

EPISODE 784

[INTRODUCTION]

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FT: How do you make or take your coffee? Does it spark joy? Welcome to So Money everyone. I'm Farnoosh Torabi, thanks for joining. Our guest today is Raj Jana and he's built a thriving business by turning the very common experience of making coffee into kind of an art form and in the process, has created a six figure per month business.

A little bit more about Raj; he was born to Indian parents who came to the US with just a few dollars in their pockets. He previously worked at Chevron as an engineer until a life changing moment at work that made him reevaluate his life path. Raj shares financial lessons learned from his upbringing, the changes he would try to make if he won the lottery and some high level coffee talk. Like, what is a pour over and why is it Raj's go to coffee order?

Here is Raj Jana.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:30.8]

FT: Raj Jana, welcome to So Money.

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RJ: I am so excited to be here.

[0:01:36.2]

FT: I'm excited for a lot of reasons. One, I love coffee. I think it's no secret, I'm a mom of two, I'm very caffeinated most of the day and I'm excited to learn about how your company is

changing the way that we think about coffee, how we drink our coffee and I mean, I'm getting ahead of ourselves a little bit but just as a tease to the audience. I mean, we're going to learn from Raj how to take an experience that we take for granted and turn it into a thriving business and an opportunity. By the way, it started as a side hustle.

Anyway, I'm getting ahead of ourselves. Raj, I also wanted to bring you on the show because I think that your journey to becoming who you are, you know, a child of immigrants, a guy who is working a day job who just wanted more and I think that's a lot off our listeners. We are on the path and the pursuit of greatness and moreness — not more just for the sake of more.

You had a wakeup call, when you were at Chevron as a reservoir engineer. You had a mentor pass away from a heart attack, three months before retiring, that's very tragic. This really changed your course of life. Was it immediate? Were you like, "Oh my gosh," — what was it about your life that you felt was not fulfilling you?

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RJ: Well, that's a great question for starters. When I started my company, I didn't really have the vision to think it was going to become what it is right now. I just really wanted something different, you know? For my entire life, when I was in college and when I was growing up I'd always played sports and work towards incredible goals and almost felt like I was living a mark just through the hobbies and the things I was doing. For the first time in my life, when I started working full time, I felt like you know, my mark was going to be left at the end of my career and in the traditional work world, the end of your careers when you retire.

That light was so far ahead, I couldn't even see the light at the end of the tunnel and I think that was the first start for me for really wanting to figure out entrepreneurship and really start dabbling and start getting into the process itself. That was something that happened over time. Now, the icing on the cake, you eluded to this in the intro but that was when one of my mentors, one of my first — his name was Jerry. He was a geologist at work, he sat right next to me and he was one of those, just a mentor how was, you know, he had done so much ahead of me that I learned a lot from him. So whenever I was scared to ask questions to my boss, I'd go to Jerry

and Jerry would be just really helpful. He was an old timer, he'd worked in the same company, in the same job, in the same part of South Louisiana for 37 years.

So, you know, he had just seen everything in that region and he never changed anything. He was just a part of that story and so, when he passed, it was a slap in the face to me, I was mad, I was really mad. I didn't understand why and how somebody could do everything right, play their cards right, do as the story tells us to do and still be robbed at the finish line.

I think, more than anything, that experience sort of just confused me and fueled me and it forced me to start asking the questions that I was avoiding in my life and it really added that fuel to the fire. It was a long time coming but that experience was really the catalyst that forced me to become obsessed with figuring out how I was going to build a company or build or replace my income and just grow this hustle and side hustle that I was growing through JavaPresse.

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FT: Also as, I think a child of immigrants, I know your dad came to the US with very little, like \$60 bucks in his pocket but yet built a great life for your family and I'm a child of immigrants, I feel like sometimes, the way that they want us to achieve success can sometimes be a limiting thing. Like, you have to go to school, get the job, there's no talk of investing or entrepreneurship or taking big risks.

It's funny I made a joke like, my parents risked everything to come here to take no chances. Everything needs to be a sure bet from here on out. You know? As a child of that environment, you can grow up sort of trying to follow the straight and narrow. But to your point, that's not really the most fulfilling way to go about life.

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RJ: It's not guaranteed. You know, that's what the whole experience taught me is that I can do everything right — I could be a great engineer and still get fired. You know, I can fail at something that was so safe. I think for the longest time, I used to think that being scared of failing meant that I wouldn't fail. So when I really — when the experiences came together, I'm

glad you brought up my dad, you know? When Jerry died, he was the first person I thought about, you know? When I was questioning everything, I was like, you know, the thought of something like that happening to my father, was like the biggest wakeup call I think I could have had.

I think that more than me feeling the lack of fulfillment, I think seeing someone like my dad who did take that chance and came to the US and worked his entire life and followed everything and someone close to you like that experiencing something unbearable I think that just, that cemented — that was the first time I think my passion turned into my why and my why was so much stronger than anything else I was facing or experiencing and just through that experience of almost engulfing myself in a why and a reason for wanting to do something, I think that gave me a path to fulfillment.

It showed me the light, it showed me like just a whole other way of living where, if I'm chasing something that means a lot, if I'm chasing purpose or if I'm chasing this, almost like this well of fulfillment, it doesn't matter what I'm doing, I could be an engineer, I can be doing anything but all the right things are going to come in my life if I just look at life through that lens. I think that was really the changing point for me.

[0:08:07.9]

FT: Okay, so now your mind is blown and going back to reality, you're still a full-time engineer, you have no business experience, you're paying off thousands of dollars in student loans, PS. You also, I understand, were in a long distance relationship, so there's a lot of moving parts to your life. At the same time you want to make this big shift to somewhere better, more fulfilling, different. How did you navigate all of that financially, practically speaking? Where did you start?

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RJ: Yeah. I wasn't in the space to quit my job and just become a full-time entrepreneur, even though that's what my heart was telling me to do. I was grateful enough to be — I was an engineer and I was making a good salary as an engineer. So what I first started doing was, I stop putting money into my 401(k) and I started investing in courses. Because I realized that, as

a business owner, you can write off any education you have and that you invest in. I started an LLC and I started – honestly, I didn't take any extra money that I was saving because I still had to pay off my student loans.

My student loans are I think eight to 9%. So I couldn't even invest in the market. I was actually getting a better return on investment by just paying off my student loans. I didn't want to stop doing that because that would dig me into a hole so I just took whatever money I was putting in my 401(k) and move that over to investing in courses, online education. And I found courses that taught people how to create a physical products business, how to launch products online using amazon.com and Shopify and these different ecommerce outlets and it was a very – The model made sense to me.

So then I just followed each of these courses. At the time, I was so obsessed, I wanted to get there really fast because of all the circumstances that I had been exposed to – Jerry's passing, the thoughts about my dad. At that point, I really just kind of took each month I had the money, put aside going into my 401(k), I'd just take that and buy a new course. I'd invest in courses and I would just buy as many as I could that allowed me to learn a different facet of physical products. Over time by just following the process and investing all of my profits back into my company, we started scaling really fast.

You know, focusing in on – we launch one product in September of 2015. That product went to 15,000 a month in December of 2015 and then from there, I didn't take a single ounce of profit out just because I was working full time and I didn't need to. I just kept doubling down on mastering that one thing that was working really well. That one product in that one market place, which was Amazon to start us off. I just kept doubling down and investing.

Then, for Christmas, I took a bet on myself and emptied out my 401(k) to then, you know, to fund that Christmas order and that end up being one of the best things that happen because we became a bestseller in a really competitive category and then sales took off and then from there, it's just been kind of keeping up with the journey. I don't think I would have been able to do this if I didn't have my full-time job or my full-time income while I was building it.

[0:11:20.7]

FT: Yeah.

[0:11:22.8]

RJ: It was – practically, I mean, I know a lot of people are probably thinking, how do you build a full-time, you know, a company while you're working full-time? I mean, I think if the fire's lit under you like you kind of learn. If you're thrown in to the deep end of the pool and you don't know how to swim, you're going to learn how to swim pretty quickly. That was my experience. I kind of had to learn how to delegate and trust other people and find outsourcers and not try and do everything myself which are lessons that most people learn a lot later in business, I was forced to learn them early on, which is what I think sort of helped me build a company at the speed that I did.

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FT: I have a friend who has a saying, which is “failure is not an option”. I mean, on the one hand, you have to anticipate some failures along the way as you're building anything. But this concept of like ultimate failure like, “I'm just going to throw in the towel!” Certainly along the way you'll have a hard lessons learned but they'll be valuable and it sounds like even though, we don't love to tell people to cash out their 401(k)'s on this podcast, but it sounds like it was not an option for you to not be able to recoup that money at some point down the road and build the company that you wanted.

[0:12:37.8]

RJ: Yeah, the best way I like to look at it is, I mean, I'm actually a big fan of failing, I just like failing really fast. Because I've always found that struggle and failure and pain have been some of my best teachers and so, the faster I learned to fail, the faster I get through those failures so that I can eventually get to the success.

You know, I think just, almost – failure isn't the problem, I think your relationship with failure is. If we just changed the way we view failure then it actually turns into a catalyst for exponential

accelerated learning, which then compounds the more you fail because you learn how to fail better and better as time goes on.

[0:13:20.5]

FT: I like that. Tell us about your business today? I teased this in the beginning, this idea of like creating an experience around coffee and then, which sounds simple and that's kind of the point and you've made a ton of money doing this. Tell us the genius behind this business?

[0:13:40.9]

RJ: Yeah. We help people use coffee to live happier lives by creating products that transform the ritual of making coffee into a meaningful daily experience. Really, everybody has a couple of minutes before their day begins, a couple of moments before a meeting begins, a couple of moments that are sort of fleeting as the day goes by.

Well, what we try to do is we try to fill those moments and if those moments include coffee, which most, for a lot of people around the world, it does. We try to fill those moments with intention. For example, if you're somebody who drinks coffee in the morning as opposed to hitting a button and getting a cup of coffee and running with it, what our company's mantra and mission really is to help people transform that ritual making the coffee, of enjoying the coffee, of grinding the beans of smelling the beans of learning about the farmers.

All these little things that's sort of happen in the process of making a great cup of coffee, we just bring the presence back to the process and we give tools and practical ways for people to essentially enhance those existing rituals. We're not having anybody do anything new. We're just helping people become more intentional about the process of enjoying a cup of coffee and by extension, using that as a gateway for them to experience more intention in every part of their life. So, yeah.

[0:15:08.8]

FT: It's not intuitive to think that people want to spend more time making their coffee. How did you know this would work?

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RJ: I didn't. I knew it worked for me. I knew that when I was working full time, I mean, coffee's always been a gateway for me. I didn't start a new meeting without a cup of coffee. You know, I would go into the meeting room, pick my coffee, my first sip almost turned into a reset button and I realized that people around me were having a similar experience with a cup of coffee. They didn't know that this coffee was having an impact on them in that way, but you could tell just by the way and the way their habits spoke for them.

So I think, more than anything, I just learned to become intentional and aware of — like self-awareness was a big thing for me, especially as I was going through a lot of just teaching myself entrepreneurship and I had to learn to become very self-aware. By becoming aware of how the ritual was impacting me, I think I was able to recognize the patterns in other people and so when we sort of transformed the way that we, approach the model of coffee, you know, we took a product that most people sell, a coffee grinder, and we sort of transformed it into an experience and I think it was because I learned to listen to myself.

I started noticing the way that it was showing up in my own life and then, just through talking to other people, market research, and really sort of seeing the same euphoric benefits of people having an experience with their coffee, I think, that just gave me the confidence to continue pushing the message and then it took off.

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FT: Amazing. We were talking earlier before we were recording that in some ways, your business capitalizing for a lack of a better word on people's desire to slow down and really enjoy — the coffee lovers, you know, wanting to slow down and really enjoy the process of making their daily or 17 times daily brew.

It's thanks to places like Starbucks where it's all about, you know, going in, going out, the speed and kind of losing the magic.

[0:17:14.1]

RJ: Yeah, you know, I think that I'm glad you capitalize because I think that every business has a soul for a problem they're fixing. I mean, there's a reason why businesses do well; they're fixing some sort of problem. I think by intentionally understanding the deeper reasons why the problem exist in the first place, allows for a way for businesses to create almost movements or for businesses to create exponential positivity in the lives of their customers.

Starbucks is a great example. Starbucks is one of the first people to create this home away from home sort of mentality in a coffee shop. They didn't do that because they wanted to – capitalization was a process, but I think Howard Shultz really just understood that this was an experience he really enjoyed and because he really enjoyed that experience he wanted to spread it with others and I think when I think about the way that our company's sort of organically grown. I mean yeah, we did a lot of marketing but all we did was take the message and amplify it.

We didn't do anything more than just tell the story and really just tell the mission behind the company, and the way our products are intentionally designed and then word of mouth sort of took over because people started experiencing the happiness. That comes from taking care of themselves in a small way every single day and I think right now is one of the most incredible times we live in as business owners because people are yearning for this aspirational need and especially physical products in particular, people are choosing to include your products in their day.

They are choosing to have you as a part of their 24 hours and sometimes actually just 12 hours. They're choosing to have you in their day and I think that, you know, focusing on this level of intention just in any level of business I think gives you a really amazing opportunity to help a lot of people and by extension of that, feel good about the work that you are doing, which then allows your company to grow really fast.

[0:19:17.2]

FT: Raj take us back to childhood again. I am really fascinated by your background I think also because of my similarities of being a child of immigrants. What is a money memory that you remember as a kid or a lesson or a conversation that has stayed with you all of these years?

[0:19:37.3]

RJ: I think at a very young age I have seen the power that money can have to help people. My dad, he still supports three or four families back in India. My grandma, he's paying for college for a ton of kids out there who don't have the resources to do so and I've first hand seen just how much fulfillment, how much happiness, how much joy you can give others by having money and so ever since at a young age, I've always wanted to be successful just because I know the impact that can have on other people.

More than yourself yes, you can transform your own life and I've never believed that money can buy happiness. I just think money removes the stresses in life that allows happiness to exist freely and so when you can exist freely, all of a sudden it turns into how can I use money to help other people and I was seeing my dad give back and my mom too, I mean both of them worked hand in hand to just always want to give back to their families in India.

That has been such an inspiring – just growing up around that has been so inspiring for me and I think it is a part of who I am and it is a part of the reason why I'm so obsessed with evolved enterprise and the concepts of consciousness capitalism just because I do think that having money and succeeding in life is a gateway to really helping other people shine themselves.

[0:21:07.8]

FT: Absolutely. Okay this sounds like maybe it is coming out on left field but I really like this questions. So I ask a lot of guests, I am recently starting to ask more guests this question. It's a question actually that comes as part of my partnership with Chase Slate. So they are the sponsor of this podcast and they did a study and they found that a majority of millennials, about three fourths of them, made a purchase and then posted it to Instagram in the past six months.

We are very much in a sharing world right now. We love to talk about the things that we are consuming.

So what was the last thing you bought that you shared on social media, it doesn't have to be Instagram, but you were really excited about it or maybe it was an investment or a donation or something that you did with your money that you posted online?

[0:22:00.8]

RJ: Oh my gosh, that is a great question. That's really makes me think right now. I'm usually not floored like that, so thanks. I really appreciate that. Let me see, you know what? Actually the last thing I shared online was a gift from a friend and there was nothing crazy special about it. It was actually a pair of Bose headphones. So it wasn't anything wild, it was just headphones but just the intention behind the gift I think made me want to share it.

I just really appreciated, you know, we were talking back and forth and I'd help them with something and all of a sudden, a week and a half later I get these really nice headphones in the mail and that experience really – it compelled me to share and just talk about how much I appreciated him in general just the idea of gifting. So I think that's the last thing I personally shared online and it wasn't the product itself. It was the experience behind it and the people behind it that really made me want to share it.

[0:23:17.3]

FT: Well they say, money doesn't buy happiness but experiences do and even if you purchased a thing but it really resembles or it symbolizes an experience I think that's a fulfilling way to allocate your resources, so to speak.

Raj, tell me also a little bit about, you talked earlier about how you like to fail fast. What's a money failure that you experience that was a good lesson learned, hard but good?

[0:23:45.3]

RJ: So my first ever stint in entrepreneurship was actually trying to start a software company and I'd read the *4-Hour Workweek*, which is a book by Tim Ferriss and it opened my eyes to the possibilities of just the life I could have. So I found this course that sort of taught you how to have to have a software company online and no money down, nothing and so it's like, "All right yeah, I am going to buy this course," and so I impulsively bought the course.

And within — the course what they teach you is just go out there, ask a bunch of business owners what they're biggest pains are and then develop a solution to fix the pain. Well, I chose breweries as my industry and so I was cold calling breweries left and right. So within six months I had, I think, talked to over 2,000 breweries around the country during my lunch break. At the end of it, I'd asked them for money to build my solution because that is what the course taught you.

It's like find a pain so painful, ask the people for money to build the solution and then you have a software company. But when I asked them for money, I didn't make any and over the last six months that I had spent doing this, I was investing in the company and investing in logos and websites and all of these stuff as if I was going to get the money and so that was really my first failure in entrepreneurship and just money really in general.

Because I had put in a lot of money in the course and spent a lot of money in researching these people and spent a lot of money almost assuming that I had won and it was a very humbling experience for me and it taught me to test fast, just as fast as I was failing. Because I was failing a lot but I wasn't testing fast enough and so moving forward, even my tests now before I put any money in anything I always test the market. Or I'll get a gauge of how well I was going to do and I will do a lot of that before I actually invest any money because before, I just went all in thinking it was a great idea because this course told me it was a great idea and it failed and so I think that was the first real money mistake I made and I haven't made it since. So mistake well made.

[0:25:56.8]

FT: Yeah, mistake made once is okay. Two times, three times there's a problem.

[0:26:01.4]

RJ: Yep.

[0:26:02.5]

FT: All right, let's do some So Money fill in the blanks Raj and then I'll set you up back out into the world to keep making us happy with our coffee. If I won the lottery tomorrow, the first thing I would do is ____.

[0:26:16.0]

RJ: Fix a really big problem in the world. I don't know, there is something about getting money that I accidentally got and using it selfishly on myself that doesn't feel good to me. I don't know why, it feels like –

[0:26:28.1]

FT: But you paid the dollar and you picked those numbers.

[0:26:30.4]

RJ: Yeah, I guess so. I guess so. Maybe? But I don't know it just feels really – that is very fortunate. I am already the luckiest person on the planet for even just being born in the US. So there are people out there that need that. I don't know, I guess it would just feel really icky to me in a way.

[0:26:47.9]

FT: I get it, yeah. I totally understand that. I know it's like how I feel when I find a \$10 dollar bill on the ground. It doesn't happen often, but I found \$20 one time in line and I bought people ice cream with it, you know?

[0:27:02.6]

RJ: Yeah or if it is not fixing a world problem, I would do something for the people in my life that I really care about. Whether it's gift people amazing things, like my brother is training to be pilot. So I don't know, if the lottery is big enough I would probably buy him a plane, you know something like that. I just think I'd want to do something for someone else. I don't think I would find a lot of joy in indulging myself with all of that, at least for me.

[0:27:32.6]

FT: Well, here that transitions us to my next question. When you do indulge, what's a splurge? So this is the fill in the blank: When I splurge I like to spend money on _____.

[0:27:42.0]

RJ: Ooh man, what I splurge on? I do splurge on food and travel and I like to splurge on things that are a part of my daily routine, like a journal. I love to splurge on really nice markers and journals and my coffee. Obviously I have a coffee company but, you know, I invest in really nice coffee makers and coffee equipment.

[0:28:11.7]

FT: What is your Starbucks order, if you ever go there?

[0:28:15.4]

RJ: I don't go to Starbucks. But if I do, if I am pushed against the wall.

[0:28:19.2]

FT: If you're at a coffee shop what is your order?

[0:28:21.1]

RJ: Oh I usually get a pour over and if they don't have a pour over, I usually go with an Americano.

[0:28:27.5]

FT: What's a pour over? I'm sorry I'm such a –

[0:28:30.3]

RJ: So pour over is like a cone that sits on top of – it's like you take a little filter, you put it in there and you have a kettle and you pour the water into the filter and then it slowly drips into a carafe or some sort of glass. Honestly if you saw it, you'd be like "Oh I know what that is." It looks like a giant beaker and it's just coffee. You're making enough for one cup of coffee but you are pouring it.

Like this is where baristas look all cool, like when they're making a pour over coffee. I don't know how to explain it. That's at least the way that I look at it. It's like this giant – you're just brewing coffee manually by hand, so it's a hand crafted cup of coffee.

[0:29:17.8]

FT: Okay. A hand crafted cup of coffee. Maybe they design like a little leaf on top? You know, with the froth.

[0:29:23.5]

RJ: Well -

[0:29:25.1]

FT: That's my goal in life by the way.

[0:29:28.5]

RJ: Latte art? That's done more with espresso beverages because the milk can be used to create like a froth top. Pour over is purely just black coffee but it's manually brewed and so the way that it brews the coffee, brings out subtle flavors that are much closer to the way coffee is naturally supposed to taste. So I drink my coffee black, I don't really add anything to it, no cream or sugar. The pour over is a great way for me to sort of taste the natural oils and essential parts of the coffee cherry itself.

It was actually a practice that was introduced to me when I first got into coffee and I've kind of just stuck with it because it's a lot of fun to make. It takes me about six to seven minutes to make a pour over myself but in general, even when you're at a coffee shop, it takes a little bit of time.

It's not something you probably get if you're on the go, like trying to get somewhere really fast. But, if it's a Saturday morning and I'm sitting in a coffee shop and I want to have — which is usually when I go to coffee shops.

[0:30:33.8]

FT: Is it on the menu or you have to just know to ask for it?

[0:30:37.2]

RJ: It's on the menu. If they don't have it, they won't display it. If you're at a coffee shop and they see pour over then they definitely have it and they usually rotate out the beans that they feature. You know, they'll be like, sometimes from Ethiopia, other times from Columbia, it's just whatever they have in hand they'll make it for you. It is really good. I really enjoy it so if you haven't tried it already, I'd totally recommend it.

[0:31:00.0]

FT: I feel like I've just gotten an MBA in coffee.

[0:31:03.6]

RJ: Well, you know –

[0:31:05.2]

FT: A master's or a PhD.

[0:31:07.6]

RJ: Yeah, you know, taking the rabbit hole down the coffee train is super, it's a lot of fun, especially when you really get into it. Because you can learn so much about farmers and business and just like relationships because that's all coffee is. Coffee is one of the oldest beverages in the world, so when you really look at the history of coffee, you start to learn so much that makes you infinitely curious. So yeah, I mean, if you're going to go down the path of really starting to appreciate coffee, I think you'll have a lot of fun with it.

[0:31:41.7]

FT: Cool. Thanks Raj. Okay, last but not least. I'm Raj Jana, I'm So Money because _____.

[0:31:48.7]

RJ: I'm So Money because I have an amazing team, I've got an amazing support system, and I'm very privileged to just live life that I am and I'm grateful for all the mentors. I'm So Money because of the people around me.

[0:32:05.6]

FT: That's amazing. They say you're the average of the five people you spend most of your time with and I suspect your top five are pretty incredible people. So thank you so much for coming on the show and educating me on coffee.

[0:32:21.4]

RJ: You are so welcome.

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FT: So much more.

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RJ: It's been my pleasure. It's been a pleasure. Thank you so much, Farnoosh.

[END]