

EPISODE 808

“DS: The technology addiction is getting really out of hand. We tap our devices over 2,600 times a day and look at our cellphone at least every 15 minutes. So it’s constant. We’re constantly using it. The real message in the book is to use technology as a bridge to human connection, not a barrier.”

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FT: That book is called *Back to Human* and its author, Dan Schawbel, is on the show today. Welcome to So Money. My friend Dan is back on the show today. He was one of my first guests on So Money, Episode 24. He and I have been friends for well over a decade, we were babies when we came to New York, bright-eyed, eager, excited to take on the world and he definitely has held up his end of the bargain.

Today, he’s a New York Times bestselling author of two career books, he’s also a partner and research director at Future Workplace and the founder of both Millennial Branding and Workplacetrends.com. His third book just released yesterday, *Back to Human: How Great Leaders Create Connection in the Age of Isolation*. It shares the results of years of research to show why virtual communication actually makes people feel more isolated at work than ever before.

I am screwed, apparently. Because I work a lot of my days from home, but I have a podcast so in some ways, I do feel pretty connected to the outside world. Anyways, he’s got some advice for us on how we can make the workplace a better fit for us. Whether we’re introverts or extroverts, work from home, work from an office and get this, Dan says, one face-to-face conversation can be more successful when it comes to your career and your work than dozens of back and forth emails. Putting things in perspective!

Here is Dan Schawbel.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:24.9]

FT: Dan, my friend. Dan Schawbel, welcome back to So Money. You were on So Money Episode 24. Can you believe it?

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DS: It's amazing. Time flies, but it's always good to catch up with you.

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FT: You're one of my dearest friends. People, if you follow me or Dan on Instagram, you know that we share a lot of love on social media for each other. But imagine when we're in person too. Like it's all out of high fives and hugging and smiling because you really inspire me and I hope I do the same for you.

We've known each other since we were babies. Not really, but like New York City babies, like 20's.

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DS: It's quite amazing, you're definitely someone I admire because you help people when you don't have to, and that's so powerful. Like I dedicated this book, *Back to Human*, to my literary agent because Jim Levine does not need to work with me. He chooses to. You know he could easily just continue to work with Tom Brady of the Patriots and Ray Dalio and the CEO of Microsoft, but he chooses to invest in me and that really means a lot and I see the same – not just from like how you've supported me but how you support other people who you might not even be benefiting from but you do a genuinely and I love that.

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FT: Oh well thank you. Well, it's easy when you're Dan and I want to help you because you're also a very giving person and we have you back now on the show because, as you mentioned,

you have a new book out called, *Back to Human: How Great Leaders Create Connection in the Age of Isolation*.

You've spent the better part of your career interviewing great leaders, people like Warren Buffett and Michael Bloomberg and Sheryl Sandberg and also everyone in between like Chelsey Handler, who is one of my favorite comedians. Jessica Alba, Anthony Bourdain, rest in peace. I mean, you've had this huge volume of incredible people from which you can probably source so many kinds of stories. But this was the one that was really important for you to tell. This concept of going back to human.

What does that mean? I guess maybe because there's a lot of conversation around AI and social media is taking over, so why was this so important to you to bring this into the conversation today?

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DS: Great question. So about two years ago, I was interviewed for a documentary called *The Revolution Generation*, which will be on Netflix in September and in this documentary or when I was being interviewed for two and a half hours, I was asked, "What is the biggest challenge for your generation, Dan?"

I'm a millennial and I went back and forth between the student loan crisis and climate change and war and gun violence but again and again, I came back to, we're isolated. We're overusing and misusing technology and while it has given us this illusion of connection, we have so many Facebook friends and so many followers and all these networks at the same time, they are very weak relationships and if you were in an emotional crisis, how many of them would actually reach out to you?

So there was a really cool study that I was reading about how a person with an average of 150 Facebook friends, only has three or four friends that would actually be with them in case of emergency and those are real friends, the friends that check up on you when times are tough. So that that really called out to me and so what's interesting is, we have this like view that

technology is going to save all of our relationships and change the world in a positive way, but we don't look at all the drawbacks that come with our use and misuse of technology.

Technology has, in a sense, forced us to work 24/7. We're always on the hook. There's no nine to five work day anymore. We're spending so much more time at work and anytime I stand in front of a crowd, whether it's a hundred or recently 6,000 people, I always ask, "How many of you respond to business email while on vacation?" It's almost unanimous that they all say yes. Though the one person in the room that doesn't raise their hand is using technology. In this way, not having your phone is the new vacation and it's so crazy that even in France, they have a right to disconnect. You cannot email employees outside of office hours.

Then in Germany there's a company called Daimler, big car company, they have mail on holiday, which is a program where if you try and email an employee while they're on vacation, the email's automatically deleted. So it creates the behavior that you should not be putting people to work when they need a break.

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FT: I think Ariana Huffington did that at Huffington Post, or Thrive now, where she's running the ship there. There's actually this book out that I'm wanting to read called — it's by Priya Parker. *The Art of Gathering* I believe it's called and so people who are enlightened like you who work with leaders and have interviewed so many people, they're seeing this need. But do you think that we're going to adopt this? Do you think that we're ready? Because we're so addicted to our phones and we're fine just like sitting in restaurants with another person not talking but just being on Instagram the whole time. Instagramming our food. I mean, I know we're not talking about individual lives, talking about leaders and companies but it all — at the end of the day, are we ready for this prescription?

[0:08:02.6]

DS: The technology addiction is getting really out of hand. We tap our devices over 2,600 times a day and look at our cellphone at least every 15 minutes. So it's constant. We're constantly

using it. The real message in the book is to use technology as a bridge to human connection, not a barrier.

If you think about my career, Farnoosh, all those people that you mentioned that you know, I connected with in the early days and some of which I've recently connected with from a celebrity standpoint, from the young leader standpoint, I interviewed a hundred young leaders at the hundred top companies in the world for the book, which took three and a half months to do and through all that journey, originally, it was connecting with people virtually. Because then, I'm an introvert and it felt comfortable to send an email or a text to somebody or even a tweet to somebody and build that initial point of contact.

But the real relationships in my life were formed when I brought those connections offline, when I met someone for coffee or now, a lot of my interviews are actually face-to-face or at least on the phone. That to me is much more important and impactful and it creates an emotional connection that you cannot get through a text or a tweet or an email. What we found, I partnered with Virgin Pulse, we surveyed over 2,000 managers or employees in 10 countries and we found that email is the biggest thing that gets in the way of human connection.

One, face-to-face conversation is more successful than 34 emails back and forth. There's someone I interviewed for the book, his name is Danny Gaynor. He used to work under the Obama administration as a speech writer. He accounts for this time when he had to come out with this — Obama and his administration had to come out with this big announcement around the Ebola epidemic. So him and his manager went back and forth and back and forth many times to try and get the speech right. Because they didn't meet face-to-face, they had all these last minute corrections that could have been prevented if they did so.

There's just many examples of how young leaders who I interviewed for the book and the research illustrate that hey, we're overusing the using technology and it's creating a lack of understanding, it's creating more frustration and mistakes as a result.

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FT: Listeners, do you hear how much research Dan did for this book? I would love, Dan, if you would share, because I know the story and I think it's really important for our listeners to hear kind of the back story of how you got this book out in the world. People think, "Oh well Dan's already got bestselling books under his belt." Is that the expression? Under his belt? I'm terrible with idioms. My audience knows this well.

My point is, you're super successful, you're well connected, you're kind, you're hardworking, you've got a lot of successful books. But this actually was not an easy route. You had a lot — you faced a lot of rejection and so I would love for you to share that behind the scenes for us because I think that's a very So Money story in and of itself.

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DS: Nothing in my life has ever come easy. I've always had to work really hard for it, that's why I really appreciated my accomplishments. When it comes to books, every book has been rejected by every single publisher, besides one. The first book, *Me 2.0*, which is the first book on how to use social media to build your career published in 2009 and it's been a long time that I couldn't even get an agent for that book.

I was rejected by 70/70 agents and two publishers. I got the publishing deal with Caplin when I was still a Fortune 200 employee and that was a huge struggle for me, I didn't really know what I was doing, I was just trying to figure it out as I was going along, it was very tough back then, I don't even think you could get a book deal without an agent, it would be really hard now.

Second book, I had fired two — you'll love this. I fired two agents and I was looking for a top agent. So instead of doing what I had always done, which was to send unsolicited emails or trying to get introductions to agents, I hired a consultant to interview the top New York City literary agents and positioned me as someone that they should want to represent and so I got to choose what A-list agent I wanted.

So while most people do things one way, I always think of a way to stand out and do things different. So that's how I got my literary agent. But still, the book was rejected by every single publisher besides one. I really had to fight for it, and I made a huge mistake during this process.

I had one publisher interested but I really wanted a different publisher, so I didn't come off the right way to that publisher and it was a big mistake. I learned a lesson by doing that and the publisher I wanted dropped the book. So I had to convince the publisher where I didn't have a positive attitude in the phone to still be interested in my book.

So at the same time that I was hoping that they'd still publish my book, I launched my very first research study, which was an analysis I did of four million millennial facebook profiles back then. Enormous amount of work but it created my whole research organization and that media campaign went viral, so it was all over the news, everywhere. It was probably the biggest launch I'd ever done my whole life media wise. Then that put things over the edge and I was able to get that a book deal.

But it started off as a paper back and then I did a 35 page marketing plan, worked extremely hard and they upgraded it to a hard cover and I'll always remember, I never really shared this, I was with my editor at lunch and he's like, "We're going to upgrade your book to a hard cover," it's something that I had aspired to have so much, I really, really wanted a hard cover and when it happened it was like, really an emotional time because, you know, before he told me that, I was in a meeting, I walk in and there was like 15 people from the publisher.

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FT: Oh my god.

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DS: I was so used to not getting that level of attention and like my agent was there, he was like really proud because of how much effort that has gone into all that because he believed that I would get a sponsor for that research study. Every company, it was like a companies that said no. American Express said yes. This has been my whole career. I'm used to it so I've become very resilient and it's made me work hard but it's also made me really appreciate all the struggles that I've been through and share the stories.

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FT: Your quote, one of your — my favorite quotes from So Money episode 24, which was the first time you're on the show, you said, "I put more value on building relationships, building value, accumulating knowledge, and then the money flows," and then you also said that, "All that matters is one person who says yes and then you can build so much from that." That was four years ago.

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DS: That was in *Promote Yourself*. Actually, I've been thinking about this more recently too. I almost deliberately create content for the purpose of building relationships. If you really think about it. I mean, when I launched *Personal Branding Magazine* in the old days, I was managing a hundred contributors. Some of those contributors you might now, like Lewis Howes. A lot of them have gone on to do great things. The magazine was a business but it was also an excuse to meet people. Same with my blog, same with all of my columns.

I'm always thinking about, how do I leverage content in order to connect with people and let content almost be the excuse to start that conversation and that's how I've built my network is I always knew, even from a young age that it was always about the network and that you should be deliberately doing things that you're passionate about, that you are excited about that you think are relevant, etcetera but that are going to create the conversation that will create the connections because it is really the relationships that are going to carry through your entire career.

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FT: So, in many ways, you're still the same Dan from four years ago with a lot of these really strong convictions about what it takes to be successful. How has your life changed in the last four years? I mean, we have been in touch but for listeners who haven't been catching up.

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DS: Yeah aside from *Back to Human*, you know, I am really getting personal with myself and understanding who I am and why I have done what I've done and what makes me-me and also I launched a podcast called *Five Questions with Dan Schawbel* where I interview top people under 10 minutes asking them five questions. So I am doing the same thing that I've always done, just in new formats with new people and continuing to fulfill my mission of helping my whole generation through their whole career path from student to CEO.

So constantly following the mission but also learning more about myself and really paying attention and leaning into more of who I already am. You know, I have always suffered from anxiety since I was born and so, for instance the podcast format works well for me because I am very intense and very quick and so to interview someone for five minutes, it feels very natural to me and I am also a very thoughtful person so the questions are going to be really good because I put enormous amount of thought and intent in everything I do and just constantly being generous finding people who I really believe in investing in them. That's always been really important.

So I think I am just an amplified version of who I was when I first started and I do believe what Marcus Buckingham says, "People don't change they become more of who they already are."

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FT: Yeah and people have said on this podcast that money makes you more of who you are. The more you make, the more you become the person that you really are and so that can be a positive thing. It can also be a not so positive thing. That's a controversial statement I've learned since that's been really unleashed on this podcast and people are like, "Wait a minute that's terrible." But, you know money, the way that we manage our money and that we allocate our money I think truly does reflect a lot of our values and how we see the world and what's important to us. Or what is not important to us.

This is a tangential question sort of since we were on the topic of social media but our sponsor here Dan is Chase Slate and they did a survey recently and found that three fourths of millennials, that's 77%, made a purchase recently and posted it to Instagram in the past six

months. You don't really do things like this, but what was the last purchase that you did share with friends, either online or some other way because you are really excited about it?

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DS: The last trip I was on was with two friends. We went to Costa Rica, which was an amazing time. It challenged me in many ways. I lost my fear of heights after canyoning and zip lining and throughout that adventure, I obviously wanted to tell people on Instagram about everything I have been going through and all of the adventures and me wearing a helmet about ready to go into a canyon and so I posted all of that, all of those pictures and how I was feeling in that moment to them just so they could see that, hey, if I could beat my fear by doing this so can they and just to show my friends and family what I have been up to.

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FT: That's nice. Experiences are a great way to connect on Instagram and you have a huge Instagram following. So if you are not following Dan on Instagram @danschawbel, what are you waiting for?

So where do you want to be in five years? Like okay, you're a very strategic person you're also, to use your own words, you said you are an intense guy. Do you plan very far into the future?

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DS: I love this question because in the past few months I've really thought about this. A few things: one is I look at the career of Ken Blanchard. Ken Blanchard is nearly 80 years old. He wrote the One Minute Manager and he's still speaking at conferences in my industry, which is HR and learning and he's not getting paid and the crowds are maybe like 50 to 200 yet he sold millions of copies in his book. He's like one of the ultimate leadership gurus of all time.

That inspires me so much because I started so early. So I am projecting out. I can make really good decisions about where I spent my time now because I want to do this forever. Now how cool would it be when I am 80 years old doing what I am doing now but whatever platforms are

out, whatever changes adjusting to those changes to stay relevant. But I am really into longevity and then the next phase — so, you know the first phase was around personal branding. That was *Me 2.0*. The second one was focused on millennials in the workplace, that's *Promote Yourself*. This one is about humanity in the age of technology and it's also a leadership book, of course.

The next one is going to take me down this next phase of my life where I focus on eliminating the stigma behind anxiety. I think based on what I know about myself and what I've seen and how I've connected with others, you know, a third of people suffer from anxiety and depression in the United States alone I think it can be a big cheerleader and change the conversation and anxiety and I think part of me believes that that's what I was actually born to do because I was born with anxiety and I've kind of figured out how to manage it and control it.

When I was a little kid, I couldn't sit down for a second. I didn't know I had anxiety. I was all over the place and I always got in trouble, and then I have one of my elementary school friends who I am still friends with who counts he's like, "Dan, you were able to project that same anxiety into your career and then make that fuel your career," and that's how I have gotten where I am today. Think about it, Farnoosh, if you text me, if you want something I get back immediately. Now I want to do that, I love to getting back to you quick and helping you but the anxiety is pushing it to make it happen quicker.

So I am leaning into who I really am when I am connecting too. There is drawbacks of course like everyone is like, "Dan you eat so fast." I eat so fast because of the anxiety. So I've really psycho analyzed my whole life and anxiety makes sense of my life and I can reshape how people view anxiety and that's going to help so many people and people in my generation suffer a lot from anxiety. The bridge from *Back to Human* to whatever book on anxiety I write, or wherever I end up doing with that, is clear to me.

It's, technology is a double edge sword. I interviewed a hundred leaders for the book and that's what they said. It is good and bad, it is how you use it. Anxiety is a double edged sword too and too many people focus on the negative without accounting for the positive. So I want to show the positive. I think it could make a huge difference in people's lives.

[0:23:19.0]

FT: When did you first realize that this was who you were and that you wanted to lean into it as opposed to consider it a handicap? Was it like a moment? You were like, “This is taking over”? Maybe you got to a place where it was doing the opposite for you?

[0:23:35.0]

DS: Yeah, I couldn’t sleep and I was like, “What is going on?” I went to my doctors, “You might want to take this pill.” I tried it, it didn’t work. He’s like, “You should take this more intense pill,” and I was just walking, I think I was around the union square or Gramercy area and I was like, “You know, I don’t want to take that pill. This is who I am,” and I really just embraced myself and who I was at that moment.

Then overtime I’m being really thoughtful about, “Okay, so if this is me does this tell a lot of my story? Does this make sense of why I’m here, what I’m doing, what I’ve avoided, what I have accepted?” and so in that moment it really told me who I could be in the future and gave me a little bit of an identity not to detract from what I’ve done but to just give me a better sense of self, which I think is important.

[0:24:31.2]

FT: Now, give us some money wisdom that you’ve inherited or adopted maybe recently. We heard all about your money story back on Episode 24 and your perspectives on money. So I don’t want to repeat, but I would love to maybe learn something that you’ve recently sort of experienced or, I don’t know, a thought that — maybe a philosophy that you thought you had that was dispelled in recent years?

[0:25:01.1]

DS: Yeah, I mean, what I’m thinking about a lot right now is when I was growing up, my grandfather especially would always say, “Be mindful of your money. Let your money take care of you, save up,” and honestly it doesn’t really work that well. I would say in the past few

months, I've been spending more. But what I am spending on is different. It is less material objects, it's more investing in myself, which is the best investment you could make.

So for instance, I bought all of this podcast equipment. That's why I am probably coming in better now than if we did this interview two months ago, right? And so I am constantly thinking, "How do I invest more in what I am doing to improve it not just in terms of me as a talent as someone who is trying to provide content and support people's lives, but invest in quality, invest in things that I know are going to pay off long term?"

So the big money lesson is, don't just – if you are going to save, save money on spending on things that don't really matter and reallocate those funds and invest them in things that are going to really help you long term because life is long. I mean, the oldest person is this guy from Mexico who is a 130 years old.

[0:26:14.8]

FT: And now they're saying that if you live — if it is 2030 and you are 70 or younger that you could live to be 120.

[0:26:21.9]

DS: That's amazing. I mean, medicine is going to continue — well Farnoosh you look like you're 26, right?

[0:26:29.6]

FT: Aw! See why I hang around with Dan? It is because he feeds my ego.

[0:26:33.8]

DS: Oh come on. No, I am sincere.

[0:26:38.8]

FT: I'll take 36, I mean that's cool.

[0:26:41.4]

DS: Yeah, you know, I will tell you something funny though. When I was an intern back in the day, the CEO brought me into the cafeteria and the women were all lined up and he goes, "Guess all of their ages," and he was the CEO so I did it. Huge mistake, I guessed too high in one of the women and I learned a big lesson, never even ask any female about their age and don't guess their age.

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FT: Never and never ever guess if somebody is pregnant. That's the other thing. I always knew not to do that and then I ran into a friend I hadn't seen in like six months who all of a sudden had this regular, like her regular frame except that she had this pop belly. It wasn't like, "Oh she gained weight." It was all in this area and so I knew she was trying for another kid and so I was like, "Oh my god, congratulations," and she also by the way, she had her arm rested on her belly like you do when you are pregnant. Like I did all the time when I was pregnant. So all signs were pointing to this woman was pregnant and so I just took the chance, and I was wrong.

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DS: The other thing that annoys me and it probably annoys you too is when people are like, "Let me pick your brain," oh. I think a puppy dies every time someone says that. It's awful. I'm like, "Come on!"

[0:28:02.0]

FT: Well on that note, Dan Schawbel, thank you so much on joining us on So Money. Your book is called, *Back to Human: How Great Leaders Create Connection in the Age of Isolation*. Congratulations, my friend. I know this was a lot of work and it was a long road to get here and you deserve it all. Thank you.

[0:28:19.6]

DS: Thank you. Thanks Farnoosh.

[END]