The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts
Episode 95: Phil Libin
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Tim Ferriss: Hello, boys and girls. This is Tim Ferriss. And welcome to another episode of the Tim Ferriss Show. I've rerecorded this intro like 17 times because I saw my brother last night after a long hiatus apart, and we drank, i.e., Tim drank way, way, way too much wine. So I've had some caffeine. I've had some coconut oil and pu-erh tea. And this one is going to make it happen, folks. Magic. Onward. This episode of the Tim Ferriss Show is like many others. It is my job to deconstruct world class performers, whether they are chess prodigies, hedge fund managers, athletes, actors like Arnold Schwarzenegger, or anybody and everyone in between.

And what I mean by that is teasing out the routines, the morning rituals, the favorite books, the behaviors and habits that you can borrow to improve your own life in a professional sense and a personal sense. This episode, we have Phil Libin. Phil Libin is a friend. He is also the co-founder and executive chairman of Evernote. I use Evernote, as you guys probably know, every day. I mean dozens of times a day. I used it to handle all of the brain dumps and organization of information and capture of information for my last few books. I also use it to create a paperless life or as close to it as possible.

And I was introduced to Evernote by you guys on Twitter, actually, in I want to say 2008 maybe, 2009 when I was revising the *Four Hour Work Week*. And I ended up recommending Evernote in that once I got hooked on the product. Then, I got to know Phil. And then, I became an advisor to the company, which is super, super cool. So I've been an advisor since I want to say 2008/2009.

And Evernote now has 150 or so million users. And it is your external brain. So you can use it to capture things online so you can read them offline. You can use it to capture voice notes, photographs, scan documents with your iPhone, for instance, so that you can take a picture of a receipt, of a menu, of a contract and then, have it OCR'd so that you can search the text that you just took a photo of later. Anyway, I could go on and on about it because I love the product. It's like Uber for me. I can't live

without it. But, in this episode, we cover so much more than just Evernote.

But we do dig in, obviously, to the lessons learned. And speaking of lessons learned, Phil shares his favorite lessons learned directly from Jeff Bezos of Amazon, Reid Hoffman of Linked In, and Hiroshi Mikitani of Rakuten. And if you don't know who he is, then, you should look him up. We talk about philosophical and performance systems like stoicism, electrical brain stimulation, which I know you guys are into.

And if you want a ton on that, you can also listen to my Adam Gazzali episode. But Phil is experimenting with brain stimulation for performance enhancement and just general well being. And we'll talk about that. Creating tech for yourself and the Evernote genesis story, they're very closely tied together. We have some frivolities like the best host in Singapore, the best hamburger in Tokyo, and why goat simulator is amazing. And then, we talk about long term thinking. Long term meaning 10,000 year thinking and real versus imagined threats. We talk about artificial intelligence and a bunch of others.

Now, most importantly, in general, across this episode, he digs into his a-ha moments and what he learned, in some cases, how they happened, and how you can make that happen for yourself. So Phil is an awesome guy, hilarious, and just an amazing, amazing executive. Now, when we recorded this, he was also CEO of Evernote but has been looking for his successor for some time now.

And in the meantime, between recording this and publishing it, he found that CEO. So you can just Google new Evernote CEO, and you can get all the goods on that. In any case, you can find the show notes, all the links, the book links, etc., at fourhourworkweek.com. And just click podcast. So fourhourworkweek.com, click podcast. And without further ado, please enjoy Phil Libin. And say hi to him on Twitter @plibin. Phil, welcome to the show.

Phil Libin: Hey, Tim. Good to be here.

Tim Ferriss: It has been a while since we hung out. And I've noticed the most conspicuous change is that the trademark beard has vanished. And I wanted to know how you decided to make that change because, for as long as I've known you, I have sort of visualized in my head this beard that you have, which is, I guess, it's not really a gotye.

It's not really a full ears to chin beard. It's more like a mouth frame. I don't know if there's a word for this.

Phil Libin: Mouth frame, yeah. If I thought of it as a mouth frame, I would have shaved so much earlier.

Tim Ferriss: You know, that's probably due to my lack of caffeine, but why did you decide to shave it off?

Phil Libin: Well, I had it, literally, for 20 years. I hadn't shaved in 20 years. I had this beard. And when I grew it 20 years ago, I was trying to look older. And 20 years later, I figured it was time to start trying to look younger. That works.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, that makes sense. And for those people who are familiar with Evernote, one of the questions that I've heard come up quite a bit, and we'll get to what Evernote is, of course, by why green for the logo. The elephant people eventually figure out. But why green?

Phil Libin: So the logo is gray. It's an elephant because elephants never forget. Elephants have great memories. And the elephant is gray. And people ask why is the elephant gray, and well, because that's the color elephants are. And it's on a green background because that's the color elephants are usually on when they're on grass. So it's to super elaborate or imaginative.

Tim Ferriss: Natural habitat.

Phil Libin: It is the iconic animal in its natural habitat.

Tim Ferriss: And speaking of natural habitat, I'm not going to say iconic animal for either of us, but when did we first meet? I want to say it was in a coffee shop. But do you recall?

Phil Libin: Yeah. It wasn't a coffee shop, it was like a Filipino restaurant.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, it was a Chinese tapioca pearls/coffee shop.

Phil Libin: Yeah, yeah. It definitely involved tapioca. I remember there was tapioca involved like in the outskirts of San Francisco.

And I want to say it was like 1854 or something. It was a while ago.

Tim Ferriss: Right. I think you're using the Egyptian calendar. It was probably I want to say 2007/2008. It was early.

Phil Libin: Yeah. I think we had only recently launched. And I think I remember you tweeted something to your followers about what app you should be using maybe it was to write your next book. And then, I think a bunch of people tweeted back Evernote. And then, people in my office saw it and got super excited. And then, I think either you reached out to me or I reached out to you. And then, we got together for tapioca.

Tim Ferriss: So what I remember is that I asked a number of questions. I think I was updated the Four Hour Work Week. And I was looking to replace some of the tools. And so I would ask my followers on Twitter what is the best tool for X. What is the best tool for Y. What is the best tool for Z. And Evernote kept on coming up. And I was like that's impossible.

What is this Swiss army knife of software? And I looked at it, and I was like I really need an intro to this. I'm having trouble figuring out where to start, which I think is a common stumbling block or hurdle for people to get over. And then, we met up, and I remember, you took a photograph of the menu, which was on the wall. And shortly thereafter, you were able to search all of the text. And I was like, okay, I get it. And then, I think I started with depaperfying or trying to remove the clutter of my house at that time. So it was all of the business cards, all of the legal paperwork, accounting paperwork. I just scanned it because I knew I didn't have to really organize it per se if I could search by the text that was scanned.

And for people who don't know, this was my first use case. But how would you describe Evernote if you could just maybe give a brief synopsis of Evernote for folks? And now, of course, I use it 10 to 20 plus times a day.

But for those people who are not familiar with Evernote, what is Evernote, and how did you become involved? Or what is your involvement with Evernote.

Phil Libin: Well, we started out as wanting to build your second brain. We wanted to make something that would just make people smarter, let you remember everything, let you find all types of information, take notes, clip things from the web, put it in documents. And we just kind of refined it from there. So we started out as this very general, simple note taking tool, and we've evolved to be what we

think are kind of the essential, every day pillars or productivity. Evernote is the work space where you can get all of your stuff done.

Tim Ferriss: And what are the origins of Evernote, what's the genesis story?

Phil Libin: There were actually two teams that were working on similar concepts.

So there was a team of people that were headed up by this guy named Stepan Pachikov who is this eccentric, genius, inventor, entrepreneur, Russian/American guy. And he had a team of people that go all the way back to the Apple Newton days. I don't know if you remember the Newton.

Tim Ferriss: Sure.

Phil Libin: This was actually a company that Apple pulled out of Russia to do all of the handwriting recognition and other cool stuff on the Newton back in the late '80s way ahead of their time. And they sort of stayed together. They sold that company, and they started another company and sold that company. And then, they had stayed together as this group working on this idea of photographic memory. Basically, letting people remember everything, capture all information in California. I was in Boston at the time. And I was just finishing up with my second start up. And my core team started thinking about what do we want to do next?

We need to start a new company. We don't want to have to go get jobs or anything. What are we going to do?

Tim Ferriss: Strategic unemployment.

Phil Libin: Exactly. And our whole insight was let's do something for us because our first two companies, we made for other people. Our first company, we did e-commerce software for big stores. And our second company, we did security software for governments and banks. And that was all fine. We were lucky enough to be able to sell both companies. But we're not a big retailer. We're not a government. So we had to wake up every morning thinking what does the customer want, what does the market want? And we got tired of that. We kind of said screw what the market wants. How about what do we want? Let's just build that.

So we sat around thinking what do we really want, what do we love? And we batted some ideas around. And our first idea is we

said we love video games. Maybe we should make a video game studio. And we thought there are already so many great video games that we don't have time to play. There's already a giant stack at my desk. So the world isn't really going to be that much better if we add more video games to it.

So let's think of something else. This was 2007. So we thought about well, all of this new social stuff is actually kind of cool. We like that a lot. Maybe we should build a social network. And we thought that's crazy because you can't compete with My Space. My Space is in that market. We're too late to do anything meaningful there. So we gave up on that. And then, we said what about productivity? All of the productivity tools around us just feel old and crappy and out of date and largely irrelevant. What if we make the new version of that, and that we kind of fell in love with?

So we had two different teams working on the same problem, and I met Stepan early 2007, and we decided to join forces. So we actually combined the teams and then recreated the company, re-launched the company as a new entity in '07 and launched our first product in '08.

Tim Ferriss: And what was the first use case, the first application of Evernote that really kind of made your eyes pop out?

Do you have any memories of particular a-ha moments with either applications that you guys came up with internally or applications and uses that your fans and users came up with?

Phil Libin: Well, it's funny. We were getting going kind of right as Twitter was getting going. And for a while, I just had an alert for Evernote on Twitter, and I could read every single time. Anytime anyone mentioned Evernote on Twitter, I would see it because that only happened a few times a day.

Tim Ferriss: There were a few hundred people on Twitter.

Phil Libin: Exactly. So that was easy. And so I literally knew any time anyone said anything on either the internet or Twitter about Evernote. I would either get a Google alert or I would get the tweet alert. So for a while, I actually knew every single thing that anyone ever said publically about us. And it was still only a few things a day. So it was kind of a humbling thing. But I remember this one day, pretty early on, where two totally different people tweeted.

One of them tweeted that they were a priest, and they loved using Evernote to gather information to write their Sunday sermon. And I remember seeing that and thinking that wasn't our intended use case at all. We didn't set out to make something that's good for the clergy, but it kind of makes sense if you think about it. If I was a priest, and I had to come up with something relatively insightful and witty to say every week, I'd probably spend time researching and clipping and writing. Yeah, Evernote is kind of the ideal thing for that.

So I remember thinking that's kind of a cool, unanticipated use case. And then, later that day, some totally different person tweeted, not to the first person, just independently, that he loved Evernote because it made it easy to keep track of all of his sins so that he could efficiently confess every Sunday. And I remember thinking, yes.

Now, we're onto something. We got both ends of the spectrum. We got the priests. We got the sinners. We're like fully, horizontally integrated.

Tim Ferriss: Theologically integrated.

Phil Libin: Theological, horizontal integration. And that was when I was first confident that maybe we were on to something.

Tim Ferriss: How do you personally use Evernote? And the reason I keep drilling into this is because I remember my challenge was figuring out where to start.

Phil Libin: Yeah, that's still the hardest thing for us is people don't know how to get started.

Tim Ferriss: So I guess there are two questions. How do you, personally, use Evernote? I'd be curious to hear how you most frequently use Evernote. And secondly, how do you solve that problem because this is not unique to just Evernote. There are many different products, let's say Sugru, for instance, which is this kind of Play-Doh that hardens into rubber that you can use for repairing things has a similar challenge. There are many different tools and products that face this conundrum.

So the first is how do you –

Phil Libin: I've got multiple tubes of that at my desk right now.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, you do? Yeah, it's great stuff.

Phil Libin: And like I say, I remember reading about it somewhere and immediately being like oh, that's awesome. I need to get it right away. And then, I got it, and I got all of these packages that showed up at my desk. And I was like okay, now what? My glasses aren't actually broken. So I don't need it to fix my glasses yet.

Tim Ferriss: Right. My iPhone case isn't broken, so I have to break it to use the Sugru. Or what else could I do? So with Evernote, on a personal level, how do you use it?

Phil Libin: I live in it. I do everything in it. Mostly, I use Evernote to run Evernote. We built it for ourselves and are still building it for ourselves. So all of the day to day things that I need for my job are in Evernote. I primarily use Evernote for work stuff. But I primarily only do work stuff. I don't really have a work/life balance. So I used to have more hobbies and skills.

And I would use Evernote for them as well. I'm a plausibly okay cook. And so I had a whole bunch of recipes and techniques in Evernote for that. I was trying to learn Japanese at one point, and I was using Evernote for that. But more and more, everything that isn't work related has sort of fallen away. And but I just use Evernote for everything work related. So everything I write, I write in Evernote. All of our meetings are captured in Evernote. When I want to know what people in the company are working on, I look at Evernote. Evernote kind of gives me an update about here's what my co-workers are doing that's relevant to my day. It's kind of become the essential multiple times a day productivity tool for me.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. I'm looking at questions for you in Evernote right now, which is very meta.

Phil Libin: And so that actually happens a lot. I remember the first time that I talked to a reporter.

We did our very first media tour. I went to New York City to meet with some journalists and reporters back in probably 2008. And I remember the first meeting I had. I don't even remember anymore who the reporter was. But he was using Evernote to take notes. And he had been already for a while. And so that was actually the first time I saw it in the wild was somebody using it to write down interview questions with me. And so there were all sorts of

moments like that that I remember being just super cool. The first time I actually really saw it in the wild like out in the street, I think it was the same trip, I was in a Starbuck's in Manhattan.

And I was waiting in line to get a coffee. And there was a guy in front of me in line who looked like an important lawyer or something. He was wearing a very nice suit. And he was holding his phone. He had a blue tooth headset. And he was holding his phone out in front of his face, and he had Evernote on his phone.

And he was jabbing his finger into something in Evernote, and he was yelling at somebody over the blue tooth headset proving a point by jabbing his finger into Evernote. And it was the first time I'd actually seen somebody use Evernote that I didn't know that I didn't have any connection with. And I was standing right behind him. I was going to kind of introduce myself. But he looked really angry. I decided to just stand there meekly behind him.

Tim Ferriss: So what did you think? What was the self talk when you saw that? Did that trigger any particular thought or feeling in you to see it in the wild for the first time?

Phil Libin: I thought, at some point, I should work on a product to make people a bit more mellow. I have built something that enables people to yell at each other that doesn't feel great. Maybe we should be something into the next version that chills people out.

Tim Ferriss: A mindfulness time out?

Phil Libin: Exactly, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Well, there is a somewhat related feature in I think it's Siri.

If you shake the phone as if you're trying to sort of rattle its brains, it might be Google Maps, I don't know which it is, but it's built into the iPhone, if you shake it, it will ask you in some way, I can't recall offhand, what is wrong.

Phil Libin: I think Google Maps, it asks you if you want to submit a support request or something like that. That's kind of neat.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Phil Libin: But so another one is I met a group of monks, Buddhist monks, they're with Plum Village. This is at Thich Nhat Hanh's monastery. And I went to hear Thich Nhat Hanh speak a few years ago. And I didn't know anything about Zen at the time at all. I just

thought it would be interesting to hear him. So I heard him speak. And he was there with sort of his entourage of monks and nuns.

And it was all very good, very peaceful. And then, as soon as he left, I was surrounded by the monks and nuns who were all saying how they just run the monastery in Evernote and swapping use cases. And it was all really neat. So that's when I actually thought we should send someone over there to record some of their bells. They have these really beautiful, ancient, mindfulness bells. And I thought let's record them and actually put them into Evernote as some kind of an anti New York lawyer at a Starbuck's yelling at somebody feature. But we haven't gotten around to doing that yet. But any day now.

Tim Ferriss: That's amazing. His first book, and I'm blanking on the name, I want to say it was Mindfulness is Every Step or something like that, Peace is Every Step, perhaps, which was really intended almost like Marcus Aurelius's meditations to be a notebook for himself and also his close confidants and new attendees or teachers at Plum Village, when then later became a book.

That was the first meditation book that really had a tangible, concrete impact on me because the storytelling, the narrative was so well done. Let's return back to the early days of Evernote.

Phil Libin: We could keep talking about Zen and stoicism, too.

Tim Ferriss: I think we'll talk about both. But what I'd love to do, and maybe this is in between, maybe it's a bridge between the two, is as the CEO, what CEO's did you admire or hope to emulate in the early days of Evernote? Because you have roughly how many users at the moment?

Phil Libin: About 150 million.

Tim Ferriss: So that's a big number. That's a number that a lot of companies would aspire to, of course. And we'll talk about maybe growth separate. But as the CEO, what types of leaders or CEO's did you admire and aspire to?

Well, there are so many that have been really generous with their time with me. That's really kind of the amazing thing about Silicon Valley is just how open everyone has been. So I was able to spend quite a bit of time talking with people who were just heroes of mine forever. So Jeff Bezos was someone who has given me fantastic advice and guidance. Hiroshi Mikitani, the founder and

CEO of Rakuten is one of the most amazing people ever. Have you ever talked to him?

Tim Ferriss: I haven't. I would love to.

Phil Libin: You should. That guys is crazy in a really good way. Very, very, very interesting. I know you have a big Japan connection.

Tim Ferriss: I do. That would be a blast.

Phil Libin: But I had a chance to very briefly meet Steve Jobs. I had actually spent quite a bit of time with Mark Benioff who has been really excellent in terms of advice and guidance.

So it's been pretty impressive. Probably, the person that I kind of most want to be like when I grow up is Reid Hoffman. I'm just a huge fan of Reid and kind of the way that he thinks about things and how thoughtfully he's organized his life and his companies. It's kind of very cool. So I'm lucky to actually be able to spend some time with these people from time to time.

Tim Ferriss: I do agree. I was actually just chatting with someone about the differences between say New York and San Francisco, LA and San Francisco. And there are strengths and weaknesses to all of them. But the ability to wander into a coffee shop or otherwise just get in touch with what you would think would be the untouchables, the very, very well known, icon figures is something that I haven't seen in many other places outside of Silicon Valley.

Just the openness and availability that those people express, even though they're at the multibillion dollar in net worth mark. It's very unique. I don't know if you agree with that.

Phil Libin: Absolutely.

Tim Ferriss: Why do you think these people are so open to share? What makes the environment of Silicon Valley different? Or what makes the people that gravitate to it different?

Phil Libin: Well, I don't know that this is unique about Silicon Valley. I think we just have a larger concentration maybe of people like this. But they probably exist everywhere. I just think almost everyone here who is successful, who has "made it", who is well known remembers doing it him or herself.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Phil Libin: Like before they built this giant, world changing, multibillion dollar thing, they hadn't done it either.

And it's all in sort of the recent past as well. Virtually everyone who I really admire has gone from just being a normal person to bending the universe in a significant way in the last decade or two.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Phil Libin: As opposed to, in other places, where a lot of wealth is concentrated in people who maybe have inherited part of it or been in those circles for longer. This is very much a scrappy, entrepreneurial, a lot of immigrant led communities. And everyone remembers before they were important, they weren't. And that's kind of a healthy thing.

Tim Ferriss: I want to ask you a little bit about the folks that you interacted with. So Bezos, for instance, he's a fascinating character on so many levels. Very methodically chose books, pitched that with Indi Shaw, had it turned down.

And then, turned it into the everything store. And when they started, they had, as I understand it, basically doors from the equivalent of Home Depot across two file cabinets as desks. That's how people started out.

Phil Libin: We did that in my first start up. We made desks out of unfinished doors and, what do you call those, construction horses.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, the saw horses.

Phil Libin: Yeah. Our first desks were all we just bought doors at Home Depot and put them on saw horses for no good reason. It turns out that's harder and more expensive than just buying cheap desks.

Tim Ferriss: That's really funny. I just built this, side note, pull up rig out of galvanized steel piping and plumbing supplies and whatnot. And at the end of the day, it cost, particularly if you factor in the labor, it's like it was a fun project, but it probably would have been better use of capital just to buy a cheap rig but still fun in its own way.

Phil Libin: One of these days, Tim, you have to coach me to be able to do a pull up. I would like to do a pull up once in my life.

Tim Ferriss: I will absolutely help you do that. And maybe we can pull in Pavel Tsatsouline who, like yourself, is originally from the former Soviet Union. You were born in I want to say St. Petersburg, but am I getting that right?

Phil Libin: Yeah. Well, it was called Leningrad at the time, but yeah.

Tim Ferriss: And I'm not going to quiz you, but do you still speak Russian?

Phil Libin: I do speak Russian, yes.

Tim Ferriss: And with such a heavy, I'm not going to lose track of where we were with Bezos, I want to come back to that, but with such a heavy Russian component in Evernote from the early days, how did that affect the company culture or growth or anything? If it did, I don't know if it did.

Phil Libin: I'm not sure that it had that much of an affect. The original team on Stepan's side were mostly Russians. Most of the people with me weren't. There were a couple. I don't really think of myself as particularly Russian. I was 8 years old when we came over. I learned English by watching What's Happening reruns and reading Thor comic books.

Tim Ferriss: I would have loved to have heard your English in the early days.

Phil Libin: Yeah. It turned out that my colloquial English came from Thor. I wasn't the most popular kid in junior high school.

Tim Ferriss: A lot of praise Odin talk.

Phil Libin: But it was good for vocabulary development. Forsooth.

Tim Ferriss: Hence forth.

Phil Libin: And but we had a really great team. I don't think there was anything particular Russian or not about the company. And, certainly, in Silicon Valley, I'm sure this must be true that most people who work at Evernote are from somewhere else.

I think we probably have more than 50 percent people born outside of this country. There's just such a heavy immigrant community. And we pull people from all over. We want to get the best people from everywhere in the world to help us build a great product.

Tim Ferriss: Speaking of that process of building a great product, or maybe not, what advice did you go to Bezos for? Or what were some of the questions you asked him or pieces of advice that he gave you, if you remember?

Phil Libin: The last thing he told me, this is only just a few days ago, but it's changed my life again, basically, every time I talk to Bezos, it changes my life. The last one was just recently. And it was kind of amazing. Not particularly relevant to the topic at hand, but super epically awesome. Anyway, I've spent my entire life thinking that I want to go to Mars. I'm like Mars, Mars, Mars, Mars.

It was like on the Brady Bunch. I just want to go to Mars. I thought this was the best thing ever. At some point, if I structure my life correctly, maybe I'll get to go. Maybe, later on in life, I would totally be able to go one way because I think it's just so important for humanity to be able to do that. I was just all into Mars. And I talked to Elon a couple of times and just vastly inspired by everything that he's doing and what Space X is doing. And I was listening to Elon speak last week or two weeks ago or something talking about Mars.

And I was super inspired. And I ran into Jeff Bezos a bit later and was kind of saying I just got to talk with Elon, and I'm super excited about Mars. I really hope that one day I can go. And Bezos looks at me and goes, "Mars is stupid." And I'm like, "What?" He's like, "Yeah. Once we get off of the planet, the last thing we want to do is go to another gravity."

"The whole point, the reason this is so hard to get off the earth is to defeat gravity the first time. And once we do that, why would you want to go to Mars? We should just live on space stations and mine asteroids and everything is much better than being on Mars." And in like 30 seconds, he had completely changed the course of my life because he's totally right. And I was like what? I want to go to Mars.

Tim Ferriss: Was this like a mid day conversation, or was it a late night, after a few drinks conversation?

Phil Libin: It was after a few drinks. I'm not sure what time of day it was.

Tim Ferriss: That's a great answer.

Phil Libin: So anyway, now, I know that the future of humanity is to live on space stations and mine asteroids. And hopefully, I'll get to do that

at some point. Other advice that I've gotten from him has been a bit more practical.

Tim Ferriss: All right. I'll bite. What other advice?

Phil Libin: Well, the best thing, in terms of actually building the company, is just scaling issues.

It's like how do you deal with things when you're at 20 people. How does that change when you're at 200? How do you think about going from 200 to 2,000 to 20,000? It's all the kind of growing pains, the life stages of the company. That's what really occupies most of my attention professionally now. This is also what Hiroshi Mikitani is fantastic at. Between Mikitani-son and Bezos, you just get everything that you could possibly want to know about how to scale a company. And every chance I get to actually pick their brain at it, that's usually what we're talking about, when we're not talking about space stations and Mars and things like that.

Tim Ferriss: What are some of the biggest challenges that you've had in scaling Evernote?

Phil Libin: Well, Mikitani-son says this really cool thing. He's got this law, he calls it the law of three and ten or something, which is basically that every single thing in your company breaks every time you roughly triple in size.

So basically, he was the first employee at Rakuten. He was No. 1. And now, they've got 10,000 or something or more. He said when you're just one person, everything kind of works. You sort of figure it out. And then, at some point, you have three people, and now, things are kind of different. Making decisions and everything with three people is different. But you adjust to that. And then, you're fine for a while. And then, you get to 10 people, and everything kind of breaks. And then, you figure that out, and then you get to 30 people and everything is different, and then, 100 and then, 300 and then, 1,000.

So his hypothesis is that everything breaks at roughly these points of three and ten, roughly tripling every size. And by everything, it means everything. How you handle payroll, how you schedule meetings, what kind of communications you use, how you do budgeting, who actually makes decisions. Every implicit and explicit part of the company just changes significantly when it triples.

And his insight is a lot of companies get into huge trouble because of this. So when you're a quickly growing start up, you get into huge trouble because you blow right through a few of these triplings without really realizing it. And then, you turn around, and you realize that we're at 400 people now at Evernote. And when I really think about it, we're at 400 people now, but some of our processes and systems we set in place when we were 30. So we kind of skipped a few steps. And everything is creaky and broken because of it whereas you really have to try to adjust.

And so start ups get in trouble because you kind of blow through these break points really quickly. And so you should constantly, perpetually be thinking about how to reinvent yourself and how to treat the culture. But then, big companies get in trouble for exactly the opposite reason because let's say you get to 10,000 people in your company.

And, theoretically, you figured out how to run things at 10,000. Well, your next big point isn't until 30,000. But you're probably not going to get the 30,000 ever, or certainly not within a few years. It might take a decade or more for a company to go from 10,000 to 30,000. But no one feels like waiting around for a decade or more to reinvent yourself. And so big companies are constantly pushing all of this bullshit innovation initiatives because they feel like we have to do something. We have to do something. But they're not actually connected to any fundamental change in the company.

They're just kind of floating around by themselves. So by having this mismatch between when things actually change and when you feel that you should actually redo everything, small companies get in trouble. But companies get in trouble. And just being mindful about that is super eye opening. So that was maybe one of the most actionable pieces of advice that I got. And this was from Hiroshi Mikitani at Rakuten.

Tim Ferriss: So this is very interesting. The law of three and ten, the tripling I get.

Where does the 10 come in?

Phil Libin: Because otherwise, it would be three and nine, it would be hard to do the math.

Tim Ferriss: Oh.

Phil Libin: It's just rounding up. He's basically saying three and then ten and then thirty and then one hundred. Otherwise, you'd be –

Tim Ferriss: Right, nine and twenty-seven and so on. Okay.

Phil Libin: And who can do that math?

Tim Ferriss: I know you, like myself, have a fondness for Japan. Have you ever seen someone previously trained on an abacus as a kid do mental mathematics?

Phil Libin: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: It's so fascinating. They put their finger up in the air like they're moving beads. And I remember there was this kid on my judo kid when I was in Japan as an exchange student for a year who could multiply three digit numbers. He could do pretty much whatever basic arithmetic you would ask him to do by using this imaginary abacus. So fascinating.

Phil Libin: My grandmother was a bookkeeper, was an accountant in the Soviet Union. And it was all abacus training for her. And I just remember when I was a kid, she would do math. And I completely remember just being blown away how that worked with the imaginary abacus.

Tim Ferriss: With Mikitani-son's law of three and ten, in pragmatic planning terms, does that mean that you as Phil at Evernote would try to look ahead to anticipate when you would hit that tripling point and then seek out the new tools and processes that you would need before hand?

Phil Libin: Yeah. We really try to. But I also think there's the whole tripling aspect, which I think is interesting. Obviously, it's just framework. It doesn't really capture every nuance.

But then, it made me think about another thing, which I think is maybe even more important as to how the world is changing now. Important changes happen at times of change. And it sounds like [inaudible]. That's not how I meant to say it. Let me put it this way. People will often say about a product but you're really asking people or companies to change their engrained behavior. How long does it take to change engrained behavior? We're saying email sucks. Email is dead. You have to get off of email, obviously. And a lot of people say that's such engrained change.

How long will it take a company to fundamentally get off of email? And I've been thinking about it like this. Every time you change jobs, it's a very good opportunity to re-evaluate what works, what doesn't work and try to be a little bit smarter the next time around. Every time you have a major life change like you change jobs, or you move into a new house or whatever, you get married.

All of these things are really good opportunities to take stock mentally and be like I've always wanted to do this a little bit better. Now is the time I'm going to do that. And so inside of companies that's basically people changing jobs. And you can measure how long like a fundamental corporate change will take based on just the number of job cycles that it requires. So let's just say that something as profound as getting rid of email will take like three entire cycles of people changing their job.

And this explains why things happen at such different paces in Silicon Valley versus on the east coast versus in Europe because the average tenure of professionals of knowledge workers is really shrinking and is much shorter here than in lots of other places. The average tenure of a Google employee right now is something like 1.1 years.

Tim Ferriss: Wow.

Phil Libin: The average person at Google has only been on the job for a little over a year. They're changing jobs all of the time. And at Apple, it's only like 2.2 something years. And at Evernote, it's a little bit longer but not much. And so everyone is basically acting like a freelancer. Everyone is doing a job. They don't think they're going to do it forever. They think they're going to do it for a couple of years, and then, they're moving on to the next one. And that's happening like crazy here in Silicon Valley. And it's starting to happen everywhere.

And so if a big change, let's just say, hypothetically, it takes three job cycles, well, if the average job cycle is like a year and a half, then, within four or five years, the company has like completely changed this fundamental thing. Whereas if you're in Europe, and the average job cycle is like 10 years, it may take you 30 years to get there. So the change that's obvious here within a few years may take decades in societies where people are just staying on board for much longer. But something that takes four to five years in Silicon Valley probably takes twenty years in Europe probably takes a year in China.

That cycle in China is crazy fast and compressed.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it really is.

Phil Libin: So how do you plan that? And more importantly, we, at Evernote, are building software. We're building products for modern knowledge workers. How do we embrace this? How do we build products for these types of people? And that's a very different idea than Microsoft Office. How do you build something that is meant for people who have a really compressed job cycle, who think of themselves as freelancers, even if they're part of a company? And how do you make that great?
Instead of trying to pass judgment on this and saying that's a bad thing and trying to hold it back, how do you actually embrace it, and how do you try to make it more awesome? And that's a big animating force of how we're thinking about things.

Tim Ferriss: How different is the current Chinese version of Evernote compared to say the US version?

Phil Libin: It's the same. I mean, there are some minor differences like payment methods and stuff like that. So China is the only place where we run a totally separate version. So we have a version of Evernote that we call [inaudible], which, basically, we kind of cloned ourselves in China. Everyone told us, if you go to China, you're just going to get cloned. So we said, all right, let's just clone ourselves. So we made a full clone of Evernote that we run ourselves that separate data centers, separate servers. And other than some minor things around how we interact with payment methods and stuff like that, it's exactly the same.

Tim Ferriss: I appreciate the separate data centers.

Phil Libin: Well, that's important for a bunch of reasons both for performance as well as giving people a choice as to where they keep their data.

Tim Ferriss: Let's talk for a second about Reid Hoffman. And then, I want to come back to some of your personal productivity habits. But Reid is a very interesting, that's my laziest adjective I can use here, he's a compelling character.

I've had the opportunity to spend a little bit of time with him. And we're both involved in a nonprofit called Quest Bridge. And he is such a cool as a cucumber sort of philosopher king in the minds of so many people in Silicon Valley. What makes Reid unique? What

are the things that draw you to him or that you find fascinating about him?

Phil Libin: Well, I mean, well before I actually got to know him, I was listening to him. I was reading his stuff. So I was just attracted to the ideas. He just has a very – to me, it's exactly the right balance of kind of big picture, philosophically oriented ideas that are really grounded and practical and that you can apply.

I really like the thinking behind Linked In and kind of what it represented. So it was the strength of the ideas and having exactly the right mixture of kind of lofty and practical.

Tim Ferriss: What else? Are there any particular examples that jump out at you or any advice that he's given you or questions you've asked of him?

Phil Libin: Well, we talk a lot about company scaling. And he made a decision fairly early on that he didn't want to be the CEO of the company. And he brought in, actually, a couple of people. Jeff is the second person that he wound up bringing on. And that's worked out great. And so I've talked to him a lot about what is that like. What's the right amount of letting go? What is the right amount of staying involved? How do you really think about?

And he's been kind of my main guide through this. I mean, there have been a lot of other people I've talked to as well. But Reid is kind of the person I'm most looking to emulate. His thoughts around really starting with Pay Pal have been super influential.

Tim Ferriss: What – I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Phil Libin: I think the best thing that I've read from him is actually more recent. It was his last book, *The Alliance*, which really has sharpened my thinking significantly around this exact idea that we just talked about. This idea of having a relationship between companies and employees that's more honest and that's about recognizing what the actual new realities of the world are and trying to embrace them. And he's writing this book really from kind of an HR perspective. I really read it as a product design perspective. I read it as how do we make products for this reality? And that's been really, hugely influential. Plus, he's just a super nice guy.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. He is. He has a very different energy from almost all of the other folks in the Pay Pal mafia. And that's not to, in any way,

denigrate them. But he doesn't seem to have the same sharp edge that a lot of those other guys do. Obviously, he's very intelligent and has an extremely incisive intellect. But when you sit down what him, he has a much more relaxed energy, if that makes sense.

Phil Libin: Right.

Tim Ferriss: To what would you attribute that? I mean, he does have –

Phil Libin: I would attribute that to the extreme edginess and sharpness of the rest of those guys. I think you put anyone in contrast with the rest of the well known people there, and anyone is going to see pretty normal. Like you, Tim Ferriss, in a room next to Elon and Roloff and Max and the people like that are going to seem super mellow and chill.

Tim Ferriss: Good point.

Phil Libin: So that works.

Tim Ferriss: Now, you mentioned philosophy a bit earlier. And you mentioned stoicism. Maybe I sort of recursively incepted myself. Reid has quite a philosophy background, as I understand it. I think he studied philosophy at Oxford after his Stanford experience. Are you religious or philosophical? Are there any particular schools of philosophy or trains of thought in religion that you use as a framework in your life?

Phil Libin: I'm not particularly religious in the sense I'm not theistic. I am very interested in having a coherent philosophy of life, a coherent structure that basically says here is why you should bother living, and here is what you should try to accomplish.

And here is what it all means. And I think a lot of people come to that from a religious background. Some people come to it from a philosophical background or a practical background. But I think it's important, at least for me, to just to think about overall structure and to have a coherent philosophy of life. So I've been looking for that for a while.

Tim Ferriss: How do you go about looking for it, and have you found any pieces of it?

Phil Libin: A little bit. Mostly, I read a lot. I kind of have been. You couldn't tell this by talking to me now, but I was kind of a strange kid growing up. I sort of became fixated by the end of the world as a

kid. I don't know why. I was really, really intrigued and kind of obsessed as a little kid with this idea of how the world is going to end. And the first movie I ever say, I was 6, it was in Russia.

And my father took me to see this movie in a movie theater. I was like this little, super nerdy, impressionable, 6-year-old kid. And my dad took me to see this Japanese horror movie called Legend of the Dinosaur, which was about dinosaurs coming back to life and eating people.

Tim Ferriss: That's the most Japanese title ever. I love it.

Phil Libin: Yeah. Legend of Dinosaur. And this was just extremely bad parenting, seriously. I don't know what he was thinking. And I couldn't sleep for like a month afterwards. I was too terrified to sleep. I thought the world was going to end because dinosaurs were going to come back and bite all of us in half.

Tim Ferriss: That's what Beetle Juice did to my brother.

Phil Libin: Yeah. And I remember, one night, I was lying in bed. I couldn't sleep. And I think my dad kind of got tired of me not sleeping. And so he came over, and he sat on my bed, and he said, "What are you afraid of? What are you worried about?" And I said, "Well, dad, to be honest with you, I'm afraid that the world is going to end because dinosaurs are going to come back and bite all of us in half."

And he said, "Look, in hindsight, I shouldn't have taken you to see that movie. You don't have to worry about it. Dinosaurs are definitely not going to come back. The world is definitely not going to end with dinosaurs coming back and eating us. The world is going to end in nuclear war."

Tim Ferriss: Thanks, dad.

Phil Libin: That's what everyone thought. This was late '70s in the Soviet Union. And that's kind of what everyone thought. And then, we moved to the US, and that's what everyone thought here. And I've been kind of thinking about what is the meaning of life and what happens when things end. And if things are going to end, what's the purpose of having a purpose? And I just read a lot of Thor comics and then went on to maybe somewhat more serious things in high school and in college and got into that. And I think I'm starting to piece things together. I think I have a generally sunnier

disposition towards life. And I think I have inklings of what meaning is.

But I'm not sure I know completely. More recently, I've been reading a lot of stoicism stuff. So you said Marcus Aurelius and a few others. So I think that's going to be the new trend. I'm calling it right here. This is going to be the new trendy thing in Silicon Valley. Zen was sort of last year's thing. The new Zen is going to be stoicism. It would have gone like Zen and then macarons and then stoicism.

Tim Ferriss: Wait. Did you say macaroons? What was the second one?

Phil Libin: Macarons, yeah, fancy macaroons.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, macarons. That's taking it to a whole new level.

Phil Libin: And maybe toast, artisanal toast is also big. So maybe it goes like Zen and then artisanal toast and then stoicism. But you're going to hear more and more about stoicism being the hip, new philosophy coming out of here.

Tim Ferriss: I agree. I agree. I've been trying to do my part with the proselytizing of stoicism, which, in and of itself, is kind of ironic. But the artisanal toast, if you ever go to [Japanese] Park in Tokyo, they have an artisanal toast coffee shop set up in the park where they have panda faces burnt into the sides of the toast that you can buy. It's fantastic.

Phil Libin: Panda faces and artisanal are not two concepts that go together usually, but in Japan, they can pull it off.

Tim Ferriss: Hold on a second. So what image would it have to be, if not pandas? Or is it imageless? Does it have to have some type of brand on it? How do you envision artisanal toast?

Phil Libin: I think is just has to be perfectly toasted. It should be a no logo.

Tim Ferriss: Oh. It's like the 15 minute pour over of toast?

Phil Libin: That's right. Well, the best toast in the world is in Singapore. It's kaya toast. So you get these thick slabs of toast spread with butter and kaya. Kaya is like this sweet coconut spread. And then, you dip it into really runny, soft boiled eggs. And you have pulled coffee. So this coffee that they pour over 6 feet in front of you. It's the best.

Tim Ferriss: Over 6 feet?

Is it like a Game of Thrones pour from across the room like Chinese style?

Phil Libin: Yeah. So you get this really aerated coffee, sweet toast dipped into runny eggs. The best thing ever.

Tim Ferriss: I'm just imagining this Willie Wonka like chocolate colored coffee waterfall that you stick your mug into. I'm not sure that's the proper image. But it does give me some ideas. So let's step outside of Evernote for a second. What are the most used apps on your phone besides Evernote?

Phil Libin: Well, so basically, to me, Evernote doesn't really feel like an app. I think of email, messaging, web, and Evernote as kind of the same order of things. So it doesn't even feel like I'm using an app when I use it. I'm just using it.

So I use a bunch of the messaging apps. I really kind of test them out. Just sort of see how things are going, see what's impressive, where are the good ideas coming from. But, again, even there, they don't really feel like apps. In fact, this is probably the thing. It's like things that I use all of the time, I don't think of as apps. I don't think of Uber as an app. I use Uber quite a bit. It doesn't really feel like an app to me.

Tim Ferriss: Is it a utility? Or how do you compartmentalize app? What does that feel like when you do use an app?

Phil Libin: It's like a service, I guess. One of my product hypotheses is that apps are going away. The concept of an app is going to become a lot less important in a few years than it is now. It's like this whole idea that you page through screens of stuff to pick something you want to use, that's a short term concept. It's only going to have been with us for a decade or so. And then, it will vanish. And it will be replaced with this concept of just experiences, services. So Amazon, I use the Amazon app.

I don't think of it as an app. I use Netflix. That's not an app. Things that have just become these permanent fixtures in my life, they're fixtures, but they're not apps. And I'll use them everywhere. I'll use them on my phone. I'll use them on the web. I'll use them on my watch, at some point, or my glasses or whatever. In terms of discrete apps that I use on the phone, a lot of

games. Like all of the specific small things on my phone tend to be games that I'm trying out.

Tim Ferriss: What are your favorite games?

Phil Libin: I go through them pretty fast. Right now, for the past couple of days, I've been playing Radical Repelling, which is what it sounds like.

Tim Ferriss: Repelling like repelling down the side of a rock face?

Phil Libin: Yeah. You repel down the side of a rock face. And you get power ups and try to avoid running into spikes and drink cans of highly caffeinated beverages that give you bursts of energy. It's very much like real life.

Before that, I was kind of into Goat Simulator. So Goat Simulator in iPhone is pretty good. It's definitely the best goat simulation that you can get on your iPhone.

Tim Ferriss: And do you use these games to decompress? Have you always been a gamer?

Phil Libin: Yeah, I have. I used to play a lot more computer games. Now, I don't have quite as much time. Although, I did recently start playing Elite Dangerous, which is –

Tim Ferriss: Elite Dangerous?

Phil Libin: Elite Dangerous, yeah. It's probably the greatest game, maybe thing, ever made.

Tim Ferriss: Like elite force but then dangerous the adjective.

Phil Libin: Yes. It's a space game. It just came out, amazing. And like Jeff Bezos, it, basically, envisions a world where humans are everywhere in space but mostly living on space stations mining asteroids. Not really going down to planets. Sort of two factors for that.

Tim Ferriss: How far away are we, do you think, from mining asteroids? Because I know there is, for instance, planetary resources, which Peter Diamandis is involved with, Brian Johnson is an investor, a couple of other folks, a lot of the Zero Gravity guys are involved with Planetary Resources, which is focused specifically on mining precious materials off of asteroids. When do you think we'll actually be in full swing?

Phil Libin: It's really hard to say. I think the most important thing to nail first is the repeatable launch vehicles. And tourism is probably going to get us there before mining does. So I'm actually kind of a big fan of a lot of the space tourism efforts like Virgin Galactic and a few others just because I think – not because I think it's particularly great to send people into orbit and that's fine. But I think that we need to get the reusable rockets and launch vehicles going as much as possible.

And that will really unlock everything else. So I think we'll have pretty good repeatable, reusable launch vehicles within five years. But then, how long does it go from there to asteroid mining? I don't know. That could be decades, especially since it doesn't really make sense to mind asteroids and then ship the results back to earth. It probably makes sense to actually just move industry into space. So you should be mining asteroids and building things in space stations. And the only thing that should be coming back to earth is basically data. We should be getting fast internet connectivity from space and that's about it.

And everything else should just be being made up there. But that's A) above my pay grade, B) I have no idea what I'm talking about, and C) probably a few decades away.

Tim Ferriss: So let's continue talking about things at least above my pay grade but still might be within yours, I think. If you were looking at the end of the world, the things that could eradicate the human race from the face of earth, aside from us leaving in some Elysium type fashion, what would you put in the top sort of three positions as probably causes of human extinction?

And would AI be anywhere in that list?

Phil Libin: Well, so probably not dinosaurs. So I think I've gotten over that. So I'm not afraid of AI. I really think the AI debate is a little bit kind of over dramatized. And to be honest with you, I kind of find it weird. And I find it weird for several reasons, but including this one. It's like there's this hypothesis that we're going to build super intelligent machines. And then, they're going to get exponentially smarter and smarter. So they're going to, basically, be much smarter than us. And these super smart machines are going to make the logical decision that the best thing to do is kill us. And I feel like there are a couple of steps missing in that chain of events.

I don't understand why the obviously smart thing to do would be to kill all of the humans. The smarter I get, the less I want to kill all the humans. Why wouldn't these really smart machines not want to be helpful? What is it about our guilt as a species that makes us think that the smart thing to do would be to kill all the humans? I think that actually says more about what we feel guilty about than what's actually going to happen. And if we really think that a smart decision would be to wipe out humanity, it may be more useful to instead of trying to prevent AI, maybe it's more useful to think about what are we so guilty about?

And let's fix that. Can we maybe get to a point where we feel proud of our species and say maybe the smart thing wouldn't be to wipe it out? I think there's a lot of important issues that are being sublimated into the AI will kill all humans' discussion that are probably worth pulling apart and tackling independently.

So yeah, I'm not overly concerned about it. I do think that it's worth taking seriously. I think AI is going to be one of the greatest forces for good in the universe and that the universe has ever seen. And it's pretty exciting that we are actually making progress towards it.

Tim Ferriss: And if not AI, what would you put at the top of the list? Does anything come to mind as – if the human race were to extinguish itself or be extinguished in the next say 20 years, what are the most likely causes in your mind?

Phil Libin: So there are interesting groups that work on this. There's the sort of existential threat groups. And they've got all sorts of good theories. I think it's extremely unlikely that the human race gets extinguished in the next 20 years.

You can basically isolate this into short term risks, which are all self inflicted. There are a bunch of self inflicted risks like nuclear war, which is probably still a risk. No, it's not going to wipe out all of humanity. But it could set us back quite a bit. And there are other like climate change is a serious issue, but it's not going to result in wiping out humanity. It might result in a lot of displacement and a lot of economic cost. There is global pandemics, which, again, kind of by their definition, a super flu isn't going to wipe out humanity. But it could be really bad. It could kill a lot of people.

So there's a lot of these sort of self inflicted risks, which I think it's important to get a lot better at dealing with. And then, there's

the real long term stuff, which, obviously, at some point, will wipe out everything on earth. But we're talking about millions of years or even billions of years. Asteroid impacts, the sun exploding, super nova and that kind of stuff.

And the only real solution there is, at some point, we do need to become a multi planet species. So no big rush. We don't all need to rush towards the exits. But it is kind of neat to actually be working on things that will enable us, at some point, to spread out a bit.

Tim Ferriss: Well, I think among other people, Steven Hawking has said pretty clearly, as I understand it, for us to survive, we have to become multi planetary or extra planetary maybe at the very least.

Phil Libin: Yeah. I think that's right. But it's also an interesting question is what is us. So it's plausible that things that look like biological human beings actually never live at scale outside of the planet. But other things we create, other intelligences and consciousness that we create actually might actually be able to spread among the stars. And that's kind of cool, too.

I think it's an elegant idea.

Tim Ferriss: There's a very cool science fiction, animated short, which is actually also very funny, I think it's about 16 minutes, called The World of Tomorrow, which is worth checking out. It digs into a lot of this. So as a side note, that's a fun watch. You mentioned Netflix. Do you have any favorite documentaries?

Phil Libin: Yeah. A bunch. I really like there was one that I just saw a couple of weeks ago that was really good. I think it was called the Gate Keepers. It was all of the living heads of the Shin Bet, the Israeli secret service just kind of talking very frankly about life, about war, about peace. And it was just kind of startling. I think there were like eight of them who wound up running. They were the top military and spy people in Israel.

And all of them were saying things that I think, later in life, they've all moved much more towards reconciliation and peace and dialogue. And it was just fascinating to hear. I watch a lot of science documentaries. So I was a big fan of the Neil deGrasse Tyson's Cosmos reboot. That was great. I watched all of the Carl Sagan version a while ago. The thing that I just saw yesterday, which I didn't actually watch, I signed in to Netflix yesterday and saw them promoting this, and I didn't even know they made it, but

this was a new documentary about James Randi called An Honest Liar or something, which I've not got queued up.

I think I'm probably going to watch that tonight. I'm a huge James Randi fan. And I didn't even know they made a movie about him. So I'm really looking forward to that. In fact, the very first things that I ever bought on the internet, like my first e-commerce transaction, I have a screen shot of it, was on Amazon.

It was in 1996. And it was two books by James Randi. So the first things I ever bought online were the first two James Randi books I ever read was also the first time I ever used Amazon. So it was like several important firsts for me that I've got a screen shot in Evernote. And I actually met James Randi afterwards, and I had him sign my screen shot in Evernote. So it was sort of five levels of dorkiness in there. But I'm pretty proud of it.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. This is James Randi the magician? Or which James Randi?

Phil Libin: Yeah. The Amazing Randi, James Randi the magician/debunker/skeptic.

Tim Ferriss: Sort of in the same vein as Penn and Teller, would you say?

Phil Libin: Yeah. He's kind of maybe the father of all of this, sort of the modern pro science and skeptical movement. But yeah, similar to Penn and Teller. But James Randi doesn't do a whole lot of magic debunking. It's more about science teaching and –

Tim Ferriss: Quackery. I'm looking online here. It says he has a Ted Talk called Randi. And the title of his talk is Homeopathy, Quackery, and Fraud.

Phil Libin: Yeah. So a lot of stuff like that. And I haven't actually seen the documentary, so I don't know if it's any good. It probably is. I remember seeing yesterday that it was on Netflix and going, oh, as soon as I have a spare two hours, I'm going to watch it. It should probably be tonight.

Tim Ferriss: Do you have any favorite non documentary movies?

Phil Libin: Well, you know, the best movie ever made is the Empire Strikes Back.

Tim Ferriss: I noticed your mug. So is that your favorite of the Star Wars series?

Phil Libin: Yeah. Well, that's, objectively, the best one. It's not really up for debate.

Tim Ferriss: Was it the ton-tons that pushed it over?

Phil Libin: It was so much stuff. It was just a really good movie. I watched it again recently because they just released the digital versions of all six movies.

And so I just watched the good three again. Yeah, it's just great. Everything about it. The middle movies of trilogies are usually the best ones because, the first movie, the director is still like trying a little bit too hard. They have to prove themselves. And then, by the third one, they've got to wrap things up. But the second one is the pacing is different. It's sort of the intermediate thing. It has a sense of continuity but also more to come. Just like everything about that, the middle part usually is good. I think the Two Towers was the best Lord of the Rings movie and so on. But Empire Strikes Back, in particular, was just super strong.
But I don't watch too much TV. I used to watch Top Gear. But it got cancelled. And then, I binge watched House of Cards and Game of Thrones.

Although, I haven't watched the last season of the Game of Thrones yet.

Tim Ferriss: I just binge watched it this last week. It's good. I won't give you any spoilers. It very much has a hirky, jerky, upper and downer effect, which I think is very intentional.

Phil Libin: I think that the series is really good. I've read all of the books. And I know the last season supposedly departs from some of the books a little bit. So I'm interested to see how that goes.

Tim Ferriss: Before I give the notebook question, not about the movie with that very beautiful woman, I'm blanking on her name, not that one but actual physical notebooks. Are you attracted to Ryan Gosling? That's my really question.

Phil Libin: He's dreamy.

Tim Ferriss: He is dreamy. What book have you gifted most to other people or books?

Phil Libin: Probably The Clock of the Long Now by Stewart Brand is maybe the most influential book on me. So The Long Now Foundation –

Tim Ferriss: That's about the clock and Danny Hillis?

Phil Libin: Yeah. Danny Hillis and Stewart Brand are the co-founders. And then, there are a lot of other people involved. And so this is the organization that's building a 10,000 year clock in the middle of a mountain. They're also preserving all human languages. It's an organization that's dedicated to long term thinking. Like how do you actually make plans for 10,000 years, which sort of sounds crazy, but it isn't. If we can't make plans for 10,000 years, then no one else is going to. And so Steward Brand who is just an amazing guy, I invited him to speak at our last conference, and he agreed. So it was kind of amazing just to introduce him on stage.

Tim Ferriss: Incredible guy, yeah.I think he was co-creator of The Whole Earth Catalog way back in the day for those people who remember.

Phil Libin: The Whole Earth Catalog and The Well, one of the first internet discussion sites and all sorts of stuff. And so his book is The Clock of the Long Now. And it just talks about the principles and the foundation. And it's a very short read. But, in particular, there's one chapter of it, which, for me, it was really life changing. I think it's called the layers of civilization. And it, basically, just talks about the six or seven layers of society and kind of how they interact with each other. And it kind of explains and puts the structure of explaining almost everything that you'd ever wondered about in just a few pages.

So it's really affected me. I read it when I was pretty young. And I've been kind of going back to it every so often. So The Clock of the Long Now, I've given it lots of times definitely.

I couldn't recommend it more highly.

Tim Ferriss: That, and I'd also highly recommend people check out The Long Now Foundation. It's an incredible group of people. Kevin Kelly is very involved as well. And as a way to telescope out and even do thought experiments solo related to 10,000 year thinking, for instance. It's a really fascinating website to check out. They also have a bar in San Francisco that I contributed to for their kick starter campaign.

Phil Libin: Me, too. I got one of the whiskey bottles.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, you did? I haven't been there yet.

Phil Libin: Oh, it's beautiful, The Interval.

Tim Ferriss: Exactly, The Interval.

Phil Libin: Yeah, it's at Port Mason. It's super nice.

Tim Ferriss: I've heard it's just gorgeous. Now, when I go to whether it's a coffee shop or a bar, I almost always have a small Moleskin or [inaudible], I don't know how to say it properly, notebook with me. I have a lot of trouble separating myself from physical note taking.

Do you use, personally, physical notebooks?

Phil Libin: I do, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: That was weird intonation on the question, sorry. It sounded more like do you use physical notebooks as a statement but sorry to interrupt.

Phil Libin: I do.

Tim Ferriss: What do you use them for? And why don't you do everything digitally?

Phil Libin: Well, it is digital. So our partnership with Moleskin is we use any notebook. Or a Moleskin notebook just works really well since we've optimized our software for it. And you just write and then take a picture with Evernote of the page, and it automatically gets cleaned up and indexed and scanned and put in context with everything else. And so it's just the best of both worlds. It lets you be discrete and unobtrusive and kind of take notes. And then, immediately, have them available digitally for searching in reference and sharing. So we're trying to give people great experiences without being pedantic about what has to be digital, what has to be physical.

We really want to blend those two things. I think the best products are made when you take into account the physical world. When we take into account how things feel like and how heavy they are and where you put your hands. And it's kind of the same if you're designing iPad software or if you're actually designing a physical notebook. You have to think about these things. And it's important

for us to think about them and to try to make beautiful experiences that combine those things.

Tim Ferriss: What types of things do you personally put into your physical notebook before scanning them into Evernote?

Phil Libin: So there's a little trick, I guess I've never actually told this to anyone before. So here's how this works. You know how if you're in a meeting, and you've got your laptop open, and you're taking notes in your laptop, it's like that sort of creates a barrier between you and the other people? And it sometimes feels like a little bit distant, a little bit intimidating?

Tim Ferriss: Definitely.

Phil Libin: We actually make stickers that say I'm not being rude, I'm taking notes in Evernote that you can stick on the back of your laptop, too, to solve that problem.

Tim Ferriss: Cool.

Phil Libin: Or you can use a phone. But if you use a phone in a meeting with someone, then, it just kind of looks like you're not paying attention to them. All of the dynamics are that you're –

Tim Ferriss: Distracted.

Phil Libin: Yeah, even if you're taking notes. But if you use a notebook, if you write in a notebook while you're talking to someone, they feel like, man, this person really cares about me. It totally flips the odometer the other way. You are signaling deep caring and interest if you just scribble in a notebook while talking to someone. And so even if you're just like drawing houses and clouds and unicorns –

Tim Ferriss: Big Lebowski style?

Phil Libin: Exactly. So it's like the key to making it look like you're really paying attention and connecting with someone is to have an open notebook and, occasionally, nod and write something down.

So that works super well. So I would say, when I'm in meetings, maybe a third of the time, I'm actually taking notes. And what I'll do is I'll just write specific words or phrases that I know if I see later will actually pop the whole meeting into my head.

Tim Ferriss: You're writing down the queues.

Phil Libin: Exactly, queues. And they're not even necessarily the most important words. They're just queues. So I may write down, in this conversation, I may write down Lebowski. That wasn't important, but I know if I saw that later, and I saw that was on my timeline in Evernote at the same time that I had this conversation with Tim, and it's linked to you and all of our other stuff that word would just trigger this memory. And it will come out. So I use it for that. I use it for queuing in a way that doesn't create this barrier between me and the other person. And, in fact, not just doesn't create the barrier, it actually makes us feel closer. And it makes people think that I'm really paying attention.

Tim Ferriss: Which you are.

Phil Libin: Which I am, all of the time.

Tim Ferriss: And the process after that, I'd love to ask you about. How often do you think scan those into your Evernote? Do you use your phone to take the photograph? Do you tear them out and put them through a machine, i.e., normal people call scanner? You always use your phone?

Phil Libin: I always use my phone. Well, I use the Evernote scanner when I have a stack of documents. But for business cards and for handwritten notes, I always use my phone. And it's important to do it as close as possible to the time and place of the meeting because, then, you get all of the association. So basically, before I get up, I'll just take a picture. And then, I know I have it. I know it's time stamped. It's geo stamped. It's associated with a calendar entry.

Basically, everything works great if you do it right there, business card and handwritten notes. If you wait until you get to the office, you lose all of that context.

Tim Ferriss: Right. I'm embarrassed to say I never even thought about that because you're not only losing the context, you're creating false signals because you could be throwing it off. And if you look into your calendar to see why that was associated with a given time, then, you're actually creating conflict.

Phil Libin: If I'm meeting with you, especially if it's in my calendar, and I take a picture of let's say I get your business card, and I take a picture of that in Evernote. That will automatically get all of your contact info and look you up on Linked In and whatever. And then, let's say I take some handwritten notes, and I take a picture of that,

the handwritten notes will be automatically titled in Evernote Note from Meeting with Tim Ferriss. And your business card will have your name and everything associated with it. So if I did it right there, I got all of this stuff. And the next time I write something about you or search for you, I'm going to get all of that stuff coming up.

And I'm going to see my note. I'm going to see your contact info. And then, I'm going to see any business articles that have come out about you and any of our publisher partners. So if you do it right away, you're really capturing a very strong signal that not only will you use right there, but it will make every subsequent access of this information richer.

Tim Ferriss: You mentioned a couple of names earlier, obviously, Bezos, Mikitani, Benioff, Hoffman. When you think of the word successful, who is the first person who comes to mind?

Phil Libin: Wow. I don't know. I don't know if my mind works like that.

Tim Ferriss: What do you mean?

Phil Libin: You just said successful, and I didn't pop into a person.

I immediately flashed on product. The first thing that popped into my mind when you said successful was iPhone. Kind of crazy. I guess I don't really think of people as successful.

Tim Ferriss: That's a new answer. I like this. So let's explore that. Why the iPhone?

Phil Libin: Well, maybe it's more why not people because I guess I don't think of success as being the most interesting characteristic of a person. A lot of success is luck.

Tim Ferriss: Right. Agreed.

Phil Libin: In fact, I think that, like anyone who has been successful even a little bit, has also been lucky. Luck is not – and when I say luck, I mean luck. I mean, random occurrence. I don't mean some mystical you make your own luck anything. There is a strong element of fortune, of random change to personal success. And then, of course, there's also a ton of hard work and really having to maximize it.

And so tons of people deserve to be successful because they're super smart and interesting and work hard, and they just haven't had the luck. So to me, whether or not a person is successful or not isn't the most interesting thing about that person. I really care much more about their ideas and how interesting or fun they are. So I guess I tend to think more about things, about products that are successful like iPhone. But that also has an element of luck but much less. I think that's much more about really great design and smart planning and great execution and things that are more predictive of and more interesting than applying that measure to people.

Tim Ferriss: Let's make it more general, and maybe this will be an equally difficult or misdirected question. But which historical figure do you most identify with, if any?

Phil Libin: Historical figure? Wow. I don't know. I want to be sensitive to not sounding like – I don't want this to come across as false modesty.

Tim Ferriss: Are you going to give me Winnie the Pooh, or what?

Phil Libin: The thing is I actually don't think about myself that much. And I'm being serious out this in a very specific way. We've already established that I play a lot of video games. I actually don't know if you do.

Tim Ferriss: I'm actually reinvigorating my game playing as of a few weeks ago.

Phil Libin: Okay.

Tim Ferriss: I played a lot of Dungeons and Dragons as a kid.

Phil Libin: I was all Dungeons and Dragons growing up. Yeah. That was fundamental for me. So basically, there are two types of games on like PC's and consoles.

There are kind of first person games and third person games. There's like first person shooter and third person shooters and whatever. And a first person game is you are seeing the game world through the eyes of your character. So you're running around and shooting or whatever. And then, a third person game like Grand Theft Auto or something is the camera is usually in back of you. So you're seeing yourself moving around interacting in the world. So in one genre, you sort of see how you look like in

the world. And in another genre, you just see the world, but you don't really see yourself in it.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Phil Libin: And I think a lot of people go through life either playing a first person game or a third person game. And I don't think there's any one of those is right or wrong. I just think, for example, if you look at most politicians, like Bill Clinton, whatever you think of him, he's clearly playing a third person game.

Like he is aware of what he looks like in any scene. And he's sort of optimizing for that and optimizing for how to do everything correctly because he's seeing himself. And a lot of people are like that. And then, there are other people who are clearly playing the first person game where they're kind of oblivious about themselves in the world. They have things they want to accomplish. They know the way they want the world to bend. But they don't really have a perception of them.

For better or for worse, it always felt like, just going over the US presidents again, it always felt like George W. Bush was probably playing a first person game where he was like a little bit less actual visibility in his own head about what he looked like interacting with the world. And, again, that's, obviously, not a judgment at all about their political styles or who you like or don't like or whatever, just more about personality. And I really think that I'm fundamentally a first person gamer. I don't think about who do I identify with?

Who am I most like? What do you I look like in this scene? What do I look like from here? How do I change my outfit? Those are things that interest me less than most of the world around me. And that probably makes me weak at all sorts of things where I should have better self awareness. And it probably makes me stronger at other things.

Tim Ferriss: Do you meditate or have a meditative practice?

Phil Libin: I used to a lot more. I went through a phase. It's required if you're going to live in Silicon Valley that you have to go through these things. So I went through a Zen phase a couple of years ago.

Tim Ferriss: The secular baptism.

Phil Libin: Benioff actually got me into it.

Tim Ferriss: Into TM or what type of meditation?

Phil Libin: No. I've never done transcendental stuff. I'm actually kind of interested in the whole mantra idea. I've never done that. So just Zen, mindfulness and Zen. And I did it fairly actively for about a year or so.

But I mastered it. I won. The important thing is to try really hard to have a goal, set your mind to it, and you, too, can master Zen Buddhism. So I became a Zen master. And now, I'm on to other things. Now, I'm on to stoicism, which is also –

Tim Ferriss: Now, you're on to Goat Simulate.

Phil Libin: Exactly. I'm done. I've reached Level 13 at being a Zen monk, and now, I'm on to Goat Simulator.

Tim Ferriss: Why did you stop? What was the reason for stopping?

Phil Libin: I didn't really stop. I think my commitment to it kind of waned. So for a while, I was meditating about 20 minutes a day, and it was good. It was very clarifying. I then became interested in what could we learn from that, and what could we apply to different products? And then, I realized, as I was meditating, I was actually just spending more and more of my time thinking about the meditating, which sort of defeats the whole purpose.

I was treating Zen meditation as like a very goal oriented thing, kind of the opposite of what it's supposed to be. And then, I started reading more broadly and got into other things. There's actually a product that I don't know if you've tried. Have you seen the Thync?

Tim Ferriss: No, what is that?

Phil Libin: T-H-Y-N-C.

Tim Ferriss: Okay. I see what they're doing there.

Phil Libin: Yeah. It's sort of super awesome. So it's basically doing direct brain stimulation through ultrasound. So you wear this device on your head, and it beams vibes into your brain and gives you energy and focus or calmness. And this totally tripped every bullshit filter I had when I first saw this got tripped. I was like, yeah, nonsense. But I read into it. I looked at the science, and it seemed plausible. I

was like this isn't setting off red flags for me in terms of just being pseudoscience.

And so I thought, okay, this seems okay. And then, I actually got to try it a couple of weeks ago. And my personal experience of it was great. I know it was just one person's experience. It's impossible to really say what's suggestion, what's placebo, what's real. But I had a really good experience with it. So I just ordered it. I should be getting mine in the next couple of days. And I'm actually really interested in this and this idea that you can actually have significant impact on how you think through meditation. But you might actually be able to have very similar impact on the way you think through just much more direct application of technology, which would be cool.

So if I was a robot, how would robots meditate? It would be something like this.

Tim Ferriss: I'm looking at it now, and the placement, it looks like there's one sensor or stimulator right where I would think it to be, which is kind of over the right eyebrow.

So the dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex. Is there another at the back, or is that the only placement point?

Phil Libin: Yeah. So what you're seeing in those pictures is the hair is covering up the antenna. So what you do is you attach this flexible antenna. You can kind of see there are super hot models on the website.

Tim Ferriss: Always helps, right?

Phil Libin: Yeah. You can see that.

Tim Ferriss: They look very elven. They look like Legolas's cousin, very elven.

Phil Libin: Yeah. Very elven, yeah. And so there's a contact point. So there are two different antennas, depending on if you're running the calming one or the energy one. And they go into two different places in the back of your head. And they aim. They triangulate that way. And like I said, I'm actually super interested in this. I've talked to the CEO of the company. I talked to their chief scientist. I think my current inclination is that it's legit, which is kind of amazing. But we'll see. I will do a lot more playing around with it.

I should get mine soon though. Next time we're in the same time zone, I can bring it over, and you can tell me what you think.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, that would be great. I'd love to play with it. It looks like trans cranial direct current stimulation.

Phil Libin: It is, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: A friend of mine, if you don't know him, I should introduce you guys, named Adam Gazali who runs the Gazali Neuroscience Lab at UCSF. And they do a lot of work with this type of technology. So I've actually been a subject and an experimenter in some of their research studies for TDCS.

Phil Libin: Neat.

Tim Ferriss: I think there's a lot of promise. You just have to make sure you don't fry your brain into scrambled eggs accidentally.

Phil Libin: Yeah, details.

Tim Ferriss: I think the TDCS, this type of brain stimulation, could be very interesting also not just for the direct impact on say performance or subjective state of mind or emotion but also for showing people what might be possible through meditative practice in the same way that there's a neuroscience PhD and a friend of mine named Sam Harris who was also on this podcast who no longer uses psychedelics.

But his early, formative psychedelic experiences showed him what could be possible with dedicated meditative practice. And that's the tool that he now uses. So the interplay of all of these different tools for expanding or honing consciousness is very interesting to me. Do you use Thync mostly for calming or stimulating or both?

Phil Libin: So I've only actually used it once. I don't own one yet. I've put in my order. It should be showing up soon. So I've had one direct experience with it, which was in London a few weeks ago. And I did the calming vibe. And it was great. Basically, the woman that was putting it on me says, as you're using it, you should look for signs to see whether or not it's working.

And I was like, "Okay, like what?" And she said, "Well, for example, can you think of some things that, right now, if you think of them, they just kind of cause you to get anxious or stressed out or angry?" And I'm like, "Yeah, done."

Tim Ferriss: As the CEO –

Phil Libin: Yeah. She's like, "Okay, good. So in five minutes, think of those things again and see how they make you feel." And I said, "Okay." So I put this thing on. I'm controlling it with my iPhone, and I'm feeling relatively calm. And then, five minutes go by, and I start thinking about these things that just caused me this fundamental stress and anxiety five minutes earlier. And I was like yeah, I'm cool with that. That's okay. I can live with that. That seems normal. I think that's not a problem. And I'm comfortable with that. And it was really impressive to me. And I know that could be 100 percent suggestion or placebo.

But what I've read about it combined with talking to the people that I know, combined with direct experience, it's definitely making me relatively sanguine about the possibilities.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, good word, sanguine. I always get out GRE'd by my guests on this podcast. It's an issue. I really need to get some flashcards. So speaking of purchases, in the last say six to twelve months, it could be whatever comes to mind, what $100.00 or less purchase has most positively impacted your life?

Phil Libin: So $100.00 or less.

Tim Ferriss: It's a starting point. If any purchase comes to mind that isn't completely out of reach of most people, then that's fine.

Phil Libin: I don't know. Let me think about it. For some reason, my mind goes to food.

Tim Ferriss: That's fine.

Phil Libin: Yeah, I don't know. I don't know if that's weird. Maybe it's just because I'm hungry. It's getting close to lunch time. So I'm thinking about this amazing hamburger that I had in Tokyo. I can't really say that was life changing but good.

Tim Ferriss: It does sound like it positively impacted your life. Was there anything special about the hamburger that comes to mind?

Phil Libin: So there's this place in Ginza that makes smoked stuff, which is kind of unusual in Japan. They're not really a smoked food culture. But this place just makes smoked everything, smoked hamburgers, smoked olive oil, and smoked soy sauce and smoked rice and eggs.

And it's just amazingly good. And they make the world's best hamburger. My favorite hamburger in the world is in this place. And they also make amazing eggs. They've got these beautiful orange in color, totally fresh eggs that they can put on stuff.

And the last time I was there, actually, about a year ago, I decided I would try to get them to put a fried egg on my hamburger. And this took like 45 minutes of like intense negotiation. And they were very skeptical about putting this egg on this hamburger like it had never been done before. I was like come on. And then, they were really nervous about disappointing me. They weren't sure how to do it. So it was like about 45 minutes.

Tim Ferriss: I'm cackling because this is so Japanese. I love it.

Phil Libin: Yeah. About 45 minutes of convincing them and then exactly how to fry the egg and put it on top. And so they finally did it. And I had it, and it was amazing because the only way you can improve the world's best smoked hamburger is to put a perfectly fried, runny egg on it. It was great. But they were very – you could tell they were deeply uncomfortable with this whole experience. And then, I went back there a year later, and it's on the menu.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, wow.

Phil Libin: So I was like my contribution to Japanese cuisine.

Tim Ferriss: Is it called the Libin?

Phil Libin: No, they didn't name it after me. I was kind of pissed.

Tim Ferriss: Kind of bummed.

Phil Libin: Yeah. I don't think they know my name.

Tim Ferriss: The man with no name. That's probably how you're listed on the reservation. They don't want to summon you to put them into more uncomfortable culinary situations. What was the name of the place? Do you recall?

Phil Libin: It's called Ginza Engai. And it's so good.

Tim Ferriss: Ginza Engai, very cool.

Phil Libin: That's probably the best sub $100.00 purchase in the past year or so.

Tim Ferriss: Wow. Well, next time I'm there, I'll have to check out Ginza Engai. It's a very run down, cheap part of Tokyo, for those people wondering.

Phil Libin: Hey, it was significantly less than $100.00. Even in Ginza, you can get a hamburger for less than that.

Tim Ferriss: I think Ginza literally means the golden throne or the golden seat. But it's a fancy neighborhood, easy to get to. And I think that is also, correct me if I'm wrong, I might be getting this totally wrong, but the Jiro Dreams of Sushi –

Phil Libin: It's in the same building.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. It's in the same subway station building.

Phil Libin: It's in the same building, right. It's right there, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: If anyone listening hasn't seen Jiro Dreams of Sushi, very well worth watching. It's actually a good segue. So that movie is chock full of routines. It's very methodical in that restaurant. What are your morning rituals? What do the first 60 minutes of your day look like on a day that is one that you're free to design? Sort of your ideal first 60 minutes?

Phil Libin: Oh, well, I don't know if I've had an ideal day in a long time. My actual day is I wake up, and I grab my phone. And I see if there are any emergencies. Usually, there aren't any.

Tim Ferriss: What time do you wake up?

Phil Libin: I don't really have a fixed schedule. I don't have kids, so it's fairly easy to not wake up at any particular time. So I usually wake up a couple of hours before my first meeting. Maybe two to three hours before my first meeting just so I have time to catch up on a little bit of work before I head to the office. So if my first meeting is at 9:00, I'll wake up at 6:00 or 6:30. But usually, I'm not a morning person. So I try to schedule my meanings a little bit later. So sometimes, I'll sleep until 8:00 or something.

And then, I'll kind of walk around the house for 45 minutes drinking coffee usually with my phone in my hand checking on various things, and it gets started slowly. What I would like is I'd like to have my digest of the day be more automatic.

I would like to hear about what's going to happen, what do I need to know about. I've experimented with setting up various ways where I can maybe like have an RSS feed that I can have read to me or something like that. And I've had mixed success with that. But it would be cool to work on something like that.

Tim Ferriss: And that's the digest like your primer for the day to come?

Phil Libin: Yeah. That would be kind of cool because I find that, at that time of the morning, I don't really want to be making decisions. And I definitely don't want to be talking to people. But my brain is still spongy at that point. It's a good time to soak in here's what's going to happen. Here's what I'm going to need to start thinking about. That's productive. I hate early morning meetings. Those tend not to go well for me.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, I know the feeling. And do you have any particular evening rituals or ways that you prep for the next day that help you get off to a good start?

Phil Libin: I don't anymore. I used to. So when I was meditating for about a year or so, I would try to meditate for 20 minutes every day in the evening. And then, I just started being too tired. So I just fell asleep in the middle of it, which isn't super good. And so at this point, I don't really have any particular thing. I've gone back and forth. I tend to try out a lot of the sort of faddish things. So I've tried don't look at a screen for the last few hours. Just read a physical book or don't watch TV or look at a laptop. So I've done that. But that didn't really seem to make much of a difference. Plus, I don't really have trouble sleeping.

I sleep pretty well. I think I'm just lucky. I'm just sort of wired up where, when I go to bed, I fall asleep regardless of what else I was doing. I'm looking forward to getting the Thync machine and maybe using that to calm down a little bit before sleep. But, at this point, I don't have any kind of fixed routine.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

For people interested in exploring the paths that you've explored for thinking about meaning, why we're here, purpose, etc., we touched on stoicism briefly, but if you had to recommend one to three books that you have found very thought provoking, what would you recommend?

Phil Libin: So I would say The Clock and the Long Now, definitely. That's just as sort of to set the stage for how to think about things. It's

great. I think a book that really had a profound influence on me pretty early on was The Selfish Gene by Dawkins. And I think that was just reissued in some 25th anniversary edition or something that I just saw, which is sort of sad that it was 25 years ago that I read it.

So that's definitely worth reading for just all sorts of brain expanding ideas. And then, in terms of philosophy, there's a good introduction to stoicism that I read about a year ago when I first started looking into this. I forget the author, but the title is A Good Life.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. That is a good synopsis.

Phil Libin: Yeah, and it was pretty good. The writing itself wasn't particularly shining. But it captured the ideas and presented them in a fairly modern way pretty elegantly. So that was a good jumping off point to a bunch of other stuff. So if I had to give three, I would say those three. But really, I think the important thing for me is to really try to have a coherent philosophy of life. And I think a lot of people don't. They sort of think it's pretentious to pretend that you can have a coherent philosophy.

Tim Ferriss: But why is that important to you? What does it allow you to do or help you do?

Phil Libin: It just kind of frames everything, it gives a reason for things. I think this is well understood, right, motivation. So if you're trying to, philosophy aside, you're just trying to communicate with people. You're a CEO, and you're trying to get people to do what you want, it's proven that it's much more effective to give people the reason. And it actually turns out that the reason doesn't really matter that much. What matters is that there is a reason. So if you say hey, you should do this, it's like far more effective to say, hey, you should do this because X, Y, and Z.

And it turns out that, even if the people don't even understand the X, Y, and Z, as long as they've heard a reason, it just fits much more neatly into the brain than if they haven't. So having a reason just makes smart people far more productive and effective.

And that's just very true of me. I want to have a reason for things. I don't want to feel like I'm doing things shrouded by this existential mystery. I want to have a structure to think about why I am making certain decisions and having a coherent philosophy makes that possible.

Tim Ferriss: So coherent philosophy, would it be comparable in some ways to the 10 commandments where it's like if you're like should I covet my neighbor's wife or not? I'm not sure. It's like well, no. It says do not covet they neighbor's wife. Therefore, decision made and that's the reason? Do you view it as a set of guidelines and a framework for decision making in life for simplifying things? Or is it more than that?

Phil Libin: The 10 commandments wouldn't serve this purpose for me just because they don't actually answer the why. The way the 10 commandments are phrased –

Tim Ferriss: They don't have the because.

Phil Libin: Right. That's exactly the cognitively wrong way to do it. Those are just commandments.

They're not explanations. Now, there is a lot of religious theory and thought about the why. So if you're a religious person, and you want to base your life around the 10 commandments, that's probably possible. And it's probably possible to actually read quite a bit of other commentary that actually give compelling reasons, if that's the most appealing thing. So I kind of prefer to have the why rather than just the what. And I don't have the exact answers, obviously. But I think I'm getting a better and better feeling that things aren't random. There is a purpose.

And I can work towards making the world better in this specific way in which I want it to be made better. And that feels great. And that's much more motivating than kind of getting up and following orders or getting up and not understanding why.

Tim Ferriss: So is your intention then to communicate this to employees or partners? Or is really something for your own internal use?

Phil Libin: Oh, well, I'm definitely pretty apprehensive about talking about anything that sounds like this to employees. The last thing I want is to be imposing any kind of philosophical world view on people. So if we're having off the record conversations over a few drinks, I'm always happy to talk about it. But yeah, this is not a – my mission in life is not to convince anybody of anything. I just want to have something for myself.

Tim Ferriss: You don't want to be Phil of the Branch Dividians? That's not your call? The book that you mentioned I looked up, the stoic

overview is by William Irvine. And it's *A Guide to the Good Life*. And the subtitle is *The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy*, which is a good overview.

Phil Libin: It is. It really is. And it's not what I thought it was. I remember studying stoicism in high school or whatever.

And I think I had all the wrong ideas about what it is. It was a very interesting read.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it's helpful because it disabuses people of the notion that stoics are I remember the description I heard at one point was being a stoic is like being a cow standing in the rain. And it's like no, it's not quite that serious or devoid of positive emotion. I know we have just a few minutes left. If you could have a billboard anywhere, what would it say, and where would you put it?

Phil Libin: Haven't we talked about this? This is one of my main goals in life.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, no. I don't think we have.

Phil Libin: Oh, yeah. One of the main things that I want to do is I want to be on a billboard advertising whisky in Japan. I want to be in a giant, Japanese whisky billboard totally Bill Murray style. But this is like a serious goal of mine. I've been sort of working towards it for a while.

I've talked to the right distillers. I think there's a chance it will happen.

Tim Ferriss: We should make this happen, yeah. Let me know if I can help.

Phil Libin: A giant billboard of me holding a glass of whisky in Tokyo. It's kind of like I've even figured out what it's going to say.

Tim Ferriss: What is it going to say?

Phil Libin: So just imagine it's me with a big glass of whisky. And the caption will say "Evernote helps you remember. Suntory helps you forget."

Tim Ferriss: That is fantastic.

Phil Libin: Yeah. It kind of feels like it needs to happen, right?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Or I just thought of another one. You could say, "Evernote is forever. Suntory is for tonight."

Phil Libin: Also good. We could have a whole series of these.

Tim Ferriss: You could. That's amazing. It makes me think of the commercial shoot from Lost in Translation when the director talks for like three minutes, and the guy is like more energy or whatever.

And he's like, "I think he said more than that."

Phil Libin: One of my favorite movies.

Tim Ferriss: It was so good. One of my favorite parts is actually an improvised part in that movie when he's waiting in the hospital waiting room, and those ladies are all cracking up. Just such a good movie. Advice to your 30-year-old self, if you had to give advice to your 30-year-old self, what would it be?

Phil Libin: If I had a time machine or something?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. If you had a time machine and could deliver advice to your 30-year-old self.

Phil Libin: If I had a time machine, so I'm 43 now, so I could go back 13 years and talk to my 30-year-old self, I would be like dude, don't worry about anything because in 13 years, you're going to have a time machine. Nothing else really matters.

Tim Ferriss: That is a good answer.

Phil Libin: So when I was 30, I was working on my second company, and I wasn't in love with it. I wasn't building it for myself. I was building it for somebody else. And I think what I would have said was stop taking people seriously when they say you have to worry about what the market wants and just build what you want. And I kind of wish I had gotten started with that in my 20's rather than in my mid 30's.

Tim Ferriss: Is there any other parting advice, or do you have an ask or suggestion for everybody listening?

Phil Libin: Well, everyone listening should, obviously, read every word of all of your books inside, forward, and back, especially the chapter in the *Four Hour Body* that's about me.

Tim Ferriss: That's right. The Excel spreadsheet, the weight tracking.

Phil Libin: That's right because it just makes sense because, obviously, you can't write a book about attaining the perfect body without having a chapter about me.

Tim Ferriss: And in the updated edition that will be published in a year or two, we'll talk about your pull up quest.

Phil Libin: My pull up quest is good. And there's actually a bunch more to say. I think since the last time we've seen each other, I've lost about 50 pounds.

Tim Ferriss: Wow. That's a sturdy, robust toddler right there.

Phil Libin: Yeah. Actually, I just went to like Getty Image Search or whatever, and I did a search for myself on Getty Images. And there were like eight years of pictures of me. And it's like I'm aging in reverse.

Tim Ferriss: That's great.

Phil Libin: It's kind of cool. Eight years ago, I'm 250 pounds, and I'm wearing a suit and tie, and I have a beard, and then just like slowly, over eight years, first, the suit disappears, then, the collar, the tie, the beard, 50 pounds. It's like I'm definitely in this localized minimize. It kind of looks like I'm aging in reverse, which is kind of cool, so I'm just going to assume that's going to continue forever. I don't see why it wouldn't.

But we'll see how it goes.

Tim Ferriss: It's like Benjamin Button but in real life.

Phil Libin: Exactly.

Tim Ferriss: The curious case of Phil Libin. That could be your memoir. Where can people find you online? Where can people connect with you on the social media? And where can they, of course, find out more about Evernote and give it a spin?

Phil Libin: Well, so Evernote is just evernote.com, or your favorite app store. And I am on twitter. I'm plibin. And also, happy to chat with anyone via email or anything else. I'm phil@evernote. My policy is I've been super lucky in just being able to get great advice from people when I ask. So if anyone actually wants to talk to me, my policy is I have to eat lunch anyway. So anytime anyone wants to come over for lunch, I'm happy to do that. So if anyone is in the

area, send me a note. And come on by for lunch if you actually want to talk.

Tim Ferriss: Your lunches may just become very exciting from this point forward. Well, Phil, you're always very generous with your time. You're always fun to hang out with. And there are many more topics we could discuss. So perhaps, sometime, we'll do a Round 2. People can let us know what other questions they might have for us to explore. And I'm looking at these questions in Evernote. I'm thankful for the product. I've used it for all of my books since we met. I've used it for planning the TV show. I've used it for all of the planning around the podcast. It is my go to sort to central repository for everything. So I want to thank you for that.

Phil Libin: Thank you, Tim.

Tim Ferriss: Of course. And I think we should have some whiskey soon and plan that billboard.

Phil Libin: Let's do it.

Tim Ferriss: All right, man. Thanks so much. I will talk to you soon.