The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts
Episode 116: Casey Neistat
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Tim Ferriss: – we just do a quick sound check. Casey, what did you have for breakfast this morning?

Casey Neistat: Honey Nut Cheerios, obviously.

Tim Ferriss: Honey Nut Cheerios. The breakfast of champions. All right. Bear with me one second.

[Theme music]

Hello, boys and girls. This is Tim Ferriss, and welcome to another episode of the Tim Ferris Show, where it is my job to deconstruct world-class performers. Whether they are chess prodigies, hedge fund managers, celebrities like the governator, Arnold Schwarzenegger, or legendary music producers like Rick Rubin – anyone in between – military, artistic, you name it – there are patterns that you can tease out. And it is my job to try to find the routines, the habits, the favorite books, the meals, the timing, everything that you can apply from their life to your own, to develop your own skills, to develop your own version of success, both in your personal and professional lives. And this episode is no exception. I had the chance to chat with Casey Neistat. We've been trying to get together for a very long time.

Casey is a fascinating filmmaker. He would also call himself a YouTuber. And if you look for his name on the interwebs, Casey Neistat – N-E-I-S-T-AT; he's also @caseyneistat on Twitter – you find headlines like the following from Adweek: "How Filmmaker Casey Neistat Gets Away with Murder." That was the headline. It talks about he effectively took a budget that Nike and used it to travel around the world with is friend, and then had Nike thank him for it.

Another headline: "From Teen Welfare Dad to YouTube Icon." Both accurate. Next headline: "Casey Neistat Can Pretty Much Do Anything That He Wants." So you see the pattern here. And it's a very fascinating story because Casey has done the opposite of what a lot of people feel you should do. In other words, he was a very popular indie director, had won all sorts of awards at Sundance,

popular on HBO, has a wall full of awards, and moved to self-publishing on the internet instead.

Now, most people look at going on YouTube as a starting point, a stair step to more traditional media and distribution. He did the opposite. He's a high school dropout, and we met through a very good friend of mine named Sep at the MIT Media Lab. And we cover a lot. We cover his history. We cover overcoming adversity. We talk about his decision to vlog, that is: put out one video per day, and how that decision made his popularity explode.

He's a quirky guy. He's very well known for running, so we talked about the physical aspect of his life. He still makes a lot of his own props. And there are lots of questions I wanted to ask. For instance: "If you are able to charge five, six figures, maybe more, for product placement in YouTube videos, why on earth would you start yet another company?" A startup, a tech startup. He's a fascinating guy. I love his work. And I hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I enjoyed it. Say hello to Casey, @caseyneistat: C-A-S-E-Y N-E-I-S-T-A-T. And, without further ado, please enjoy my conversation with Casey Neistat.

Casey, welcome to the show.

Casey Neistat: Great to be here.

Tim Ferriss: I have had so many requests from my fans to connect with you. And of course we have many mutual friends: Ryan Holiday, Sep Kamvar, very old buddy of mine, among others.

And I'm a fan of your work. So thanks for making the time.

Casey Neistat: Yeah. It's great to finally speak. I feel like you and I have tried to actually connect physically, on the phone. I think there was a text back and forth at one point in time. So it's nice to finally hear your voice.

Tim Ferriss: I think it's fated to happen. You know, things connect when they're intended to connect on some level. And, that having been said, you are in New York City and just had, it would seem like, the entire squadron of police cars from NYPD pull up outside your house. This isn't *The Professional* or anything. Is there any catastrophe pending outside of your window?

Casey Neistat: No. And I warned you of that before we started recording just to let you know, when you hear sirens in the background or whatever it

might be, not to be alarmed. But I think one of the biggest battles for me of being a filmmaker and making movies in New York City for 15 years now has been figuring out how to navigate the incessant noise pollution that is downtown Manhattan.

And to paint a little picture for your audience, my office is on the second floor facing Broadway. So that means it's at the exact height of all the exhaust pipes of these really loud buses that drive by. And I have single-pane windows. So I will try my best, but if you hear what sounds like some sort of battle taking place in the background, know that everything's fine; that's just New York City.

Tim Ferriss: I remember very distinctly this one night when I was working on my TV show and we had to do voiceovers. We had to do pickup lines. And we were filming – I'm not going to name the hotel – in a hotel room in New York City that was on the third or fourth floor at a very busy intersection. And literally every time I got three quarters of the way through any line – we tried this at two different times during the day – we had to start over and over and over. It was just the most maddening experience imaginable.

How do you contend with that, actually? We'll start there. Because I remember this joke that someone told me about audio, and they said, "Why does thunder come after lightning? Because even God has to wait for audio." Is that one of the biggest challenges of working in New York City? Or are there other challenges that people might not be aware of?

Casey Neistat: I think that's probably the most tactile. That's probably the easiest to point to. But I'd say, to digress here, it's more than just a battle that is recording audio for films, that there's this noise pollution in New York City. But my wife and I moved to Tribeca. We actually live on Broadway in New York City. And the grumbling of a garbage truck or a cement mixer or a bus – I've become so sensitive to it that I freak out when it goes by and my wife has to tell me to calm down.

And it's one of the biggest reasons why I want to leave this city now after 15 years. It's not just a noise like thunder or loud music. It's a noise that just kills all other noises. So it's like this black cloud of sound that prevents any communication or conversation or human interaction. It just destroys everything. And it wrecks my world. And I take it so personally.

Tim Ferriss: So you've been in the city then for 15 years, but you grew up in Connecticut? Is that right?

Casey Neistat: Yeah. I was born and raised in southeastern Connecticut, and I always sort of preface that by saying, "I'm from the poor part of Connecticut. I'm from the shitty part of Connecticut." When people think of Connecticut, they think of Greenwich and the fancy parts. And Connecticut has kind of another side to those tracks, and that's where I'm from.

Tim Ferriss: And is it true that you were on welfare at one point?

Because I was going to bring that up later in the conversation, but I've read that. Is that true? Ryan and I have talked about your background and how fascinating it is. But he told me that you had dropped out of high school, and then I had read that you were on welfare. But I was just hoping you could provide some context around those kind of early years.

Casey Neistat: Yeah. I had a troublesome adolescence: one of four kids, and my parents got a divorce when I was I think a freshman in high school. And I think it's always a real challenge for any family. But at that age, I think it's probably the most – I have a grown son now who's a senior in high school. And the freshman in high school, 13 years old, is such a vulnerable age for young people. And I didn't cope very well with the issues that were happening at home. And I ran away from home and moved in with this girl and got her pregnant, because that's what teenagers do. And I had a kid. My son was born 2 weeks after my 17th birthday.

And I never went back home after running away from home at age 15. I never went to my parents for money. When I say I left home, I proper left home. I never went back. And, yeah, when my kiddo was born, we were on welfare. We got free – let me think. What was it? We got free milk. And then there was something else. Welfare is: you get this credit card and you can spend money on anything. And then you get free milk and maybe free diapers. I don't really remember how it worked. It was a long time ago. But certainly it was very helpful at that time in my life.

Tim Ferriss: And how did the bridge from that point to film come about? We'll talk about some of your specific work, but how did that develop, the interest and foray into filmmaking?

Casey Neistat: It's funny, because, Tim, that question itself is something that I've only really started to examine in the last couple years of my career,

as people ask me more and more, and especially with the launch of my tech company. And, looking back, I think it's a pretty specific thing, which is that: as one of four kids, as the middle, sort of forgotten child – not the youngest, not the oldest, not the girl, but the *other* one; that was me – I always was sort of the loudest, to get the most attention, because nobody paid attention to me. That's what my psychiatrist says, anyway.

And I think when my older brother, Van, who I credit with getting me into filmmaking – when he showed me, in 2000 or 1999, how the first iMac – that big, blue, bubbly-looking iMac thing – how you could edit video on that, I just saw something that really captured my imagination. And when he and I edited the very first thing I edited, which was taking my – at the time – baby son to the zoo –

all of a sudden I saw this opportunity to take what was an idea or set of ideas that only existed in my head, and turn it into something tangible, turn it into something that I could then share with people. And for someone who had spent my whole life – then, all 18, 19 years of it – feeling like I'd never had a voice, all of a sudden, via filmmaking, I sort of felt like I had a voice; I had a loudspeaker.

Tim Ferriss: That makes perfect sense. And, from that feeling, let's flash forward for a second because I really want to introduce people to some of your work if they haven't seen it before. But could you talk about *Bike Lanes* or *Make It Count*, whichever came first?

Casey Neistat: Yeah. *Bike Lanes* came first. *Bike Lanes* is a really good example of that. How do I preface this? People ask, "Where do you come up with the ideas for your movies?" I always say, "Whatever affects me, whatever impacts me, whatever I care about is what I make a movie about."

And *Bike Lanes* was a movie I made in 2010 I think. Maybe it was 2011. I was given a summons from a police officer for riding my bike outside of the bike lanes, which, for starters, it turns out is not an actual infraction. But, beyond that, it really frustrated me because I wasn't breaking any laws and I felt I was doing something that was completely just. And I think what most people would have done is maybe gone to court and fought the $50.00 summons, and probably would have won and wasted half of their day in the process. But I redirected my anger and I made a movie that really expressed my frustration, but did it in a somewhat sardonic way.

And that movie went tremendously viral online. It was seen like five million times in its first day. And this is before I had an audience on YouTube. And at one point in time, Mayor Bloomberg actually had to respond to a question about the video in a press conference.

Tim Ferriss: That's amazing.

Casey Neistat: That's a really literal example of me being a frustrated kid and wishing I had a way for everyone to hear, and way to share my frustrations. And that movie is very much a compartmentalization of that exact emotion and outcome.

Tim Ferriss: Now, in concrete terms, can you give people a visual for what you ended up doing in that film? Because it's very Buster Keaton in a way.

Casey Neistat: The cop's argument was predicated on this idea that the bike lanes were there to keep you safe; the bike lanes are for cyclists. I was riding outside of the bike lanes; therefor I was unsafe and should be given a summons. So I made a movie where it just starts at the beginning where I say the cop said I had to stay in the bike lane no matter what. And "No matter what" is underscored. And I proceed to ride my bike around New York City, crashing into everything that is in the bike lanes, preventing people from actually cycling safely within the lanes themselves.

And that sort of crescendos when I crash into a police car that was parked in the middle of a bike lane.

Tim Ferriss: With something like that, the bike lanes, taking this frustration or dissatisfaction and scratching your own itch, which segues nicely into tech – and we'll get to that also. Almost all the best founders I know are scratching their own itch when they create a product or a service. For instance, with looking at the iPod batteries and whatnot. Have you had a case where you vented frustration in a public way that you regretted after the fact, or wish you had handled differently?

Casey Neistat: Regret's a strong word. But one that I look back on and sort of shake my head was – I was very young. When was this? I'm trying to come up with a year for you, Tim, and I don't know. But I was probably 22 or something like that. And I was a nobody then, so nobody knew who I was. And I had just made a movie with my brother about bicycle theft in New York City.

And they invited us on local morning news to talk about bike theft. And they wanted us to recreate a bike being stolen. And we showed up there and this woman who was the host of the morning news was so rude to us. Because we were just kids: we were two kids who showed up early in the morning. She was so rude to us and so mean to us. And then she swore at her intern in front of us. And were just like, "My God, this woman: who does she think she is?"

So we kind of pranked her on air, and my brother pretended to cut me when he was releasing the bike. And this was, I want to say, maybe when YouTube had just come out. It had to have been 2005, 2006. And that scene went crazy viral. And it's basically this woman talking to the camera about what's taking place: "Here they are demonstrating a bike lock."

And then all of a sudden I start screaming and drop to the ground and squeeze ketchup packets all over myself. And at no point in time did anyone, especially the woman, think that it was real. I'm not a very good actor. I had ketchup packets all over me, and my brother was shaking his head. But her response is what got people so excited, because she freaked out. She very quickly turned into that werewolf that was swearing at interns earlier in the day.

And, in any event, it became this huge story. It was all over the *New York Post*. They vilified her. Whatever. It was what it was. But looking back at it, I'm not a huge fan of pranks. I'm not a huge fan of a laugh that's at someone else's expense. And I think so much of the response to that was out of context. The world didn't know that I was doing this because this woman was mean to me. The world just saw me being a prankster. And that's an image that I don't like to project.

So the fact is, miss-contextualized, I think was a silly thing.

Tim Ferriss: That was the *Bike Thief*.

Casey Neistat: Yeah. And not the video itself. Just this little prank that we pulled on air. It lacked the societal or cultural relevance of maybe some of my other yippie movies that definitely had a purpose. This was much more of just being a jerk prankster kind of guy, which is definitely not how I would describe anything else that I've ever done in the ten years of my career.

Tim Ferriss: When someone asks you, "What do you do?" these days, how do you answer that? I'm sure it depends on the context. But, in general, how do you respond to that question.

Casey Neistat: "I'm a YouTuber."

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

Casey Neistat: It used to say in my Twitter bio that I'm Casey Neistat, creator of the HBO series. At one point in time I said "Award-winning filmmaker." I don't think I gave myself that title, but others – it's not an inaccurate title.

And now, when I just take a big step back and I say, "How do I want to be identified?" I think being a YouTuber, being like every other kid on YouTube is maybe the most flattering context for me to live in. I like "Tech entrepreneur" but it's just such a pretentious kind of stupid title. If there were an easier way to say that, if there were a less annoying way to say "Tech entrepreneur," I'd say that's it. Because 90 percent of my time is my technology company and 10 percent is creating YouTube videos. But 90 percent of my efforts in the tech company are internal-facing, and not external-facing. And 100 percent of what I do on YouTube goes straight out to the world. So, for all of those reasons, I identify most as a YouTuber.

Tim Ferriss: And let's talk about one of your most, if not the most – correct me if I'm wrong – popular videos on your YouTube channel, which is *Make It Count*. Is that still the most popular?

Casey Neistat: I think so. I don't know. The one I released 38 minutes ago I hope gets more views than that. But we'll see. Yeah. *Make It Count* is a really interesting case study, Tim, because that was such an inflection point in my career as a filmmaker. Historically I had directed advertisements as my primary means of income. Which is a really convoluted, unnecessarily complicated, somewhat ridiculous process, where just a tremendous amount of money is wasted, and at the end of the day you turn out something that is sort of creativity by committee, which is mushy, invisible, and no one cares about. And that's how I describe 99 percent of all advertising that's done.

And after my HBO show when I was trying to figure out what to do with my career, I went to the production company that represented me, the company that brought me my advertising gigs, and I said, "All I want to do is make awesome videos, put them on

the internet, and then find companies that will give me money to make awesome videos like my other videos, but I'll do it for them."

And my production company shook their head and me and they said, "Good luck. It will never work like that." So I immediately stopped working with them and I went on my own. I kind of went rogue. And somewhere in there, Nike came to me and I did this tiny project with them which led to a larger project, which was a three-internet-movie deal. And the first two movies where right down the line; they were what you'd expect. I had big, huge, $100 million athletes in them. They were very well-received. I loved making them. But when it came time to make the third movie, I was really burnt out from the process.

And at the ninth hour, I called my editor up and I said, "Hey, let's not make this advertisement. Let's not made this movie. Instead, let's do something I've always wanted to do, which is: let's just take the entire production budget and travel the world until we run out of money. And we'll record that. We'll make some sort of movie about that." And he said, "You're crazy, but sure."

It wasn't his ass; it was mine. And that's exactly what we did. And *Make It Count* became this video about running around the world and sort of chasing after what matters to you. And that was the point. That was the message of the campaign: to make it count, to make every moment in life count. So there was something poetic about the fact that, by us going rogue and taking this budget and doing something we weren't supposed to do, that that *something*, that narrative was so perfectly in line with their messaging that, in the end, we had something that they were tremendously excited about. And I'm not sure anymore, Tim, because I haven't checked on YouTube, but that was Nike's most watched video on the internet for a number of years. And everyone was really excited about the way that it turned out.

Tim Ferriss: What was your phrasing in the first phone call or email when you gave Nike the head's up on what you'd actually done?

Casey Neistat: Sure. So, a little context for your listeners out there. The video literally opens with scrolling text that says, "Nike gave me a budget to make them a commercial. Instead I blew the budget traveling the world." And that's literally what happened. So, some details around that to color in what happened specifically: firstly, this was the smallest budget of all three budgets for all three videos. So this is the kind of budget that I would say would be

equivalent to what Nike typically spends on craft services, what they typically spend on snacks for one of their huge advertisements. So there wasn't that much accountability.

On top of that, they knew me, they trusted me, and they weren't working with me because they thought I could make them a perfect TV commercial. They were working with me because they wanted something different. So I called them before I did this, before I took off, and I said, "Look, I'm not going to do the treatment."

A treatment is like a script. "I'm not going to follow the script. I'm going to do something different." And they said, "Okay. What are you going to do?" And I said, "I don't know. But I'm going to travel and it's going to be great." And they just said – it was one executive in particular. It was a guy named Alex Lopez. He's still at Nike and he's an incredible creative genius. And he was like, "Casey, just don't screw me over here." And I said, "Alex, no promises. But we're going to go."

And then we were sort of like radio blackout for the next ten days. How we did that movie – we hit 15 countries in 9 days – we had a girl here in New York City, and she was working pretty much around the clock, and she'd get an email from me from whatever internet café I was in, saying, "We want to go here next." And then she would figure out how to make it happen. Until the money dried up.

Tim Ferriss: And when you were doing that – you've done a fair amount of traveling – do you have any particular – routines or tricks for maintaining sanity, or at least minimizing completely burning yourself out when following that type of schedule?

Casey Neistat: Well, firstly, that type of schedule is a unique type of schedule. That is like DEFCON 1, a total chaos schedule that's completely unsustainable, unrealistic, and that I would advise no human being on earth to every attempt. And, to add one detail to that, I did it with my best friend, Max. And it wasn't until our sixth night of travel that we slept horizontally. We were keeping track. So we were sleeping upright, coach seats, either on airplanes or on buses, going from Zambia to Kenya. We never ever laid down. And I remember our feet were so swollen that we couldn't get them into our shoes. We just had these big, fat, swollen feet.

So I recommend it for no one. That said, I still travel quite a bit. And I consider myself a real expert when it comes to traveling.

Tim, you're someone who has probably defined what it means to hack life better than anyone else. When it comes to traveling, though, I think that I've got a really good grip on where all the loopholes and shortcuts are to really remove the hate that is commercial aviation.

Tim Ferriss: Could you give people a taste?

Casey Neistat: Sure. And it's funny, because you tweeted earlier today –

Tim Ferriss: And I know you have a video. I saw some fans link back to it. So I'd love for you to give a little bit of color on that.

Casey Neistat: You tweeted earlier today, "What should I ask Casey in our interview today?" and somebody tweeted back something negative about the movie I made about how to get free upgrades: do my investors get angry because I only fly first class? And the truth is: if you fly enough, you can really crack the whole system that is flying commercial.

That said, it's very important to say this loud and clear: if you don't fly a ton, if you don't spend at least 200,000 miles in the air a year, which is about 6 times around the earth, none of these tricks work. These only work if you fly a lot. But if you fly a lot and you fly with one airline and you really climb to the top of the heap, which is airline status, and you build relationships, you can almost always ensure that you will get special treatment.

And, after flying a lot, it kind of makes sense. If you're the airline, why should you cater to a mass audience that just goes on Kayak in search of the cheapest flights and then jumps on a plane? There's no loyalty there. There's nothing there that incentivizes someone to fly with you. But someone like me who spends ungodly amounts of money flying and traveling every year: of course they want to court my influence and my loyalty. And that courtship is something that you can exploit to your own benefit. And I guess that's how I would describe what it means to hack commercial flight.

Tim Ferriss: If you're traveling and trying to travel light, but you're going to be recording video, what does your go-to kit look like? What type of gear?

Casey Neistat: Well, I always travel light. It doesn't matter whether I'm going somewhere for an overnight or going somewhere for a month and a half; I always have the same setup, which is one small – as big as it

can possibly be while still being a carry-on – rolling suitcase, and then my backpack. And all of my camera gear is in my backpack, and my laptop, and everything else is in the rolling suitcase. But literally I can't fit a pair of socks into my backpack. So I always have to have the second bag with the miscellaneouses and clothing in it. But camera gear is pretty cut and dried. I always have a point-and-shoot, and then I always have an SLR.

Tim Ferriss: What type of point-and-shoot and SLR do you currently favor?

Casey Neistat: This is not by any means an endorsement, because I can talk ad nauseam about why this hardware is absolutely terrible and about everything that's wrong with it. But it's my current favorite. So, again, this is not an endorsement in any capacity. But I currently use the Canon 70D as my main shooter, including all my vlogs. And I do that because it has the best auto focus technology of any SLR on the market. And when you're shooting with one hand, you can't be pulling focus. So that's why I use that.

And then my latest point-and-shoot is the Sony RX100, which has been great. But there are some reliability issues there, which is exactly what I expect from Sony: reliability issues. Far from perfection.

Tim Ferriss: What does your post-production look like? What are the tools that you use for editing and post?

Casey Neistat: I just use Final Cut X, which is really terrible software.

It's just not great. There are various real reliability concerns around it. And it almost feels like it's been handicapped by Apple to appeal more to the consumer and prosumer than the professional market, which is antithetical to Final Cut 7, and every previous iteration, which was absolutely professional editing software. I think they make this for people that don't consider themselves pros but want a lot of options. So there are some benefits to that and some detractions to that. And I feel like I've sort of maxed out what this software is capable of, and now I'm really starting to feel the fact that it's not as capable as other professional-grade editing software.

Tim Ferriss: Is there any other software that you use in addition to that?

Casey Neistat: Not really. I'm all about speed and efficiency. I upload every single day.

So, with that, you lack the opportunity to spend a tremendous amount of time color grading or bringing in after effects to clean up, or doing the kinds of things that technologies and software enable us to do. I have much less of an appreciation for what technology can bring to my work, and much more of an appreciation for the craft of storytelling and communicating ideas and sharing messages, which does not necessitate the kinds of things that technology enables you to do today.

Tim Ferriss: So looking at other people taking a stab at YouTube, what are the biggest wastes of time, generally speaking, in your mind? Or how do novices waste the most time, whether it's in the filming stage or in post or otherwise?

Casey Neistat: I think it's less technical than anything else. I think that the biggest waste of energy and resources on YouTube is: you see YouTube creators trying to copy and be exactly like someone else.

And the only thing that succeeds on YouTube are people who are thinking outside the box, doing new things. And I can talk about that until the cows come home because it's something I believe in so profoundly. But YouTube is built on originality and built on unfounded genres and styles of content creation. I think it was in 2011: YouTube spent $200 million on giving these huge budgets to known production entities; that is like the MTVs of the world; like LACMA, for example, and all these big entities. $200 million so they'd start YouTube channels so original, high-quality content would be made just for YouTube. And every one of them failed.

And at the same time that they were failing and those 200 million dollars were evaporating, all of these individuals, all these young people, creating content that fit into no categories, came up on YouTube in a huge way.

And now it's those original creators who are defining what YouTube is, who are defining it in a way that does not exist inside any of the norms of filmmaking. In fact, almost without exception, most of the successful content creators on YouTube don't come from a filmmaking background. But instead they've metastasized what is a capability elsewhere, an understanding elsewhere, and they've turned that into success on YouTube. Tyler Oakley was big on Tumblr. He was big blogger and he turned that into being a vlogger, and now he's this tremendously influential, essentially, talk show host, which is what he does via YouTube.

Tim Ferriss: And so I'll tell you how I first came in contact with your work. I was having a conversation with a friend of mine named Jason Harris, who works at a company called Mekanism. They do a lot of work with YouTubers.

And he's a very smart guy. And I was lamenting the fact that I felt like the ship had sailed on YouTube for me and that it was not the best fit because it was hard for me to find popular YouTubers who were not appealing primarily to say the 12-to-15-year-old demographic with super-fast cuts, and with a very particular style. And I was pointed to your work because a number of folks including Jason said it was very smart and probably hit a similar demographic. Not so that I could copy it, but so I could look at it as a potential role model.

So for someone let's say in my shoes, where I'm comfortable with text; I'm comfortable with audio; haven't done as much video, although I've dabbled in television – I am fascinated by the allure and promise and direct connection that YouTube offers.

How would you suggest someone like me get started on YouTube? Would it be with a daily vlog? Would it be with something else? How should I get my feet wet and start getting enthusiastic about it?

Casey Neistat: I often get asked about what is the best way to achieve success on YouTube. And the truth is: if there were any one defined path, if there were anything that was quantifiable or anything that could be written out, I think a lot of people would follow that trajectory. The reality is pretty far from that, though. There are – I don't know what the exact number is, but I think it's 1.1 billion different channels on YouTube. And there are 400 hours of content uploaded every minute of every day to YouTube. So the vastness, the depth that is the ocean of YouTube, is this huge abyss that's very hard to stand out in. And the only thing that I can say, the only advice I ever give is: "Don't think. Consideration will not yield success on YouTube."

It's purely based around action. Some other things that I push for is: quantity matters. It's not just the quality of the work, but it's also the quantity of the work. People look to YouTube not to find great, well-made films; they look there for relationships.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: [Inaudible].

Casey Neistat: Yeah. I think that's why, when you look at – I don't know. Who can I pick on? Look at *Vanity Fair*. *Vanity Fair* is turning out this incredibly high-production, star-studded content. Nobody's watching it. Nobody gives a shit. That's not why people watch YouTube. There's no relationship there.

The reason why I am psyched to be considered and identified as a YouTuber versus a filmmaker is: YouTube, unlike filmmaking, is not a one-way street. It's this reciprocal, symbiotic relationship that your content has with a very specific audience, and that that audience has with your content. So, to succeed within there is very challenging. And I think the only way to do it is to find your own path.

The only way to find that path is to act, is to start going.

Tim Ferriss: And let me dig into that. Because I like this thread. And I'll just draw a parallel in writing. So I remember at one point I was talking to Po Bronson, a writer I admire, and I asked him what he does when he feels blocked. And he said, "Write about what angers you. Write about what makes you upset." And I thought that was very interesting advice. But that proved to be very helpful, and has been helpful for me when I feel like I'm having trouble getting started.

Do you have any suggestions? I'm happy to act. And I think a lot of people listening would be as well. But what might be some angles or questions or ways they can get started? Forget about success; just to start getting content out there.

Casey Neistat: Sure.

I think that what YouTube uniquely possesses in its audience over any other distribution outlet is that the audience is so fine-tuned to bullshit. Their bullshit detectors are so highly refined that even the slightest amount of bullshit will set off their alarm, and then you'll be rejected; the audience, the community will reject you immediately. So a great place to start is one of honesty, one of frankness.

And that sounds hyperbolic or wishy-washy, but the truth is: being yourself on camera is an incredibly difficult thing to do. It's why the David Lettermans and the Jimmy Fallons of the world are so brilliant: because when you're watching Jimmy Kimmel on TV, you really believe that that's who this guy is. And when you see someone who's uncomfortable in front of the camera, which is the

vast majority of us, it reeks of something else, which maybe is something that's contrived or something that's forced or something that's faked. So I always say: start from a place of honesty. And that's where the quantity comes into play.

Because the more you're doing something, the more comfortable you become with it. So I think the combination of those two. And if you throw in a little bit of passion – what truly motivates you? What are you truly interested in? – I think you can find an actionable recipe for building a foundation on YouTube.

Tim Ferriss: So it seems like – and correct me if I'm wrong – that putting out one video per day: that decision has made your popularity really explode. So I'd be curious to know why you think that has worked, or why that has happened. And then a question from a fan that came up was: you said no to vlogging before because you felt like it could make things feel contrived. How do you feel about this now?

Casey Neistat: Well, those are two questions. So let me –

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Tackle one at a time.

Casey Neistat: – tackle the first one, which is about popularity and YouTube.

The reason why I started doing vlogging was because – I have to unpack this a little bit – when I started my technology company, which is a social product – it's a social network – I always knew that I would need to lean on my own social reach and my own influence to build a core base of users for my product. And then as I began and as my tech company and the construction of it really began, my social reach started to atrophy because I wasn't creating content, because I had to run a company.

So in really trying to examine, "How can I address both of these issues?" which is: promote my own social influence so it will help my company, I just made a decision on my birthday of this year, my 34th birthday, that I was going to start daily vlogging. And, coincidentally, I was on this beautiful, lovely trip with my family in an exciting location in the Caribbean. And I had a lot of material those first four days, a lot of beautiful material to show off. And that's what I did.

And when I got home, the fourth blog or the fifth blog I ever made was me returning to work. And I say into the camera, "I don't know how sustainable this is. Because I live a fairly ordinary life

where I show up at work at 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning, I leave work at 7:00 at night, I go home to my family and I go to bed. There's not much in there that warrants vlogging every single day.

And the reason why I bring that specific up, Tim, is because that dovetails with your next question, which is: I used to reject vlogging because it was a little bit of "Is the dog wagging the tail or is the tail wagging the dog?" in that: I don't want to be living my life so it's interesting for my vlog. And the reason why those two points dovetail so nicely is because when I said that on the vlog, when I said "I don't know how to make this interesting now that I'm back in my daily life," I understood vlogging as a visual, public diary of one's life. And I think that's where I was wrong.

And what this thing that I call a vlog – and I embrace that title, that it's a vlog – what it's become is instead a daily show for me. And that show sometimes, like in the vlog I posted yesterday, for example, is very much so a diary. It was my wife and I and my daughter going on this crazy trip out to Queens to try to buy some funny clothes for a wedding that we're going to in a few months. It was very much so a diary.

But then you look at some of my other vlogs, which are just me sitting in front of a camera talking to my audience about why I'm so passionate about filmmaking, or something much more personal. And instead of a vlog, it feels much more like a confessional. And some of my vlogs are examining technical things like my electric skateboard. I've got entire vlogs dedicated to how this thing works. And some of them are about building things. And some of them are about how I structure my daily life.

So really, I just post every 24 hours. And I call it a vlog because that's the easiest thing for me to call it that people will understand.

But the truth is it's not a diary of my life. Instead, it's this outlet for whatever it is that interests me.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

Casey Neistat: So I hope that answers the question from the fan. It's that when I said that comment about vlogging, I understood vlogging to be one thing. And then, in practice – and this really reinforces that idea that I said about action being so important – in practice it really manifested as something wildly different from what I originally understood it to be.

Tim Ferriss: And, in your daily practice, your daily routine, I've read that you might take up to eight hours to edit one of your videos. I don't know if that's true. We can get a comment on that. But how much time do you spend interacting with fans or viewers on YouTube, Twitter, all these different social platforms? On an average daily basis, what would you say?

Casey Neistat: I mean, in aggregate, I would say it's less than an hour.

I try my best, but it's very hard. Usually I check into my daily upload about an hour after it's been posted, I see who's commenting and what they're saying, and I jump in and try to reply to as many as I possibly can. On Twitter – you're pretty great on Twitter, Tim. I've been following you forever. But you respond when you can: you've got a minute of downtime, no one's looking; you're sitting in a car; you're waiting for something. Then you just jump on Twitter and you reply to a few tweets. But I would say there's nothing more defined than that for me. And I'd love to change that. I'd love to figure out a way to have it be much more inclusive of my audience. But, regrettably, time is fungible, and to dedicate more time than I do currently to my audience would mean to take it away from somewhere else. I'm just not in a position to do that.

Tim Ferriss: And I do the same thing, by the way: when I post a blog post, typically I'll post at night so I can catch any errors that fans will point out immediately.

So I'll try to hit, say, the UK or New Zealand, and then answer questions the following morning, or along those lines. And it's something that you just have to batch. But what was your first paid gig related to film? Or when did you realize that you could actually give this a go as a profession?

Casey Neistat: Awesome question. The first paid gig I ever had was to make a happy birthday video for this guy named Tom. Tom's husband was turning 50 years old, and Tom contacted my brother and I and said, "Hey, I've seen some of your little art movies floating around the art world." This was like 2002. And he was like, "I'd love to hire you to make a movie for my husband's birthday." And we're like, "Okay, great."

And he's like, "Just let me know what it costs." And all I knew at the time was that he was a rich guy. So we debated for days: "What do we charge this guy?" And we came back with what we saw was the most ambitious number we could possibly go to him

with, which was: we asked for $5,000.00. And the truth is: we were willing and ready to do it for $100.00. But we knew he was a rich guy, and we knew that he liked us, and we knew that he had bought really fancy art, so maybe just maybe we'd get away with it. And he didn't bat an eye at it; he said, "No problem." And then he said, "Here are a list of people I'd love for you to interview about my husband." And it was like: "President Clinton, Senator Hillary Clinton."

Tim Ferriss: Wow.

Casey Neistat: All the members of their cabinet. All of these triple-A rock-star politicians. We were just like, "Holy smokes. Who is this guy?" And it was Fred Hochberg, who is currently the chairman of the Import-Export Bank.

And his husband is a guy named Tom Healy, and Tom is currently the chairman of the Fulbright commission, so they're probably one of the biggest power couples out there. And they're two lovely guys who, to this day, I'm very close friends with. And we got our $5,000.00 for that gig, and it was a huge deal.

Tim Ferriss: That's amazing. Did they just email you through the contact email on your website? Or how did that connection happen?

Casey Neistat: There was no website back then. Back then, I was working for $10.00 an hour as an artist's assistant. And, in the interim, my brother Van and I were making these little movies in my apartment that we would post on literally Apple iDisk, and we would email around the link so people could download the .mov files and watch them. And somehow one of the artists we knew or something like that was like, "You've got to check out these two young maniacs that I've met who make these crazy little videos."

And he saw it, and he was like, "I don't want boring video for Freddie's birthday. I want something that is going to keep people laughing." And he gave us this assignment. We came back with something absolutely crazy that involved – when we met with Bill Clinton, they had a prepared statement on his teleprompter. And when the Secret Service left the room to go get the president, I deleted all the information off the teleprompter.

And while the president is sitting there in his seat, waiting for the teleprompter – I just remember him being like, "Nancy, what's going on here?" – I rushed over to him, with my hands down so I didn't get tackled by security, and I was like, "Hello, Mr.

President. My name's Casey. I'm here to do this interview with you for Fred Hochberg. Here's an idea I had." And he started laughing. He was like, "Boys, I love it." And we hit record and we had the nugget recorded. Before they got the teleprompter up, he was out of the room. And when he said the joke that we had him say in front of the 500 people at Le Cirque, where we showed the movie for Fred's birthday, it brought down the house.

Tim Ferriss: That's a ballsy move. But I shouldn't be surprised. You're a pretty ballsy, bold guy to start with.

Casey Neistat: I mean, back then it was definitely a nothing-to-lose kind of situation. We were absolutely nobodies. I was getting paid $10.00 an hour. I couldn't afford food back then, and that's not hyperbole. That is fact.

Tim Ferriss: Let me take a step back. When you think of the word "successful," who is the first person who comes to mind, and why?

Casey Neistat: That's a tough question. My grandmother. My grandmother's probably the most successful – she passed away three years – four years – good God. I've stopped keeping track. She passed away at 92. And she's my hero; she's my muse; she's my everything. And the reason why is she started tap dancing when she was six years old. She was a little fat girl and her parents made her do something to lose the weight, so she started tap dancing.

And she loved with it. And she fell in love with something at age six and she didn't stop tap dancing until the day before she died at age 92. She died on a Monday morning at age 92 and the first thing we had to do after she died was call her 100 students to say she wasn't going to make class that day.

Tim Ferriss: Wow.

Casey Neistat: And for me, it's just like: she was never rich. She actually never had a whole lot of money. She was a tap dance instructor. But she dedicated all the proceeds from her tap recitals to the American Cancer Society to raise money to beat cancer, because cancer took her father. So she's a total hero and a philanthropist, despite not having the means.

And then on top of that, what is the ultimate quantification of success? For me, it's not how much time you spend doing what you love. It's how much time you spend or how little time you

spend doing what you hate. And this woman spent all day every day doing what she loved.

All day. She spent almost no time doing the things she didn't' want to do. She just did what she loved the most in life, which was dancing. And dancing was her life. You'd wake up in the morning; she was dancing. You'd go to bed at night; she was watching Fred Astaire on TV. And 86 years of her 92 years of existence she spent doing nothing but exactly what she loved. And I just can't think of a higher benchmark of success than that.

Tim Ferriss: How has that impacted you on a daily basis? And I'll rephrase that. When you wake up in the morning and you don't feel like putting out the video – do you have those days? And, if so, what do you do in those circumstances? What do you say to yourself?

Casey Neistat: Well, I always want to put out the video. I don't always want to make the video, Tim. So, to give a little structure that, what my day looks like is: I wake up at – 4:30 in the morning is when my alarm goes off.

This is seven days a week. And I edit. I finish my edit from the night before. The edit gets done usually between 6:30 and 7:00. From 7:00 to 7:45, it's processing, uploading, designing and color correcting the thumbnail that goes on YouTube, preparing the post so it's up; it's live; it's rendered; it's fully processed. And it goes live at exactly 8:00 a.m. That's seven days a week. Immediately after 8:00 a.m., I work out, which usually involves running whatever I run, you know, 8 to 12 miles, or going to the gym. And then I'm in my office 9:30-ish. I live across the street from my office, so it's a pretty narrow commute.

And then I work in my office all day long. I usually try to get out of here by 6:30, race home, give the baby a bath, and then hang out with my wife for an hour and a half. She goes to bed at 9:00. And then I sit down and I edit, until I pass out at my computer, until 1:00 in the morning. I sleep usually on the couch until 4:30, which is three, four hours later.

I wake up and start over. And that is seven days a week for me. Sometimes on the weekend I spend less time in the office, but that's every day.

Tim Ferriss: That sounds brutal.

Casey Neistat: It's tough.

Tim Ferriss: So have you always needed very little sleep.

Casey Neistat: Yeah. I've never ever been a fan of sleep. I hate sleep. Sleeping and eating are like my two least favorite things to do. And I'm frustrated every day when I get tired, and I'm frustrated when I get hungry.

Tim Ferriss: I can help you with the latter; maybe not the tired. I've been doing all sorts of fasting experiments. What time do you eat breakfast, and what do you eat for breakfast?

Casey Neistat: I usually don't. I only eat, like I said, Honey Nut Cheerios, when you asked me earlier during our audio test –

Tim Ferriss: During the sound check, right.

Casey Neistat: – because whichever – I don't know who, but one of our team members at my tech company is a big fan of them, so there's always Honey Nut Cheerios and milk in my office. So when I hear somebody else's spoon clanking the porcelain, I'm like, "Ooh, Cheerios," and I get up.

But just because that's sugar and that's delicious. But no: I don't know that I am a big breakfast eater. I usually just wait until I get really hungry and then I eat until the hunger stops. And then I repeat that.

Tim Ferriss: Seems like the most natural way to go about it. As opposed to eating by the clock. I just have to mention: Honey Nut Cheerios – I had breakfast with Larry King for the first time not long ago. And we met at sort of a Jewish bagel shop, and he goes there every morning, and he eats Honey Nut Cheerios. So they have to keep it stocked at this place for me. I just thought that was one of the most unusual things I'd ever seen. But it seems like a number of top performers eat Honey Nut Cheerios for breakfast. So maybe there's something there.

Speaking of Larry King – I've always kind of idolized him for his ability to get people to open up – you've met so many successful people over the years in different professions.

Who has made you feel star-struck and why?

Casey Neistat: Who has made me feel star-struck? God, that is a tricky one. It's funny because I go to a lot of big celebrity events. And it never

really hits me with the kinds of people that you would think that it would hit me with. I'm trying to think. I met Jack Welch once in the street.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Casey Neistat: And for whatever reason, I was star-struck by him. I was so excited to meet him. But honestly, I don't know. Star-struck is an experience I don't know super well. And I guess the reason why is: I have about as much appreciation and understanding of that as I do when people get excited to meet me. And I say that right now, looking out – I have a monitor in my office that: the camera films just outside, the sidewalk.

And I can count: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 kids standing outside of my office waiting to see me.

Tim Ferriss: Wow.

Casey Neistat: That's every day. It never stops. And I have about as much understanding or ability to understand, empathize with those kids outside my office as I do the idea of getting star-struck.

Tim Ferriss: So why Jack Welch?

Casey Neistat: I have no idea. Maybe it's just because I had just finished one of his books, and I had all these ideas in my head that he had planted there, and that's something flattering. But I don't. I definitely see people as people, at face value. And I think that what you contribute and what you do is incredibly meaningful and important. But, at the end of the day, we are all people. And I think that it's tough for me to try to elevate someone else.

And in the same regard, when I see videos that auto-play on Facebook of Syrian refugees getting beaten on the Macedonian border by officers with clubs, I would say that I have – whatever that feeling of empathy would be for a movie star, I share that with them. Where I look at these people – I see Kanye West, and I'm like, "Okay, he's a person just like me." And I see someone holding a baby, getting beaten with a club while it's pouring rain out, and I say, "That person's just like me." And it's very hard for me to think of a human being as someone other than an equal.

Tim Ferriss: Right. And I realized I kind of walked over my own question, or probably walked over your answer to: "When you feel demotivated or that you don't want to make a video, what do you do?" Is it that

your regimented seven-day-a-week schedule just doesn't allow the space for that self-doubt?

Casey Neistat: Oh, no. I didn't answer the question either. I digressed into something. But no. It's very real. In waking up to edit, I never want to do it.

And yesterday it was Sunday morning, and I was like, "I'm not going to do it." And I didn't. I didn't get my post up until 1:00 in the afternoon. And there was a total mutiny on Twitter by my viewers. I don't want to do it. But the truth is – I can only equate it to climbing a mountain. I've climbed some really big mountains before, and when you're the closest to the peak is when you want to give up the most. But the return that is standing at the summit is such a victory that the minute you're up there, you just want to do it again, and you've forgotten about the pain.

So the hate that is the battle of the edit and the upload and the bullshit and the getting it done and the technical problems that are outside of your control and the camera not recording audio and every other hurdle that comes between you and uploading – all of that is absolved, all of that is erased the moment you click "Upload," and it's replaced with this sensation of adrenaline and wonderment and achievement and accomplishment that is having made something that I now get to share.

And that was true when I was making a birthday video that a couple hundred people in a room got to see. That was true when I was making videos of my son when he was a baby and I'd share then with my family. And that's certainly true of my daily uploads on YouTube that go out to a million people a day.

Tim Ferriss: You seem to be very contrarian. I don't know if you've always been that way. But you're also very well-spoken. So you dropped out of high school. How do you explain that? How did you develop that ability? And it's not to say that someone who drops out of high school can't be well-spoken. But I'm very impressed with how well-spoken you are. So I'd just be curious to know how you developed that.

Casey Neistat: I don't know. Maybe reading a lot. Or I always try to surround myself with people that are smarter than I am.

I mean, I can remember when I got my first real job when my – at the time – girlfriend was pregnant with my first kid and I was 16 years old, and I was in the back of a kitchen, and everybody just

sort of thought that I was an idiot, probably because of my age and the fact that I was kind of a dope, and I probably talked like an idiot then, as a tenth grade high school dropout whose only previous work experience was selling dime bags in the parking lot of high school – the lack of respect and what that felt like. And then I really remember – again: 16 years old in the kitchen of a really dumpy seafood restaurant getting paid $8.00 an hour – I really remember what would happen when I acted differently around these guys that I worked in the kitchen with, how they would treat me differently.

And every day became this sort of social study for me, this social experiment: how would they respond to me acting a certain way? And I remember when they would pick on me, instead of me trying to come up with quippy comebacks to them, I would just look them in the eye and not say anything.

And then the picking on me stopped immediately. And I guess that little experiment right there was something that had a huge impact on me. Because the more considered I am when I say things, the more I think before I speak and things like that, I think the more people respond in the way that I would hope people would respond. And the more I feel like I'm doing a good job of communicating whatever it is that I'm trying to say, whatever information that I'm trying to disseminate, the more satisfying it is for me. It feels great to be understood. So I do whatever I can that best services that.

As far as the educational part, or being an autodidact, I'm a big fan of reading. I'm a big fan of World War II. I always say I got all my understanding of business and how business and life works from studying the Second World War.

Tim Ferriss: Any particular books or documentaries or resources on World War II that you're a big fan of?

Casey Neistat: Oh yeah.

Probably my favorite, or at least my second-favorite book in the world: it's a textbook, and it's called *The Second World War*, by John Keegan. And it's literally just 1200 pages at size 6 font about the Second World War. And I remember getting in trouble showing up to work tired because I would be up all night long reading this textbook about World War II; it was so riveting to me. I read it cover to cover probably three times.

Tim Ferriss: Amazing.

Casey Neistat: And I remember reading in *The New York Times* that John Keegan passed away – I think it was maybe 2008, 2009, something like that – and being deeply sad that this military lecturer, this professor from England, had died. Because I felt so close to him because I read this book that was nothing more than an academic's perspective on the Second World War. It was not a first-hand experience. There's no emotion in this book. It's pure military strategy. And I remember deeply being emotionally affected by the fact that this guy had died. But that's one book in particular that really affected me.

Tim Ferriss: How were you introduced to that book?

Or how did you find it?

Casey Neistat: I have no idea. I mean, I can tell you actually: I was at a dinner party with a girl I had a crush on whose mother was a columnist at *The New York Times*. And they were talking about World War II. And one of them said, "What year did World War II start?" or something like that. And I remember thinking in my head, "What year did World War II start?" And I literally couldn't tell you – forget about the decade. I couldn't tell you what part of the century it took place in.

And I remember in that moment feeling like an idiot, the same way I felt like an idiot in the kitchen when I got picked on. And the next day I just went to Barnes & Noble, because there was no Amazon then, and found whatever looked like the most down-the-line, straightforward book on the Second World War so that I could make sure that the next time I was in a conversation where World War II came up, I would be much more versed in it.

Tim Ferriss: Amazing. And you said "Second-favorite book." What is the other book that was in your mind?

Casey Neistat: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X.* I've read that book more times than I can count. I cried at the end of that book. I don't know why. I guess I was surprised that Malcolm X was killed, even though he'd been dead for 40 years and I knew that he had been shot. That book resonates with me in such a way – he was bad kid; he was a troublemaker; he was arrested; he was thrown in jail as a dropout and a thug.

And I say this with some hesitation, because that man's an absolute hero who really changed the world for the better and for so many people. So I don't compare myself to him in any capacity. But certainly when I read that book for the first time, I saw so many parallels between his struggles – again, in a universal way – and the struggles that I had. And he was a troublemaker. He wasn't selling dime bags. He was doing real crimes with guns and robbing people. And he went to jail.

And he educated himself in prison to the degree that he developed an astigmatism in his eye from reading in the super-dim prison light. And he went into prison the degenerate thug that he was, and he came out of prison, I think, one of the greatest communicators of the 20th century, and someone whose ideas and the profundity behind the way he was able to share those ideas affected the world and affected the Civil Rights Movement in such a way that we still feel the impact of it today. He's just such a hero, and that book is written in such a brilliant way that's so relatable, even today, that I can't think of another piece of writing that's impacted me the way that book has. The movie sucked. Not the movie.

Tim Ferriss: Not the movie, the book. What book have you gifted most to other people? Is it one of these two, or a different book?

Casey Neistat: No. The book that I've gifted the most to people – there's a real trouble with gifting books, which is that if you're gifting someone a book, it means you think that they're going to actually read it.

And I would say, more often than not, most books that are gifted are more a gesture by the person who gifted them to you than they are you receiving them. Most people who gift the kind of books that I receive – they just want to feel special and be able to say "I gave you that book." That's a little cynicism for you. But, no. The book I've gifted the most is a book called *It's Not How Good You Are, It's How Good You Want to Be*. I think that's the name of the book. I'm going to look it up right now. But it's written by an ad man, and it's about the art of advertising.

Tim Ferriss: It's a great title. Even if that's not the right title, I like the sound of it.

Casey Neistat: The reason why I gift that book is because you can read it in 40 minutes.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Casey Neistat: Each page has like 20 words on it, and each one of them captures these really big, lofty ideas. Here it is. *It's Not How Good – It's How Good You Want to Be*, by Paul Arden.

And each book has huge, 150-font text where it says one sentence. But each one really punches you in the stomach in a really big way. And I think this book has the ability – and it was written by an ad man, but I think it's just about creativity in general and how to break through, in a way that really affects you. I think that there's a passage in there where he talks about how: when hiring, always see someone who's been fired or who has quit their previous job as a virtue. It's a bunch of little items like that. And I don't know. I just think it's a magnificent book that you can sit down and will shake anybody up who reads it.

Tim Ferriss: I'll check it out. I'm in the shake-up phase at the moment.

I'm going to ask just a couple of rapid-fire questions. They don't need to be rapid-fire answers, but I'll throw just a bunch of questions at you. What $100.00-or-less purchase has most positively impacted your life in the last 6 to 12 months?

Or whatever comes to mind.

Casey Neistat: What $100.00-or-less purchase. That's a really challenging question to answer.

Tim Ferriss: Or something not extremely expensive.

Casey Neistat: No, I understand. So it's not that recent, but it is something I say to young people who want to get into filmmaking. The camera that I shot the *Bike Lanes* movie on cost $150.00. And you started this interview out by asking about that movie, and I think that speaks to just how impactful that movie was. And that movie was shot on a $150.00 camera from Walmart, and that edited in iMovie, which is free software. So I think that when I look back at where really big impacts have been when it comes to making a little investment, that movie and that $150.00 investment and the impact that it had on my life and my career is something that I often point to as: "Don't blame it on the gear.

"Don't blame it on a lack of resources. Because it's never the resources that determine your success. It's how you use what you have."

Tim Ferriss: And is there any entry-level camera that you might suggest to people now who are looking for an equivalent and just getting started? Or is the phone good enough?

Casey Neistat: I think the phones now are great. They're way better than good-enough. But if you look at a lot of the big vloggers, vlogging was invented by people just using the webcams on their computers. So I really just don't think the quality matters. I think cell phones now are incredible. If you want to get something bigger than that, you go to the store and you buy whatever the cheapest Canon point-and-shoot camera is. They all have a Hi-Def video record button. They've got stereo sound. They've got zoom. It's more than what you need to tell a great story. It's never the hardware; it's only how you use it.

Tim Ferriss: And, speaking of vloggers – so I'm not familiar with the world of vloggers outside of your own.

Who are a few vloggers – maybe they have different styles – that people could check out just to get a feel for how people are going about doing this?

Casey Neistat: Sure. So there's one guy who's a good friend of mine. His name is Ben Brown, spelled as you'd imagine. And Ben's a guy who's a really honest, frank guy. He's a daily vlogger. His vlogs are very much, by definition, just a diary of his life. But I think what Ben does better than anyone is he really is himself on camera. So what you're seeing on camera is who he is in real life. And what the impact of that is in aggregate is that after you spend day in and day out watching his ten-minute vlogs every day, he becomes a friend. He becomes a friend by proxy.

And he lives a somewhat adventurous life. He's got a beautiful girlfriend in Cape Town, South Africa, where he spends the majority of his time, even though he's from England. And then he travels a lot for work. His work is vlogging. So you span this guy's life along with him.

And, via that, you feel like you become friends with him. So I think he really captures what is the romanticism behind vlogging and behind sharing your life in a daily capacity via video.

Tim Ferriss: Got it. Anyone else come to mind? Just so people can look at a few different options?

Casey Neistat: Sure. There's a guy named FunForLouis: Fun – F-U-N F-O-R – fun for L-O-U-I-S, Louis. Louis is very similar to Ben. Louis is like a godfather of vlogging. He's been doing it for like four years. He's someone who is six-foot-four, long dreadlocks, who just rejected the grind, and he wanted to live a life of adventure. And he literally is traveling 365 days a year, and he bankrolls it all by sharing those experiences that he does via his camera and via YouTube. He doesn't drink. He doesn't do drugs. He doesn't have a girlfriend. He's just an honest guy on sort of a journey to define himself. And I find his vlogs to be very humble and honest.

And they capture who he is. And he shares that in a way that I think is extremely relatable.

Tim Ferriss: What are the most common misconceptions about you or your work, would you say?

Casey Neistat: God, that's tough. And it's tough only because I pay such little attention to negative people and the people who are wasting their time criticizing. What did they call that about Steve Jobs? His reality distortion?

Tim Ferriss: Reality distortion field.

Casey Neistat: Yeah. So the biggest misconceptions? People think I'm really rich. And I think that's kind of a frustrating misconception. And the reason why it's frustration isn't because I don't have a wonderful, absolutely privileged life, which I do. It's frustrating because of how many times in life I've said no to huge paychecks because they didn't align with who I am as a person.

I said no to a $100,000.00 job today on YouTube because of what they wanted me to do and what they wanted me to say. I just passed on it. And that's been the case from when I was really broke: if it wasn't something that I thought I could get behind, that I believed in, I just said no. And I think that if money were my focus, I would've found a home in advertising, done very well there, and never looked back. But instead I've always stayed true to what really matters to me: sharing ideas and sharing perspectives. And I've done that with tremendous financial risk. That has cost me – probably prevented me from being this rich guy that people think that I am.

Tim Ferriss: How do you decide what to say no to? If you're comfortable talking about it. And I ask because I'm constantly trying to get better at saying no. And you mentioned Steve Jobs. And he's

famously quoted for a lot of things, but one of them was "Innovation is saying no to a thousand things." Or "Being successful is saying no to a thousand things."

And sort of always striving for that simplicity. What did the company – what made you uncomfortable that led to the no? Or you could speak more generally if you want to. But I'm trying to get better at this myself, and I'm always looking for playbooks or rules that other people use.

Casey Neistat: I was terrified, absolutely terrified to say no for so long. And it's because it was such a novel idea, this idea that someone was willing to pay me to pick up a camera, something that I had not just done for free, but something that I had spent every last cent of my life to be able to do, and now people were willing to pay me. And then willing to pay me a shitload of money. And then I had to say no. So it was something that was really scary for me to do. But I would say that transition happened a couple of years ago. And the more I said no, the more it made me feel better. And I don't know what the science to it is.

But I can tell you that when I launched – not when I launched, but when I got the first little bit of financing for my technology company, it went from being an idea to something more tangible; I just said no to everything. And that's pretty much where I lie right now. Everything is given one filter, and that one filter is: "Is this good for me and my tech company?" And if the answer is no, it's a pass. And if the answer's yes, it gets an examination.

Tim Ferriss: And I definitely want to talk about Beme. For people who also want to develop this ability to say no, there's a commencement speech by Neil Gaiman called "Make Good Art," which I just find fantastic. But he has some really good metaphors for this as well.

And I'm going to come back to Beme in just a second, but what do you believe that other people think is insane? Or what is a belief that you have that many people think is crazy?

Casey Neistat: It's funny because, to the listeners out there, I'm talking to you right now, not Tim.

But Tim sent me all these questions saying, "If you want to rehearse for this so you have answers." And I came back with an emphatic, "I don't like to know the questions ahead of time because then they're rehearsed." And now I'm finding myself with

these really challenging, great questions, and I'm grasping to come up with an answer that's true.

Okay. What do I believe that's crazy?

Tim Ferriss: Or that other people think is crazy, but you might not. And this is a common interview question, and this is a paraphrase that Peter Thiel, former CEO of PayPal and first money into Facebook – that he uses a lot. Just something you believe that's controversial or that other people think is nuts.

Casey Neistat: I think they talk about this in the first chapter of *Zero to One*.

Tim Ferriss: I'm sure it comes up.

Casey Neistat: I believe in the religion of work, and working hard. And I think that that's something that people resist and people resist the notion of.

And the more I find myself preaching the values and the virtues of that, the more resistant people are. But I just believe that anything can be achieved through hard work. And it's hard to say. As I'm hearing myself say that, it sounds like something that some dipshit guy who's found success will say. But the truth is: the harder I work, the more successful I am. And, moreover, you realize that you will never be the best-looking person in the room. You'll never been the smartest person in the room. You'll never be the most educated, the most well-versed. You can never compete on those levels. But what you can always compete on, the true egalitarian aspect to success, is hard work. You can always work harder than the next guy.

And if you're willing to work harder than the next guy, you will succeed. Because most people – like I always say, when someone's like, "Yeah, but I'm not going to commit to working like that; I'm not waking up; how could you sleep a couple hours? I'm not going to do" – the second I hear someone say that, I think to myself, "Great. That is one less person I have to climb over on my way to the top." Because I know what hard work can yield, and I know just how meaningful hard work can be.

Tim Ferriss: I don't know why I'm so embarrassed to admit this, but one of my favorite semi-documentary – but it's more of a historical reenactment film that I've seen – is called *Miracle*. And it's a Disney movie with Kurt Russell about this incredible story of the

U.S. hockey team in the Olympics at Lake Placid going against the Soviets, who were considered unbeatable.

But in one of the training sessions, they're just bickering amongst themselves and looking at hot chicks in the stands instead of taking the game seriously. And he's like, "Oh, well, I know you guys think you have a lot of talent, but you don't have enough talent to make it in this particular game. But I can promise you that we'll out-work every other team that's going to play us in the Olympics." So, yeah. I do think there's a lot to pull from that.

The tech company. So tell me and the listeners about Beme. But, related to that, you have an amazing life. You've created an amazing life for yourself through experimentation and hard work, have been a popular director; you have Sundance, HBO, etcetera. You can make a lot of money – some YouTubers; I'm not going to say you, but YouTubers can make five, six figures for product placement on YouTube. So why on earth start a tech company? And what is the tech company?

Casey Neistat: It was at the peak of my career that I actually pivoted to starting this tech company. And the peak of that career was one of doing branded content deals on my YouTube channel. And, yeah, those deals were six-figure and seven-figure deals. They were huge deals. And in starting my technology company, I actually shut down my production company that was doing those tremendous deals. So part of that rejection around me being rich is because of that: because I killed the –

Tim Ferriss: The golden goose?

Casey Neistat: Yeah. I killed the cow that I had been milking for years to do this, because that's how much I believe in this. But what started the tech company was this: I was doing advertising work for my YouTube channel. And it was fantastically successful. I was tremendously proud of it, all of that. But I really felt like I had exhausted it. I had reached a plateau where I was doing similar work.

And even though it was good and people loved it, I didn't feel like it was moving me forward in any way. And it was around that time that I was invited to MIT, to Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and I was invited there via the Sundance Institute in a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. And they invited me to live on campus and work out of the media lab for six months. And I remember thinking about that, and my initial gut response was, "Leave my company for six months? How much is that going to

possibly cost me? I can't afford to do that. That's crazy. Say no to all this money? I've never said no to anything in my life."

And the more that I thought about it, the more I was like, "You know what? I can probably afford to do this. I can probably afford to live off my savings for six months. I'll be dead broke at the end of it, but this is an opportunity unlike anything else." And I just, in the end, said, "Fuck it." And I went for it.

And I lived on campus. And I never went to college. Never went to high school. And I just went there with a wide-open mind.

And I had one agenda, and that agenda was: "When I leave here, I want to make sure I have an understanding: I'm doing something that I've never done before; I'm doing something that is not currently on the books, because I don't get it." And while at MIT, I learned one thing, one very meaningful, powerful thing, and that one thing was that, with technology, almost anything is achievable. And therefore I took that understanding when I came back to New York after my tenure there was over, after my semester there was over, my fellowship was complete, and I wanted to solve a problem. I wanted to solve a problem that I identified years ago but I didn't think was solvable. And I wanted to take this new understanding that I could solve big problems with technology and I wanted to realize that. And that was the prelude to me starting a technology company.

Tim Ferriss: And can you explain the premise of Beme?

Tell people where they can check it out? But also how it works, the basic conceit behind it?

Casey Neistat: Yeah, sure. So that problem that I really wanted to solve was one that – my life has been so impacted in such a meaningful way by my ability to share my ideas and my perspective. But I have an unfair competitive advantage when it comes to sharing ideas and perspectives, which is that I know how to make movies. I have this creative expression, so I can share my perspective because of that. Larry King had a CNN talk show. He'd share his perspective because of that. And: is there a way to, with technology, make it so you can actually share perspectives and share ideas without having to create something? Can you bifurcate this idea of creation from this idea of sharing? And that was the problem that I wanted to solve.

And, to unpack that a little bit, even something like a YouTube: it first requires you to make a video.

And then you have to upload a video. There's an act of creation in there. When you think of something like Instagram, like Twitter, you have to come up with that clever tweet. Snapchat: you have to shoot something; you review it; you edit it; you see what it looks like; you add some filters to it; you draw on the screen. And then you get to share it. What would it look like if you were to remove the entire process, all the mechanics of creation? And that's what Beme is. That's how Beme works.

So literally how Beme works – and it's B-E-M-E: Beme. How it works is: you cover the proximity sensor on your cell phone, and the proximity sensor is this tiny black dot that's right above the speaker hole at top of your phone. And when you cover that sensor, it automatically starts recording a video clip. And the minute that clip is done, which is four seconds later, it's immediately posted to your feed.

So what that looks like in practice is: when you see something of interest, when there's something you want to share – an idea, a perspective, a cute puppy, anything you want to share –

you just hold your phone your chest, or you put your thumb over the proximity sensor, the screen goes black, it captures, it vibrates when it's done, and then you put the phone back in your pocket, and you just shared something using the most media-rich content that's ever existed, which is video with sound. And you've done it without ever having to create, without ever having to confront that burden that is a creative expression.

Tim Ferriss: Very cool. I've been watching it with great interest and playing around with it. So I encourage people to check it out.

I know we are coming up on time for both of us, so I want to just ask a couple more questions, and then I'm absolutely going to ask you to share where people can check out a number of things related to your work.

What are the most underrated documentaries or movies in your mind? They could just be a few films that people might check out that perhaps they haven't come across because they haven't been fully appreciated.

Casey Neistat: Okay. So my favorite movie is probably *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp.*

It's a British movie that was made during World War II. And it's my favorite movie, period. It's a movie that Wes Anderson really studied, and you can see a lot of his style in that movie. For example, the opening title sequence: all of the credits are embroidered into a gigantic blanket, and the shots are just of that blanket. And this is a movie that was made in 1941 I think, 1941. And that's my favorite movie because it captures everything I love about filmmaking. But it also had to be made at a time when the country's priority was saving themselves from destruction and death. That's the priority. And instead, at that same time, they decided to make a movie. And that is such a novel, such a wild idea. And they had no resources. And when they needed big, wide establishing shots, they just filmed a painting.

Because they couldn't fly a balloon or airplane to take the shot because it was during the war. So that's my favorite movie.

Other movies? My favorite documentary is probably *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*, which is a movie from Werner Herzog from 1997.

Tim Ferriss: How do you spell Dieter? D-I-E-D-E-R, I guess?

Casey Neistat: D-I-T-E-R.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

Casey Neistat: And *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* is about a U.S. Vietnam fighter pilot who gets shot down on his very first mission, and he's trapped as a POW for a number of years. And the movie was actually made as a fictional narrative, or nonfictional narrative, called *Rescue Dawn*, with Christian Bale, a couple years ago. But skip the Christian Bale one. Just watch the documentary. That movie will bring you to your knees. That's one of those movies that: any time you're having bad day or you think you've got it hard, you watch that movie and you understand what it means to survive.

You know, it's the story of a guy who ate maggots for four years and finally escaped, and the best friend killed. And much of the interviews that were done were with him when he was living I think in Portland, Oregon or something like that. And Dieter takes you into his basement. And underground he has hundreds of pounds of sugar and flour and oats, in the U.S. in the '90s, because he was so scared of being hungry again that he wanted to make

sure no matter what, he'll never be hungry again for the rest of his life. And it captures humanity in such a visceral, such a real way. And it's a work of nonfiction. That's a movie that's moved me.

Tim Ferriss: Sounds like a great perspective-adjuster.

If you could have one billboard anywhere, what would you put on it? And where would you put it?

Casey Neistat: God. I don't know. I'd love to have a billboard – something that just reminds people to be nice.

Where I would put it is wherever the most people would possibly see it. But I think that we – I don't know that communication – actually I do: I think that communication and social networks, the internet, has made this better. It's going in the right direction. But I think people are so quick to be judgmental and be negative. And the truth is: if you give other people the benefit of the doubt and you have a positive approach to everything in life, you end up being happier, and it's better for them. It's like that absolutely quantifiable mathematical equation, which is that what's best for you *and* me is better for me than just what's better for me. Does that make sense? I'll say it again.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Casey Neistat: Something that benefits Tim and Casey is better for Casey than just something that benefits Casey. And I think positivity and being nice is a big part of that. And it's something that's often overlooked.

Tim Ferriss: Agreed. What advice would you give your 20-year-old self?

Casey Neistat: Twenty-year-old?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Or 25. Whichever you prefer.

Casey Neistat: I would say my 15-year-old self.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. You can answer that one.

Casey Neistat: It would be: "Don't listen to anyone." I have a rule, which is: "Always listen to everyone and then reject everything you don't like." But the truth is: so many people love schilling knowledge, and it has such an impact on people, and it affects them in such a way. And the truth is: no one knows anything. And life is this

malleable, mushy piece of clay that's only up to you to shape. And when you look too much to other people to help you shape that piece of clay that is your life, you end up with a compromised lifestyle, because it's something that's not your own.

Tim Ferriss: How do you end up feeling overwhelmed by the paradox of choice in a situation like that, if you adopt that philosophy? And I tend to agree a lot of the time.

But I also, at points, feel like I have too much optionality, and it makes it very difficult to navigate, and there's a lot of self-doubt. And maybe that's just my own neuroses that need addressing. But how do you find direction in all of those options and all that freedom?

Casey Neistat: That's a billion-dollar question. I don't have an answer for that. I can tell you that my wife is someone who – and she would agree with me if she heard me say this, but she's just someone who's crippled by indecision. She has so many choices in front of her, and her lack of ability just to zero in on one affects her in a tremendously negative way. And I tend to be very George Bush – the second George Bush – about this. I'm not a tremendous fan of George Bush at all. But that man made mostly bad decisions, but he made decisions. I need to come up with a better person when I [inaudible].

But I really believe you make a decision and you move on that decision. And it's better to later in life figure out that that was the wrong decision than it is to sit around and never have made a decision in the first place. And that's a really scary thing to do, but the truth is: I'm only 35 years old, but I'm also 35 years old, and I've had – whatever it is – 20 years as an adult now, which is just about enough time to look back and start to examine things. And I think that having always opted to trust my instincts – because my instincts are there to keep me alive – and to move on them has only benefited me, despite myriad failures along the way.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. I can see how the World War II reading probably has influenced – what I agree with is the ability to make decisions with incomplete information. Very good advice.

Last question before we wrap up: do you have any ask or request for my audience?

Anything that you would ask them to do or suggest that they do?

Casey Neistat: No. It's wonderful having an audience to speak to. And something that I always try to tell anyone that will listen, even though I just contradicted myself by saying "Never listen to anyone" – but it's just that idea of being nice. When you share positivity out there, that comes back in such a big way. And that's such a lame TV evangelist thing to say, but the truth is: that is so meaningful. It is so cheap; it is so inexpensive; it is so easy to be cynical, to be negative; to be someone who brings other people down and brings yourself down is really easy to do.

Being nice, being positive is really hard work. But you feel so much better at the end of the day. It's just like exercise: you don't want to get out there and do your run. You don't want to go to the gym. But when you do it, you feel so much better. You're so much better off that you did it. And, at the end of the day, at the end of life, at the end of a year, the aggregate of having done that, having put in the work to be a more positive person, that's really tremendous.

And I've got two kids now, so I say all this in their shadows. And the older I get, the more I really believe in that, and I work hard to achieve that every minute of every day.

Tim Ferriss: People have asked me this, so I'm going to ask you: what have you been listening to most when you run, recently?

Casey Neistat: The problem with me is I'm not much of a loyalist when it comes to music. I hate the answer "I love everything," but I love everything. And old friend of mine – his name is Jonny; Jonny Famous is his name on Spotify. And that's no *H*: J-O-N-N-Y Famous, Jonny Famous. I just listen to his playlists. He's this incredible DJ who's DJ'd parties with me, all kinds of fun stuff. But I just go to him, and I'm like, "Jonny, what are you listening to?" And Spotify enables that, and I just listen to his playlists.

So that's not a super-sexy answer, but it's the truth.

Tim Ferriss: No, it's specific. It's perfect.

All right. This has been so much fun. I know we've tried to connect over the past weeks and months, and it's finally here in front of us. Where can people find you on the internet? Where can they check out you and your work? And maybe give them a video or two to start with also.

Casey Neistat: Yeah. Everything I've ever done is on YouTube. If you just type my name into Google, you'll find it. If I had to say start somewhere, watch that movie, *Make It Count*, because we just spent so much time talking about it. And then another movie that I like to point to is a movie I worked really hard on that is kind of under-watched on YouTube, but it's called *Draw My Life*. And basically it is my autobiography that I made via little drawings that a friend of mine did. And it's something I worked super hard on it. It's like a 12-minute summation of everything I've done from birth until age 30 or so.

And I'm really proud of that little movie. And then your audience should download Beme: B-E-M-E. It's on the App Store now. We'll have it on Android probably in November. We're working really hard to get it there. But Beme is a burgeoning community that's growing every day. And I don't know. The more people that are part of Beme, the more exciting it becomes.

Tim Ferriss: Awesome. Well, Casey, thank you so much for taking the time. And everybody listening, for show notes, links to everything that we mentioned in this conversation, you can just go to 4hourworkweek.com, all spelled out, and click on "Podcast." That also has all past episodes. And, Casey, this was great. Hopefully we can hang out when we're in the same city. And best of luck with everything. Thanks for taking the time.

Casey Neistat: Of course. This has been fantastic. Take care, Tim.