

Lauren: Welcome to "52 Weeks of Hope." This is where you get to hear how to feel happy, balanced and worthwhile, how to make that lonely ache vanish and feel empowered, confident and secure. I'm Lauren Abrams, and today we're talking to the visionary business and personal success story and entrepreneur, Mike Alden.

Mike's a bestselling author, lawyer, podcast host, and speaker. He's been named as one of Boston's 40 Under 40. He's written so many books. But success was not handed to Mike. He grew up surrounded by death, jail, drugs, criminals, seeming unsurmountable odds. He did not have a role model. A counselor actually told him he was gonna be nothing. Determination came from within and it still does.

He's all about work and being your best. He had a lot to prove coming from where he comes from. And he works hard to be where he is today. And he wants you to be your best too. He's here today to tell you how to do just that.

He says the majority of society has no idea what they can accomplish. And you have the tools, resources to be better in every single part of your life. That you can get more out of life just as he has, simply by asking. All you need is yourself. And he's super excited to show you how, which he does, in this fun, entertaining episode right now.

I had so much fun talking to him. When I was listening to the episode to edit it and see which parts to edit out, I couldn't edit any of it out. I just kept laughing, listening to it over again. So, hopefully, you'll enjoy this as much as I did. Both times, I listened to it through again, it's just absolutely one of my favorites. And it is so inspiring and gives such a wealth and plethora of information. Hopefully, it helps you and inspires you as much as it does me.

Welcome to "52 Weeks of Hope," Mike Alden.

Mike: Wow, thank you so much for having me. I appreciate that. And it sounds like I've actually done some kind of cool things in my life, I think.

Lauren: Yeah, right? How many books have you written? And I believe you have a new book coming out, is that right?

Mike: It's interesting you say that. So, I've written six. And I have one now called "Best Seller Secrets." It's more of the self-publish route. And it's really more for authors who are really kind of interested in marketing their books. Because with my other books that I've written, I've literally spent millions of dollars marketing my books. And so, a lot of people and a lot of authors, you know, they have no idea what to do. Most authors have no idea what to do, and most publishers don't know what to do.

So, that book is out now. But when you say I have one coming, I'm actually in the middle of writing a new one that I haven't even talked about publicly. So, I do have another one that's coming out as well.

Lauren: And what's that one about?

Mike: So, that was actually, the title of that is called Connection Capital. And the premise is pretty simple. But where I show people that it truly is your network that is in fact your net worth. And I show people the differences between networking and actually and building connection capital and how you can literally take...you could start with nothing, no money, but you can build a life and you can build a business by the connections that you make.

In fact, I started out telling a story of just one individual that I met at an event years, and years, and years ago. And that one meeting that was at little tiny little bar in Vegas at a trade show has changed my life. And it's not only changed my life, but it changed thousands of people's lives all over the world from that one meeting. But it didn't happen just because we met, it's because we built a connection, and that connection became, ultimately, capital for me.

Lauren: What was the meeting? How did how did one connection turn into something more than that? Because people meet people all over...well, not during COVID, but people meet people all the time.

Mike: Sure, yeah. Well, it's a great question. You know, I kind of open the book up and talk a little bit about that kind of chance meeting. I was practicing law. I was working for a company. I was general counsel of this company. And it was a networking event, a cocktail event that was free, the food was free, the drinks are free. And so, myself and another friend of mine that worked at the company, we went there, and we didn't know anybody.

But a gentleman came up to me and introduced himself. His name's Mark Bigelow. He actually lives out your way, in Santa Monica. Actually, he lives in Palm Desert, actually, but his offices are in Santa Monica. And he just introduced himself. He says, "My name is Mark Bigelow." He's older than me. And he says, "This is what I do."

And then, that just turned into a friendship like almost instantly. And then, it just developed over time to where we begin to do business together with my old company, where I introduced his company to my existing company. It generated literally tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions of dollars, for my old company, and it has done the same for me.

But really the kind of the key thing, to answer your question, like what changed, like how did that really happen is that I developed a real relationship with him outside of business. And I was interested in his life. He was interested in my life. He's an interesting person. I'm an interesting person.

I can pretty much connect with anybody in all walks of life and that's what I show people. You know, if you grew up wealthy, you can connect to the people that grew up poor. I happen to grew up poor, right. So, I started from the bottom. And I've been able to connect to people on the top.

But going from both sides of the spectrum is hard to do, if you don't understand other people's lifestyles and the way they think. And so, I've just been able to empathize with other people and connect with other people on a more personal level. And when you're able to connect with the people on a personal level, then it can, in fact, turn into business.

And it's a delicate situation when you start doing business with friends. But if you truly are able to connect with them in so many different ways, it actually makes it a lot easier.

Lauren: How do you get to where you can get to that deeper level and it's just not name, rank, and serial number?

Mike: Yeah, I mean, like I said, you know, you become genuinely interested in their life. You become genuinely interested in what they're doing, their family, their friends. You know, do they have pets? You know, what's their upbringing? Where are they from? And just listen to them. And, you know, I'm also a proponent of learning from others that have done things better than me and have been doing things longer than me.

My friend Mark that I'm talking about, he's older than me, he's had some great success, his business background didn't start out in the world of direct response. It actually started out in the fashion world. And so, he had some really interesting stories about that world and, you know, dealing with textiles, and totally unrelated to the business that we're in together, and well, that we did business together. But it was just interesting to me.

And then, over time, when you start to develop a relationship like that, and you can then ask them for things. Like, my first book is called "Ask More, Get More." And so, when I knew that Mark was the most connected person I had ever met at that time, I would say, "Hey, Mark, you know, can you connect me with so and so?" You know, and he would say, "Sure."

And he would connect me with so and so with no expectations of any sort of compensation in return. Right? And so, that's also another thing too. When you start initially, starting on a relationship where are you going to exchange money back and forth for whatever it is, it's kind of hard to develop a friendship. So, what I like to do is, and by the way, I'm not...

This isn't like really methodical or systematic or anything like, "Hey, you ask them about their puppy. And then, you know, see, if they talk about their wife." No, it's just you become...you do what human beings do. You have conversations, and you talk to each other, and you learn about each other.

In the book Connection Capital, I do talk a little about, you know, some of the things that you can do. But it's more about that deep connection that we all should have as humans. You and I are connecting here over Zoom, and you know over this podcast medium, right, of sound. And so, the way people connect is a little bit different. But it's still the same thing. Like we have to connect to grow.

Lauren: Oh, absolutely. I mean, that's what being human is. It's necessary to have that. I mean, we connect to our stories through what it is. It was when actually that I saw that you had struggled as a youngster and that you came from nothing and built yourself up and all that, and I was like, "Oh, wait. I did too." I was like, "I have to interview you. I want to hear about your struggles, how you overcame them, and how you got to where you were." Like, that's "52 Weeks of Hope."

Like, what's the hardest thing you overcame? How do you do it? How can you give hope to others? I mean, that was it, I was like, I want to hear your story. It's how you connect.

Mike: Well, that thing too. You know, you find commonality, right? So, you know, I'm a believer that anybody can find a commonality with anybody. So, you know, if there's a homeless man on the street and there's a billionaire, they have some commonality somewhere. And so, when you recognize that you can, in fact, connect with people on so many different levels, and you do kind of search for that, and do try to figure out, like, how can, you know...

You see, a lot of people, like when they climb the ranks and they have success in business, or just in life, or what have you, or they grew up in different socioeconomic, you know, kind of situations where, you know, wealthy and middle class and lower middle class and poor and in the poverty level, you

know, we're all human, right? And the old saying, we all put our pants on one leg at a time, and we all go to bed and wake up in the morning. And we all do a lot of things.

And so, if you start there, like on the most basic level, like, "Hey, we're all human." You know, I had a friend tell me and he said, "Hey, look. You know what? You know, we all have to pee, right? It's all of us. Male, female, it doesn't matter, right? We all do that.

So, it's kind of silly to think like that. But when you can think about the fact that we are in fact human. Right? Let's start there. And then again, being able to be genuinely interested in people.

You know, I don't know that everybody's born with this type of skill, but it can be taught to be able... Because a lot of people... See like, right now, I'm the guest on your show, right? So, as the guest of the show, I'm going to do most of the talking. That's just the way it works, right, in this type of scenario.

But when I interview other people, they're the ones doing most of the talking. And I'm sure it's the same way when you're on other people's podcast. So, we also understand that there's a dynamic there.

And my point of that is that I'm not talking right now just because I want to hear my voice. But there are a lot of people that do. They just don't shut the fuck up. But like, you know, "Listen, man. Learn from these other people." Like, listen to these other people's stories, like you said, because it's interesting.

Because, you know, when we started this podcast, I know you read what you sent over. Because I don't need to necessarily read what people are sending over because I know my life. And I know what I need to talk about. And I know that if we're dealing with hope, and 52 weeks of hope, that it's easy for me, right. And so, let's just talk.

So, we're having a conversation right now. And there's no ulterior motive. I mean, maybe there is, but I don't think that there is other than just building you know, cool content and relationships. Like right now, you and I are building relationship. It's simple. It's already happened, right?

And how far we go along in this relationship, we'll never know. But you know, who knows? And so, it's an interesting concept. And I'm having fun writing it and talking about it, obviously.

Lauren: Yeah, it's great. Did you always want to be a writer? What made you write your first book? And is there a natural synchronicity from your first book to your upcoming seventh?

Mike: Kind of.

Lauren: And I'm sure there will be an eighth and ninth, right?

Mike: You know, it's funny. The first book, "Ask More, Get More." I mean, the title itself is awesome. I'm just gonna say that, you know, the concept is awesome. I wrote that in 2014. And there's been some other books that have come out like literally a book called "Ask More." I'm a lawyer. And another book out called "Ask More." And you can't trademark the title of a book, unfortunately. And then, another book called "Ask."

You know, but here's the thing, about "Ask More, Get More." I did standup comedy for three years. And I actually performed at the LA Improv in over the 3rd Street Promenade called the 54th West Street or something that. There's a big comedy club over there. I realized when I was doing comedy, I had a bit that was actually in the movie, "This is 40." And I freaked out. I was like, "Oh, my God, did I hear that there? Did I hear that in the movie? Did I see that in the movie?"

So, I went back and I looked at it. And I realized, "No, no, I didn't see it. And I didn't hear it." And it was actually, it was a story about my about my life. And I called up on my comedy friends, and I was really into comedy, like I said, I performed out there. And I was just really into it. And a buddy of mine said, "Mike, it's already been done. Like, whatever it is you think, I don't care, what it is, it's already been done." So, it's the same thing with my books, right?

So, I write this book, "Ask More, Get More." And, you know, the concepts are, you know, the title again, just tells you pretty much everything, right? But I wasn't the first person to think about that. And the things that I'm talking about are the things that I've learned from others.

So, you know, when I started writing the book, though, I did realize that there are a lot of differences between me and the people that I grew up, you know. I grew up in a really difficult situation surrounded by crime, drugs, and violence. You know, my mother's HIV positive, my stepfather died of AIDS, my father was addicted to coke. One of my brothers died of an overdose, and another brother did time in prison, another brother was in rehab. My stepmother just died two years ago of an overdose. Kid I grew up with went in jail for life for murder. And so, that's just the beginning. Right?

So, all the kids that grew up with me, most of them, there's a couple that made it out, and then, family members, a lot of family members, you heard what happened to most of them, we all have the same situation. Like, why am I different? Like, what makes me different?

And so, I started writing that stuff down. And really, you know, learned that one of the things that I realized is I just think a little bit differently. And how did that come about? Was it divine intervention?

No, I don't think it was divine intervention. I just think there was a there was like aha moment or what they call an ignition moment in my life when I was like, "I'm either gonna be a criminal or a lawyer. Right?" And I decided. And I was both. And I am still a lawyer. But, you know, when I was a kid, I was a punk. I broke the law, I did really bad things.

So that book, "Ask More, Get More" talks a lot about my life. But it also talks about the principles of just success that I've learned from others. And then, when you ask about my other ones. I didn't have a plan to write my other books. They just came to me.

In this book, Connection Capital that I'm writing right now, I'm not even exactly sure when it'll be out, I have a couple different publishers that are kind of courting me. And, you know, it's something that I've done, really, ultimately, to build my life. And that one interaction that started with that networking first, with my friend, Mark Bigelow, has changed my life forever. And so, when you can understand that, and it's a powerful thing.

And so, a lot of people are introverts, right? Like, we don't want to meet others or we don't want to go to events. You know, I was talking to my, I call my girlfriend, but I mean, we've been together forever, and we own a house together and everything else. And we're just not technically married. And you know, when we would go to Vegas for these trade shows, when we were kind of probably shouldn't because we didn't have the money and I would bring five people, and it would cost, you know, all-in, probably 20 grand or something. I would always say at her event, "I go with that one connection, that one person that we're going to meet."

So when people start to think about that, when you do connect with people, how it can in fact not only change your life but others, it's important to recognize that as humans, in order to grow, we need to connect.

Lauren: Yeah, that's that whole thing about, if you stay inside, you might miss out on that miracle, that thing that could happen that could change your life. Or as you're saying it, the one person that could introduce you to somebody that get...

Mike: Yeah, like, I don't know about you, but I'm sure we're gonna learn at some point. And I have no idea. I didn't even know you were in LA. I don't know who you're connected to, like right now, I don't. Because, right now, it's probably not the setting to do that in.

But at some point, we're going to have that conversation. And you're going to be like, "Oh, I know so and so..." I'm like, "Oh, well, you know, so... That's cool because I've been trying to connect with so and so. And I'd love to be able to talk to them." And you might say the same thing to me. And then, before you know it, our relationship is blooming, and we have no idea where it's going.

So the concept of connection capital to people like you and me is not a new concept. And it's not a novel idea. But to a lot of people it is. The people that I grew up with that are still stuck in the projects, mentally and physically. They don't understand that, "Hey, you know, let's ask for more. And let's connect with other people. Let's go outside of the projects, you know."

That's another big part of my life where I was able to get outside of the projects and see other people and connect with other people and be like, wow, like, I would go into what I thought was the rich neighborhoods. They were just middle-class neighborhoods, and see what it was like to live in a home with a mom and a dad and their refrigerator was full. And they had two cars, and they had a pool. And I was like, "These people are crazy rich."

No, you know, they were just doing things a little bit differently. And then, you even connect with them or their parents. You know, like, "Hey, like how do...?"

Like, I had a friend. He lived in this neighborhood that I just aspired. Like, I wanted to live in that neighborhood. And I would go there. There's a couple things that I noticed. One, it's a massive house in a beautiful neighborhood. But I also noticed they had no furniture. They had like nothing there. So, they shouldn't have even lived there. They just couldn't even afford to live there.

But I remember being in high school just kind of almost like interviewing his dad, like, "What do you do? Like, I don't know what you do for a living." And he was, essentially, a door-to-door salesman. And I was like, "Wow. Like, you live here?" And he's like, "Yeah." You know, and then he taught me how to kind of speed read, I didn't even know that was a thing.

And so like, those are like those moments again, where, because I was curious about people, like, man... Like Joan Rivers had a great show. It's called "How'd You Get So Rich." And she would knock on people's doors. And, you know, it seems like it was unscripted. You know, but it was cool.

Like, you drive by someone's house, where you're out in the Hills, Beverly Hills and Hollywood Hills. And, man, like you drive... I've been there, right? And you live there. But you drive past people's houses. I know. There's a lot of actors and whatever. But it's like, "What the fuck does that guy do?" I mean, like, I want to interview him or her. Like, I want to know, like, how they got there, you know.

Here, where I'm from. It's funny. So, I'm in Beverly, Mass. Beverly Hills was actually founded from a guy in Beverly, Mass, interesting little tidbit. And here, it's a lot of old money. You know, and I've talked to these people in some of the massive houses here and said, "Yeah, what do you do?" And it's interesting just to hear people's lives. So, you know, kind of going down a rabbit hole here, but I'm always generally interested in other people.

Lauren: Your friend in high school, his dad, when he was telling you, "Oh, I'm in sales." Did that make you, "I want to be a salesperson"? Is that...?

Mike: I didn't even really know what that was. And marketing is the same thing. I didn't even know that there was such a degree in college as marketing. I didn't understand that when I was selling lemonade, you know, and I franchise it, essentially, in the summer, or when I would go door to door and sell chocolate bars for my school, like I didn't realize that that was sales and marketing. And no one really taught that to me. No, it didn't.

Actually, in fact, when I first got into sales, I sold cars right out of college. And I did not want to do that. I had such a negative perception of that, like everybody does, right? You know, car salesmen, used car salesmen, those are bad people, blah, blah, blah.

The reason why they think that way is because they don't understand. They don't understand that we're all being sold something. You know, you sold me on coming on your podcast, right? And just by connecting with me, you know, and there was a sale that happened. And there's no money that's going back and forth. But you sold me on it. And I do the same thing all day long.

And so, when people realize that being sold is something that we do, again, as human all day long, and you kind of you feel this kind of uneasy feeling of being sold, because nobody likes to be sold, but also recognize that you are being sold. Like your kids sell you on why, you know, they want to go to the movies or why they want to take the car. And the sale either happens or doesn't. And then if you say no, then they give you a rebuttal, "Well, Mom, you know..."

So, like we're always being sold. And just because money doesn't go back and forth doesn't mean you're not being sold. And so, I did realize that, you know, in my early 20s about sales and recognizing that to be successful in life, you need to really know how to sell and not be afraid of it. And by the way, like, I still like get nervous when I'm selling stuff to people. If you don't, then you're just probably not human.

Lauren: Yeah. How did you end up going to college?

Mike: Football. You know, yeah, I graduated with a 1.9 GPA out of high school. But I was also class president and captain of the football team. And I turned my life around from being that punk kid who used to get in fights all day long and been arrested when I was younger, and just did kind of bad things. But I didn't go too far. I also didn't do any drugs. I drank, and I probably shouldn't under age, of course. But I didn't do any drugs.

All my friends that started to cross that line of smoking weed back then, you know, it's a different culture back then. And then, you know, they progressed to like psychedelics and stuff like that. It just wasn't my thing, thankfully. And then, also like pills and stuff, like, you know, here in New England, it's everywhere.

But the opioid epidemic was pretty bad up here in this area. And a lot of it was coming into Gloucester, Massachusetts, which was decimated by kind of the opioid epidemic. So, I was pretty lucky that it wasn't my thing. And even when I would have, like I had, you know, my wisdom teeth removed and they give you Vicodin or whatever. I can kind of get why people would like that instant feeling. But fortunately, my body just reacted differently. And I couldn't sleep, I was itchy, that whole thing.

So, I didn't do any drugs, you know. So that was like one thing where I was like, all right, well, you know, I was really thankful for that.

Lauren: Yeah, that's good, definitely. What prompted you to go to law school?

Mike: So, you know, it's like... So, I was a kid...

Lauren: Sales was not a hit?

Mike: Well, I majored in political science. And so, I knew I wanted to be a lawyer. And is it the first or second grade you write down like, you know, what do you want to be? And it's like, fire man, school teacher, or doctor or nurse or whatever. I wrote down lawyer, like, I don't even know how I knew what that was, probably, because I had police in and around my neighborhood all the time. And I might have heard the term and maybe kind of recognized what it was. So, I wrote that down. And I knew I wanted to go to law school.

And the other interesting thing, Lauren, about higher education is that, you know, once you get to college, okay, everybody now has a college degree. So, I was told in high school by my guidance counselor, this is what my guidance counselor told me and I thank him for this, but I was really pissed then. He said, "You know, Mike," because I had a 1.9 GPA. He said, "You know, Mike, college isn't for everybody."

And so, I got into college because of football. And I wasn't wildly successful as far as my grades. But they were good enough to get into law school, which is also super competitive. So, for me, it's like that kid who had the chip on his shoulder, it was the next level.

Okay, so I graduated college. Congratulations. So does everybody. So you have two choices, what are you going to do now? You're going to get a master's, you're gonna go to medical school, you'll maybe you want to be a CPA or what have you. You know, I just knew that I wanted to be a lawyer.

So, and I was on the bubble. So, I graduated with a 3.0 GPA. So, that's just barely enough to even be looked at. And like, 3.0 until like four decimal points, like 3.0001, whatever. It was like exactly a 3.0. So, it's just enough to get in. And I also did everything I could to get in. And I just knew I wanted to be a lawyer.

So I got in. I went to Suffolk Law at nights, and I loved every minute of it. It was hard. I went to school for four years, I drove back and forth, I had a job, full time. So, it makes it even more difficult.

But then, at that level, now, it's no joke. So, now you're talking, I think, it was like 65,000 a year, money that I had to borrow. And I'm also competing with... So, I'm in Boston. So, Boston is, people can argue but, you know, Boston is probably the city in the world that has, you know, probably some of the top lines in the world at any given time. You have MIT, you have Harvard, you have BC, you have BU, and Northeastern. It's a big, big, you know, education hub.

And so, when I went to law school, I went to Springfield College, and then, I'm in class with MIT, Harvard, you know, BC. And I went to Springfield College. And so, when I got at that level, I was like, "All right, now I need to level up even more." And I took it a lot more seriously. And graduated top half my class, was in the Dean's list three out of four years. And I just knew that's what I wanted to do. And so, that's how I got into law school. And so, that was kind of my experience in law school.

Lauren: How long did you practice?

Mike: Like 10 years, you know. So, I still keep my license active. I still, you know, kind of stay on top of things that are a part of what we do. I mean, my company, we primarily market products and services on television, and dietary supplements is our kind of our bread and butter. But, you know, we do obviously market books and sell a ton of books.

So, advertising law, food and drug law, you know, as that evolves, we have a CBD company. So, that's a bit of a kind of like gray area right now. And so, we stay on top of that. I keep my license active and I loved it. I love practicing law.

But I'm also an entrepreneur. Like when I meet new people, I say, "Well, I'm a lawyer by trade." And I still do it, sometimes. It's like, why am I doing that? Because I want to tell people, "Oh, I'm a lawyer. Hey, look at me, you know."

But I am, I'm a lawyer. But I'm an entrepreneur. But in my core, I'm really an entrepreneur, and then a lawyer second. But I always tell people as an author, I'm actually a marketer first, and then an author. So, practiced for 10 years, started my business in 2008, and never looked back.

Lauren: So, being a lawyer to give you credibility? Okay.

Mike: Well, it is a little bit of that. It's a little bit of like FU to some people. Like, you know, I was told I should have been dead or in prison, you know. And since like, "Okay, well, now I'm making more money than you."

And, you know, the other thing too, when I was presented with the possibility of working like in the finance office, when I sold cars, and the owner's name was Bud Coughlin, he was really successful. He was one of the top executives at Ford. Like me, he grew up tough. He went to BC and Columbia, got his master's from Columbia. And he said, "Mike, just, you know, why don't you work for me in the finance office and get your master's in like finance or

something, you know, and grow here? And maybe you can get your own dealership."

And, you know what? It didn't seem like crazy to me. And I considered it. But I also knew that I wanted to go to law school. See I never want to look back on life. I'm 46 now. I never want to look back on life and say, "Man, if I had only done that. If I only maybe just pursued it a little bit just to see." You know, because you could go to law school first year and realize it's not for you. And okay, then you just find something else. And so I just never wanted to look back on life and say that, right?

And so, but I also knew that when you graduate law school, you're in the top 1% in the world of academia, okay? And also, it's something that, once you pass the bar exam, unless you do something crazy, it's nothing, no one can ever take it away from you. And so, that was really important to me as well, to be at that level.

And also the education side of things. So, I knew that when I went to law school that I could essentially focus on business, which I did do. I focused on business and corporate law and contracts, and half of it, the other half was criminal stuff, because I have, you know, kind of had a built-in client base with my family members and the kids I grew up with, right? So, I did that. And so, that's why I decided to go to law school versus getting my MBA.

Lauren: Do you have a mentor? Or does your mentor keep changing as you get to the different levels?

Mike: So, as a lawyer, it's funny, because I didn't know any lawyers. And when I was practicing law, and I was lucky, it was in house at a company. So, we had outside counsel. And I didn't know the guy, but I knew who he was our outside counsel. I just called him up, introduced myself, "I'm the new lawyer here." And he was kind of surprised that I was even there. And I said, "Look, man, I need a mentor. So, you're it."

I mean, that's literally how it happened. He's like, "Oh, okay. So, cool." So, as a young lawyer...by the way, they do that in a lot of states anyway, they pair you up, the bar association in each state usually does that for young lawyers. And a lot of times, depending on the state, they also have CLE, continuing legal education. So, you have to kind of like keep up on stuff.

So, he was like, my first mentor. His name's Chris Robertson, still a great friend today. And he's a partner at a huge law firm, all over the world, actually. He went to Harvard, as we would say, so he's wicked smart, as we would also say, from Boston. So, he was kind of like my first mentor.

But I've had business mentors throughout the years. Yeah. And they do change a little bit. I don't pay for a coach. I have these people say, "Oh, do you pay for a coach?" Like, I don't need to pay for a coach, you know. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm wrong. I don't know. But I'm not gonna pay some dude, you know, or chick or whatever, pardon me, if I'm being...like 100 grand a year or whatever it is, just to tell me things that I already know.

And so, I have friends that hold me accountable. And that's really the thing. Like, I have really good friends. They'd be like, "Hey, Mike, you know, maybe you shouldn't be doing that." Or, "Maybe you should be doing this." Or, "Mike, you know, like, what you're saying makes sense. And maybe you should pursue that." Like, those are the types of people that have helped kind of build me as a person, both professionally and personally.

Lauren: Is there a time in your life where you just felt really alone?

Mike: Yeah, a lot. I mean, even today, you know. So, the life of an entrepreneur is a lonely life. You know, when you think about the consequences of your decisions, and you think about, you know, the responsibility of your business and the people that, you know, have families, and mortgages, and houses, and kids, and dogs, and school loans.

And so, that's a lonely place when things are really going wrong because I live in what I like to call organized chaos. And it's always like that in my life. When I'm doing 15 million a year, or whether I'm doing 10 a year, or 5, it's pretty much the same. And so, when I realized that too, I realized, "Well, do I need to do 50?" Like, is that like, "Am I gonna feel the same way if I do 10? And also, can I keep maybe more?" You know, so a mentor actually taught me that.

But, yeah, you know, look, the lonely moments in anybody's life are there, but I'm also... Look, I go to therapy. I've been going to therapy my whole life. You know, out your way in LA, I think, it's a little bit more like people are open about it. But here... Now everybody's talking about it. I was talking about it in 2014. I'm a practitioner of transcendental meditation.

So, in those lonely moments, you're left with your thoughts, one's own thoughts. And when you're left with your thoughts, things can spiral out of control. And I've had full-on panic attacks where I thought I was going to be put in the hospital. And that's when I learned transcendental meditation, that was a very lonely moment, very lonely moment.

You're going to have them and there are moments where I just want to curl up in the basement, and just shut off the lights and just do nothing all day long. And by the way, I do it sometimes because there's also nothing wrong with that. But I'm also self-aware, like, hey, like, if there's something wrong here, like really, mentally, I'm so self-aware that I will go to my doctor and talk to them. If, you know, "Hey, look, is there something I need to do?"

Look, I'm kind of anti-medication for really for anything. But if you're going through an acute crisis, like a lot of people are right now, and you're self-medicating, however it is, that's the wrong thing to do. And again, you're in a lonely moment.

And when we talk about being alone, you don't have to be physically alone, right? So, you can have people all around you, people who understand. But, mentally, in your brain, you're alone, like you maybe there's something going on, and you're afraid to talk about it.

The great news is that it's becoming less of a stigma now, like these, you know, mental challenges. But I also recognize at a very...I wouldn't say young age, but within the past 10 years that, you know, happiness is something that I'm pursuing, and I'm always pursuing. But I also realized after studying happiness, and writing my second book, and talking a little bit about that, is that we're not born happy.

Our brains aren't actually wired to be happy. And people like, "What? What are you talking about?" You can't just Google it. You just not. Because what you're designed to do is, you're designed to survive, right? You know, we are animals, plain and simple, right?

And so, what are we? Why are we here? What's our main objective? Well, to procreate and survive. And so that's not a very happy thing except the procreating part. So, you have that kind of happy moment there. When you realize that happiness is something you have to work towards, and you can work towards it, those lonely moments become a lot less lonely.

Lauren: Yeah. And you answered so much of my questions. You have what do you do? So therapy, meditation, talking to somebody, and not keeping it in, not trying to deal with it yourself. You also made me think that it gives us perspective for when we're not lonely, and the appreciation and gratitude and something to work. Oh, I love that.

Mike: Yeah, you know. It sounds corny, and a lot of people talk about it. And these memes and also other stuff out there, but all the memes in the world and all the videos you can watch, you and I were talking about YouTube earlier, and all these things you can...but, you know, you have to become accountable for one's own life.

And so, if you're having those lonely moments, if your world does seem like it's, well, what I call my organized chaos, but if it's actual chaos, only you can address it. And now, look, I'm not talking about true clinical depression or people who suffer with bipolar, because a lot of times they can't even see it.

Lauren: No, I'm not. I'm not talking about that either.

Mike: Yeah, I'm just talking about those dark moments that we all have. And so, and you know, in that moment, if someone were to diagnose you, you might be clinically depressed, but it's not a long-term thing.

So, you just need to address it. You know, and you need to work at it. And I do. And I'm far from perfect. Like, I didn't meditate today, probably should have, it's now 4:00 Eastern Standard Time, probably should have meditated, didn't, probably not going to. Okay, so does that mean, I'm never gonna meditate again?

No, tomorrow, I'll start over. You know what I mean? Like, just reset, you know. So, I think that, you know, becoming self-aware is critical for anything you're doing in life.

Lauren: Yeah, absolutely. And I've said it a lot of times on my podcast that I give myself a break, especially in this last year. Okay, maybe my meditation is 5 or 10 minutes. It doesn't have to be long anyway. You know, like just do it first thing in the morning.

Mike: Better than zero.

Lauren: Yeah, absolutely. And so, I've been on a challenges accountability thing with an accountability partner for the last couple of months. And we've committed to minus 10 minutes, which if you had told me that a couple years ago, when, you know, I was 30, 45, an hour, every morning, you know. Like, well, it depends on the age of my kids. Everything seems kid dependent in a certain respect. But, yeah, like, they're not that young anymore. Now, it's like when I meditate, "No." And then, you know, they go and do their thing. So, I don't know. Do you have kids?

Mike: I do. I have tall little girl. She's not little anymore. She's soon to be 15 and she's amazing. Her name is Morgan. And she's just a total rock star, just love her stuff.

Lauren: And do you spoil her to death with everything that you did not have as a child? Yeah, you're nodding your head. Yes.

Mike: Yeah, pretty much. But here's the other thing too, how I parent. You know, how many kids you have? Two?

Lauren: I have two. Yeah. So, you know, look, there are guides but, you know, no one really prepares you for being a mother. I remember just trying to get, you know, advice. And I think my mom or dad said, "You just figure it out, right?"

So, I treat my daughter pretty much, since she was able to really understand things, like a real person and not like a kid in just real-life scenarios. And I involve her in my life. And even some of the things that most parents might not want to involve them in.

For instance, you know, like, when we would go to Florida, you know, every year or every vacation or Christmas or whatever, or wherever we're gonna go, Vegas, and there were times where financially, even though I'm crushing it like compared to most people, that it just may not make sense. Because when I travel like, it's stupid money, like we're not staying at the, you know, like some dire hotel.

So, I would say to her, like, "Look, you know, here's the deal. Daddy's gonna close this deal. And if I don't close the deal, we're not going. If I close, we'll go." And so, she's understands. And then, I have conversations, business conversations, around her, including conversations that get really heated sometimes. And she hears me and she listens to me.

Because my point of the kind of going where I'm going with this is, I think too many parents shield their kids from the real world, even to this day. And it's really having a detrimental impact on the society in how kids react and how they respond.

And so, my daughter has certainly not dealt with any adversities, the same types of adversities that I've had, like, you know, waking up in the morning having no food in the fridge, and, you know, having the electricity being cut off, and, you know, her mom's car getting repossessed, or any of that stuff. Like the stuff that I dealt with, or getting beat up or shot at, and like all the shit that I've dealt with, right?

But, at the same time, I also I involve her in things that might be a little stressful for her about finances and making her aware that, "Hey, look, you know, you can't just bang daddy's credit card for 20 bucks on DoorDash just because you can. Let's talk about it. Like, do you really need to do that? And, you know, and maybe let's only do it once." When in fact, I know I can do it all day long.

And so, I try to almost create adversity in a way. So, she's also an athlete, right. And for me, that's so critical because you're going to lose. And as an athlete, you're going to learn how to lose. And so, she's learned how to lose. And that's important because in life, you're going to lose over and over and over again. So I love athletics.

She plays soccer, basketball, and now tennis. And so, you know, she's been on soccer teams and lost. She's been on club soccer teams, we'll travel, you know, four hours, and we get to the game and she gets pulled out of the game, doesn't play the whole game. And she's pissed, good, I'm glad she's pissed.

But it's just a part of life. That's the way it is, you're going to get pulled out of the game. You're not going to get put in the game, when in fact, you should have been put in the game. You're going to miss the winning shot. You're going to cause the team to lose. These are all the things that just happen in real life.

And so, the adversities that I dealt with, she'll never deal with. But, you know, she is learning kind of how to work with a team, how to overcome those adversities, how to communicate with people, and also how to lose because it's important. People need to know how to lose. A lot of kids don't know how to lose specially out and where you live, you know, these kids just grow up like just ridiculous wealth, and they don't understand like what it means to get there.

You know, a lot of people see like kids of celebrities. But they also don't realize that most of the celebrities, they, for some reason, didn't just happen for them overnight. You know, I mean, like Brad Pitt, didn't just all of a sudden wake up and become Brad Pitt. You know, he worked at it.

And so, but his kids, and the kids that you've adopted, they'll never ever see any of the stuff that, you know, kind of he went through. So, it's interesting conversation. We could probably talk for hours about it, but I know you don't have all day.

Lauren: Yeah. It definitely is. And my kids have seen it all. And plus, I mentor kids in downtown LA with absolutely nothing. And they're involved in that too.

Mike: Oh, cool. That's awesome.

Lauren: Yeah, yeah, it's really, it's amazing. Is your life different than what you had imagined it would be? Is it just beyond...? I mean, I know you put in first grade that you're gonna be a lawyer, but...

Mike: No, because I always knew that I was going to be rich, if that's you want to call it, don't use that term or whatever. Like I just knew, I told my aunt, when I was, I don't know 5 or 6, that I was going to be a millionaire at 21. It took me to 34 to get there. And so, no, no, I'm not like amazed at where I'm at because I worked my ass off. And I get my ass kicked all day long. And I take massive risks and I lose over and over and over again.

But, you know, it's those wins that that make the difference. And so, no. I mean, where I'm at today is not necessarily where I want to be tomorrow. And, you know, I'm always trying to climb. And my mom said to me, "Is it ever going to be enough?"

It's not about like accumulating things. You know, it is in a way like life, to me, is a game or sport. Like, okay, so I won at this level. Well, just like college, right? So, you go into college, you're a freshman, you're a sophomore, you're a junior, you're a senior. Now, you're at the top, and then you got to start all over again. Same with high school.

So, it's like, you know, it's the progression of life. And to me, it is a game that has pretty big consequences if you're wrong. But it's something that if you really think it through and you understand the consequences, you can, in fact, win at the game of life. And that's what I'm trying to do.

But the biggest thing for me is happiness. And, in fact, I own a brand called Wicked Happy. Like, this hat it says grateful on it. It's from my brand Wicked Happy because, you know, when I was really crushing it in revenue, a few years ago, I spoke at this event, and where all these kids selling T-shirts. Kids like making like 7, 8 million bucks a year revenue.

And I was like, man, it blew my mind. And I was like, I said to a lawyer who works for me, who's now my partner in this deal. I said, "I just want to be wicked happy." We're from Boston so wicked is a thing. And he's like, "Well, my girlfriend said that she was, 'I think that that's a T shirt.'" Because it was T shirt convention that we're speaking at. And he said, "I think it's a brand."

And so, you know, the very essence of that brand is about happiness. And we're not like, I'm not crushing it with a brand. I probably will. COVID, obviously, slowed it down. But, for me, like the biggest thing, where I see my life now is I just want to be happy because I know what it's like not to be happy. And whether I'm sitting in my private home in the street that I live in, in this massive

house, or if I'm in a condo somewhere, whatever, as long as I'm truly happy and the people with me are happy, that's all I really care about.

Lauren: What challenge are you most proud of overcoming?

Mike: Boy, there's a lot. You know, I would say one within the last 20 years was I missed the bar exam by one question. So, when you miss the bar exam by one question, what happens is that it goes before committee, and then it gets reviewed, like your whole... So, bar exam is two days and they review everything.

And you usually get brought up when it's that close. That's just what they do. But it didn't happen to me. I actually got brought down. And so, that was, you know, it's like a big giant kick in the nuts. Like, but, at the same time, I didn't study. I was working. I studied for three weeks. I didn't put in the work, you know, I took a lot of risks.

I decided that I wasn't going to study certain subjects that could possibly be in the bar exam because they can't put everything in the bar exam. So, you kind of have to study for everything. And then you have to say, "Well, even look, historically, this wasn't on a bar exam, the likelihood of this be on..." Blah, blah, blah. So you take you do take risks. But my risks were massive because I just didn't study.

So, the second time around. So when I got that letter in the mail that said, "We regret to inform..." By the way, I have that framed around here somewhere. I took like a couple days off. And then, I studied for 13 weeks straight for 10 hours a day, I took one day off, and I crushed the bar exam the second time. The funny thing about it is that when you take the bar exam a second time, your chances of passing goes down dramatically.

Lauren: Yeah. It's really bad. Yeah, it's true.

Mike: And then, it gets worse as it goes along.

Lauren: Successively worse.

Mike: Yeah. When California is the hardest state in the union to actually pass, right?

Lauren: Yeah. Right. And it was three days. They just switched it two. After our second day, we would cuss out the rest of the country who was celebrating because...

Mike: Wait, hold on. [crosstalk 00:43:31] I didn't realize you're a lawyer.

Lauren: ...a third day. Yeah, I'm a lawyer.

Mike: Oh, I didn't... Again, so we didn't know. So, yeah, you guys, it's three days for you. Right?

Lauren: Yeah, it was. They just switched it last year or this year? I don't know. They just changed it to two days like the rest of the country. It was three days.

Mike: Yeah. People don't understand that. You know, it's one of the most difficult things there is. You know, so you get the medical boards, you got law school, and then the CPA exam. So, we can argue about which is harder. But either way, it's really hard.

So, you know, what happens. So, when you pass the bar exams, you get your score, right? So, you get your score. It tells you your score. Excuse me, when don't pass. When you pass the bar exam, you don't get your score.

But here's the thing, I studied. And I'll tell you a quick story because you'll appreciate it. I didn't realize your lawyer. But I heard you say associates, and I was like, ah, maybe...

So, when I was studying the first time, I had a good friend that I went to law school with. And he had, like me, the second time, he'd already been studying for like 11 weeks. And we were studying at this local law school. It wasn't the law school we went to.

And he told me that he had a photographic memory at that point. And I was like, "What are you talking about?" "Because I can actually see my notes. I can go back and look at common law and I can just tell you, you know, what the commerce clause says like verbatim or I can go back to property law and or I can go back to wills and trusts and talk about, you know, what's the rule of perpetuity? No interest shall vest within 20 years..." Well, whatever. So, stuff like you don't remember now.

But like, "So, you have a photographic..." I'm like, "No way." And he's like, "Yeah." And then, I remember talking to him and being like, "Oh shit, like, I'm screwed here," you know?

And so, the second time, when I studied for 13 weeks straight, I reached up all the classes, the Barbris, and these other ones you had to take. But I also took a writing course on how to write essays for the bar exam, which is different than writing an essay for an actual exam in law school. It's just different.

And it was like literally learning how to switch from writing righty to lefty, it was completely foreign to me. But the way the professor taught it, by the way, he got disbarred, actually, but so he had this class on how to do it. But he got great results, always got great results.

So, when I went in day one, you know, the multiple choice, at the end of day one. I was like, if I don't show up for day two, I'm still gonna pass. Like, that's how confident I was. Like there was maybe like five or six questions that I was

iffy on. Everything else, I was like, no problem. And then day two, same thing. I was just like this is, you know, we're good to go. It's funny. So, now you're a lawyer.

So, I'll tell you. The first time on the second question was about secure transactions. And I knew nothing about secure transactions. I knew the term. But I didn't know what it meant. I didn't know about commercial paper. I didn't know. The whole question was about some woman, she goes into the bank, she passes a check. Blah, blah, blah. And, you can't bullshit on the bar exam. Right? And so, that was really, that was the question, I think, that really screwed me.

The funny part about that story is that the second time around, I knew it cold. But when I became an in-house counsel for this company, they didn't really have a lot of money, but they had money in reserves, in merchant reserves. So, I figured out a way to secure future loans against those reserves. They didn't know it.

And so, I had just like one-page notes. And so, we were borrowing money. That guy, Mark Bigelow that I talked about earlier, his company loaned us like tens of millions of dollars over the years based off of a secure transaction. So, it's interesting where life leads you, right?

Because who knows if I would have ever even studied that. I probably would have never even studied it. And by the way, I've done that with my business. So, it's one of the ways I funded my business other than connection capital, because I process credit cards, and when they process, they go into a reserve account, and you can't touch it. It's like, you know, it's like a savings account. You can borrow against it, if you know how to do it.

And if I hadn't missed the bar exam the first time, I probably would never know how to do it. So, pretty interesting. I didn't know you're a lawyer. That's crazy. So, how do I not know that? I don't think you told me.

Lauren: Probably not. I don't know.

Mike: Do you still practice?

Lauren: Yeah. Yeah, I do.

Mike: Oh, okay. What kind of law do you practice?

Lauren: Plaintiff's employment.

Mike: Oh, all right.

Lauren: Yeah.

Mike: My ex-wife, we sued the company we work together. We lost on a technicality. I didn't realize this that when there's a sexual harassment claim, there's a clock that ticks. I didn't realize that. And she just literally fell outside of it, like within days of when it happened. And it was pretty clear what had happened, but you know.

Lauren: A lot of the statutes change now, a lot.

Mike: Yeah, yeah. Well, California, it's a lot different in...

Lauren: Yeah. California is very employee friendly.

Mike: Mass is too. Yeah, there was a time started to tick on the day that you found out that...the rule was then that the day that you found out that it had in fact happened or when that happened is when the clock starts to tick. I don't know if that's like that now. But that's what it was then.

Lauren: It just depends. A lot of the statutes now, it's all off the table. Do you have a message of hope that you would want to give?

Mike: Yeah, you know, I think that, you know, when we talked about those dark moments and those difficult times in life, and what I've realized is that when you go through these really kind of crazy events and these difficult events... I had a friend of mine that actually committed suicide recently.

And I remember having a conversation with him about how chaotic my life was and the things that I was going through. And it was a really difficult time. I got hurt really bad financially. I built this massive house. And then I had to put it on the market. It was embarrassing. Like I built it. I was living in it for like a year and a half, then all of a sudden, I had to put it on the market. I would have made money, if I'd sold it. I ultimately didn't sell it.

But, you know, he just said to me, "Mike, you're gonna be all right." And it was just so simple. He's like, "You're gonna be okay." He was older than me. And I'm like, "What do you mean, man?"

He's like, "Look, you know, like, if you stay in the game and you understand that this is..." Like, Les Brown was on my podcast, and he says, "Michael, it's the struggle that creates life." And so, there is hope at the end of the tunnel. I think hope is, you know, I'm looking at your background, I think hope is important.

But I'm gonna say this and maybe somewhat, you know, kind of, I wouldn't say call it contradictory, but I'm also a realist. And also, you know, hope is one thing. You can just hope until the cows come home. But if you don't take any sort of action and do anything to follow up on the hope that you have or the positive mental attitude that you have, just thinking about being successful or just hoping that things are going to work out, it's not just going to work out. I don't believe in that.

And so, I may be wrong. And it may be something that people may be completely the antithesis of what you talk about on your show. But hope is important. And it's something that you that you should have. But I just want people to know that whatever it is, you're going through business, personal, whatever, you know,

I went through a divorce. And the divorce was actually pretty easy. But I went through a custody thing. Just recently, it was bizarre. We'd been divorced for like eight years. And it was it was horrific. And we were like, it's a long story. But you know, I just realized after talking to some people, friends of mine, that, "Mike, it's not going to be forever."

Like when I had that panic attack. And then I did go to my doctor, he said, "Mike, it's not forever, you know." So, just understand that whatever the difficult times you're going through, that hope will get you through. But also don't forget that you do need to do something about it in order to get you through that difficult and dark moment.

Lauren: Yeah. No, everything is about action. I don't know if it was just my last podcast where I said, I was taught, "God doesn't drive parked cars." I have to take action. I can't sit in a corner and hope for anything. It's about the footwork. I have to do something. And I'm sorry for your loss with... There's been a lot of suicide. It's just...

Mike: It was pre-COVID. It was a couple of years ago. And his wife had passed. And I think he was kind of going down the path of Buddhism. And so, he just believed that his body was a vessel. And you know, it's a beautiful thing, if that's what he really thought. Like he ended it because he thought he was gonna be reunited with his wife. I hope he's right.

And so, you know, it was really sad. And yeah, and it hurt me and hurt a lot of people. But at the same time, I almost, in a way, it's a weird way to look at it. Like I kind of think it's a beautiful thing because that's what he believed. And he was 57 years old and lived an amazing life and did some great things. And it sucks that he did that because, you know, he kind of robbed the world.

But, you know, he didn't have kids, didn't have family, the only thing he had was his wife and me and my family. But, you know, just kind of is what it is. And so, but he inspired me. And when he said that to me, he's like, "Mike, it'll be okay." And I was like, "All right."

And I look up still... And I'm not really super religious. But I'm like, you know, "Man" like his name is Jim. Like, "Jim, can you help me out here? Can you get me out of this mess?" And maybe he is, who knows? Like, right, who knows what the world is, you know, what's really going on out there in the universe? But, yeah, so thanks for that.

Lauren: Yeah. No, definitely. What is it that makes you feel really inspired today?

Mike: Today, like right now? Like at this moment?

Lauren: Not in this moment, but generally.

Mike: Yeah, you know, when people talk about being grateful, and I really kind of embraced that term, and just understood what it meant, I get inspired by the fact that I'm here. And that, you know, by the luck of the draw, and you know, one in a billion chance that I made it on this planet, you know, literally from the second I was in the womb, until I came out, the cards were stacked against me. I had all sorts of medical issues when I was first born.

And so, the fact that I'm here, I'm alive, I have a family, and I'm able to contribute to the world, then that inspires me. It's something, again, like happiness, like being grateful is something you have to remind yourself of. And so, I'm inspired by the fact that I can get up every day and do things, when a lot of people can't, you know.

So, I get inspired by others. But also I'm inspired by my own life that I'm here and able to just, you know, look at my daughter and call my wife, I call my girlfriend, and my dogs. And just like the little things.

Like, when people talk about, "Stop and smell the roses," I don't like the smell of roses, I don't know, because they don't smell good. I don't know why anyone wants to smell a rose, but when you've really... I've done it. Like when you really look at like a blade of grass and the color or when you're out in the woods and you're going for a walk or where you live, man, like when you walk, you know, in Santa Monica on the beach there or in Newport Beach or Malibu and just like see how beautiful it is. Like that inspires me, like man, like I'm here. So, let's figure something out. And let's do something with it. Like that inspires me.

Lauren: That's great. That's a good note to end on. Thank you so much for being a guest today for "52 Weeks of Hope."

Mike: Well, thank you. You are great. And I'm just happy to be here.

Lauren: I hope you enjoyed this week's episode and take with you Mike's messages of persistence, courage, and humor. We can all use a lot of that going into the weeks ahead and he's such a good example of you kinda choose to achieve anything that we set our minds to.

Be sure to tune in next week for another amazing episode with Hala Taha. She's the CEO of YAP Media. It's a podcast marketing agency for top podcasters, celebrities, and CEOs. It's projected to generate over a million dollars in revenue in her first year. She's super well-known for engaged following and influence on LinkedIn.

She discusses next week her greatest accomplishments and how they always come on the heels of failure and how you can do whatever you set your mind to, just like she's doing. She's amazing. People think she's just lucky, yet she talks about how hard she works, and it's her grit and determination, and how

she focuses on the positive. She's a big believer in "The Secret," remember that? And you-keep-your-eyes-on-the-prize type of mentality and just keep going, it's kind of exactly what, I guess, Mike Alden was just talking about that you can achieve anything you want to achieve in life.

So, I mean, she is absolutely amazing. It's just like Mike. I mean, these are just some of my favorite podcasts and people to talk to. I just could listen again and again. I probably will.

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