, my real creative philosophy on film though is making sure you do enough due diligence at the beginning with your key artists, which is like your DP and your production designer and your editors that they all are on the same page because they're all going to add so much to it. But you just have to make sure that you communicate what you want. And then, they will make it better.

Matt:

Do you have personal strategies for you, when something just goes way wrong or there's just a massive set back or some crazy thing, to not throw you off your game? As you said, you have to keep moving forward. You have to get through it. You have to keep

doing it. And when something happens and some crazy stuff befalls you, do you have personal internal strategies for your own stress management to allow you to keep performing at the level that you need to perform at despite the fact that the ground may be crumbling underneath you?

Michael:

Right. Ultimately, I think my stress relief is being around others that aren't doing what I do so that they can crack me up about their shitty things in their life. Let's be honest, right. Because we all want to hear about shitty things in other people's lives. I keep telling you how great this is and you're like fuck you, guy. I don't care. I want to hear about the shit that stresses you out so I'm like oh, I can relate. And I think that's where we have a laugh because that's what we all can relate to. And so, the reason I say outside of the industry is that then, it becomes less incestuous. And then, it's not about apples to apples in terms of – then, we just start to talk about the same thing over and over.

So, I love to hear how other entrepreneurs are suffering. Let's be honest. I'm sorry. I love your successes, people, but I love the suffering because we learn from suffering. We don't learn from our successes. Maybe some people do. I don't. I learn from all of my failures or potential failures. And actually, doing these 20 plus camera shoots where we have one take to capture the best paramour show over 21 pilots or whatever we're doing, massive bands and you get one take at it. I don't get a Take 2. I don't get to cry about I didn't get that shot. So, when we get to the film set, I treat it somewhat similarly like this is what we get. We just have to pivot. I don't know.

Again, it goes back to my trading days. You just can't get too high or low. So, how do I deal with it? Maybe I internalize it and some therapist down the road, if you're out there, you're going to help me because I've got a lot of shit built up back here. But yeah, I think right now, I internalize a lot of it. So, it's really healthy.

Matt:

All right. I want to circle back to some of the tactical kind of entrepreneurial questions in terms of how you built your team and built your company in a way that you don't actively have to participate in it on a daily basis. Can you talk about that process?

Michael:

Yeah. I think, ultimately, that process only starts from a shit ton of work. So, let's be up front people that are listening to this for what

are the tips for doing passive income. This isn't passive. This is an enormous amount of years of work to understanding exactly how to choose a specialist so that your search can be short, to the point, and executed in a timely fashion to make a client happy. That only comes because I've been doing it for so long. This wasn't something where I'm like okay, I'll just read a resume. And oh, it looks like that resume is similar. I have to have my bullshit meter at a 10 because everyone wants these jobs.

Not every single person but a lot of people because it's a great job. And these people are really special people. But I sift through referrals and resumes. And I have an HR team that helps, too. And when it finally gets to me, it's kind of like one of the final stages. And then, I normally like to see them either in person or virtually. And I want to just know is this person for real. I can see someone's resume and talk to them and know exactly what part of that resume is real and what's not literally in 30 seconds. And for a lot of people, it's real. But, honestly, it's 50/50, I'll say that actually. And I don't mean that they're lying.

I just mean that it's them trying to put out a persona that's less than what I need. I need the real deal. And then, when I find the real deal, that's exciting but I also have to make sure do I like this person, is my team going to like them. You could be amazing but if you're a pain in the ass, I don't know if that's a great fit for my team. We're not a huge team so then, it's called a culture fit. And the other thing is diversity. Diversity is very important to me. I have to interview people that are diverse, male, female, all kinds of different races. I make sure my HR and development people – like we have to bring in, to me, a diverse crowd, which is not the easiest to do sometimes.

But it doesn't matter. We've got to do it. And we like doing it because it's important to me. I guess maybe they don't like doing it but they have to because I make it a requirement because I want everyone to have a chance.

Matt:

Can you talk about how you manage and run your company, manage your team, oversee everything that your company is doing, from the other side of the world? You and I are in Lisbon, Portugal right now. And you travel the world and go to epic places and things like that. How do you do that and manage a distributed team that's on another continent?

Michael: Yeah. I think it's time management, No. 1. You've got to know what time zone you're in. You've got to have a right hand person, too, that's state side if you're running your stuff in the states. Or you need somebody that's your right hand person in the actual area of where you're doing your – if it's going to be a 20 plus person, you've got to have a local I call them almost like fixers. So, you need a local that's on their time zone that will work at your hours because that's their job is just to work at your hours. And I'm pretty cool with mine. I kind of actually still work on hours that are more applicable to my clients.

And so, that helps him out. But he needs to be on top of it. So, 1) is get a great assistant. Get somebody that really knows what you're doing and is someone that's dependable. And, again, if that's in view of your budget if you have a budget to do it. But we're talking I have 20 employees. You better have an assistant. If you don't, I don't know what you're doing if you're location independent with no assistant and 20 people. It just sounds like a disaster waiting to happen. So, you need a buffer. And that buffer is a good assistant. How do you find a good assistant? I don't know.

That's another podcast. But find it. I found it. I've got a great one that's both creative and logistical. And lean on him or her. And that's what I do. I lean on him or her. And I check in with my key members of the team almost weekly and then, with the rest of the team, quarterly right now. But this was all a progression. That's the other thing, people. This wasn't Day 1, turn key, this is how it is. It was like I was there full time every single day making sure the team was doing okay. And then, now, I've got it to the point in the last like year or so or maybe a little bit over that that I'm not there every day but I do care.

And I want to check in. But the client also doesn't want you there all of the time. So, you have to also be careful that you don't overstep and start overmanaging certain aspects, at least from my standpoint. And yeah, I think those are the tips I would give people is time management, making sure you have someone local that's a go to that could do a lot of different things for you when needed and then, checking in with the key core elements on a timely basis so nothing gets too far away from you.

Matt: Awesome. All right, Michael, at this point, are you ready for the lightning round?

- Michael: Yes. Let's give it a shot.
- Matt: Let's do it. All right. First question, what is one book that you would recommend that has perhaps influenced you over the years that you would recommend people check out?
- Michael: I would say Jordan Peterson, probably Dr. Jordan Peterson I should probably call him, *Twelve Rules for Life*, has really been the most impactful book recently for me. I think all of his stuff, actually, is very impactful from a manager's standpoint, not just from a life standpoint. He's really taught me, not personally by the way, just by researching him and listening to him, but *Twelve Rules for Life* from Dr. Jordan Peterson has probably been the most influential thing on me from both personal but also a professional standpoint.
- Matt: Awesome. What is one app or productivity tool that you're currently using that you'd recommend that other people check out?
- Michael: So, the app that I use the most and probably the most important to me is the Google Schedule. Everyone communicates to me that way. I'm able to see what my day is looking like, what my future days are looking like, and do my time management through my Google Schedule app. So, without that, I'm kind of lost. And I would have no idea which day, time zone, or whatever I'm on. So, definitely, I would say the Google Schedule app would be the No. 1 app I would use from an efficiency standpoint.
- Matt: Awesome. Now, you've been to over 20 countries and you're continuing to travel a good bit now. Let me just ask you, first of all, before I ask you for your top destinations, let me just ask you why you travel. What do you get out of traveling the world, in general? What does travel mean to you?
- Michael: So, traveling to me is the No. 1 thing that lets me really appreciate life. I wish I knew more languages and like a true American, I don't know many. But what I am good at is watching behavior. And so, going to all of these countries and watching people behave in certain ways, there is definitely a through line to everyone. I don't care if you're American or from Portugal or from Brazil or Australian. You're definitely unique in certain aspects. But there's a similarity there, too.
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And so, I am a culture freak. I love just immersing myself in a certain culture to hear the comedy, the way they speak, the way they fight, the way they do a lot of things, especially from an emotional standpoint. And, again, I think there are similarities to everyone. But, ultimately, travel allows me to feel like I'm actually telling a story that's accurate.

Matt: That's awesome. What would be your top three favorite travel destinations that you've ever been to?

Michael: The top three travel destinations that I've ever been to would be Fiji, Australia, and I would say Lisbon. Lisbon has been very impressive. I liked Australia because I loved the mentality that the east coast had when I was traveling. And I love the comedy in terms of the way that their culture handled certain things. And then, Lisbon feels like it's Paris 20 years ago or Copenhagen 10 years ago. It's like it's on the cusp of something big. And then, Fiji was just really relaxing and chill and has a lot of things going on there that I found very relaxing. So, it was one of my more relaxing places.

Matt: Awesome. So, I now want to ask you about your bucket list travel destinations that are at the tippy top of your list that you'd be most excited about seeing. What are your top three bucket list travel destinations that you have never been to?

Michael: Asia. Asia is probably bucket list. In terms of where in Asia, I'm not sure yet. I think there are probably a lot of places but I haven't really explored it at all. So, I'm very open minded to places that I should go there. And I would love to explore the Greek islands. I've heard amazing things about that. And I would say the third thing would be, I think, Dubai sounds pretty amazing. I've never been and just that area, whether it's all manufactured from scratch, that's kind of crazy. So, I'd love to see what it looks like.

Matt: Awesome. Michael, it's been incredible having you on the show, my man. I want you to tell folks how they get a hold of you and follow you on social media and learn more about the incredible projects that you're up to, see your film, everything.

Michael: Yeah. You could check out Emelie on Netflix now. I think they are giving it another run. Emelie is E-M-E-L-I-E. Even if you loved it or hated it, just hash tag it and make a comment on Twitter. I love

reading that. And I would say that's pretty much it. There's www.michaelthelin.com and you can always reach me via that or at least somebody that will get the email and send it to me as long as it's a nice one. And if you don't like the stuff that you see, keep it to yourself. It's all good.

Matt: Awesome, love it. Michael, thank you so much for being here, my man. It has been a pleasure.

Michael: All right. See you. Thanks, Matt.

Matt: Good night, everybody.

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