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Robert Glazer: Welcome to Elevate, a podcast about achievement, personal growth, and pushing limits in leadership and life. I'm Robert Glazer and I chat with world class performers who have committed to elevating their own life, pushing the limits of their capacity, and helping others to do the same.

Robert Glazer: Welcome to the Elevate podcast. Our quote for today is from Neil Blumenthal, and that is, "Creativity flows when curiosity is stoked." Our guest today, Tim Urban, has built a career on appealing to the curiosity of others. He's the writer and illustrator of the very popular website, Wait But Why, a long form blog that regularly reaches millions of readers. He's also delivered a Ted Talk, Inside the Mind of a Master Procrastinator, which has been viewed almost 29 million times.

Robert Glazer: Tim, welcome. I'm really excited to have you join us on the Elevate podcast today.

Tim Urban: Thank you for having me.

Robert Glazer: So I'd love to hear how you got started as a writer. Was Wait But Why your first writing project?

Tim Urban: No. So I had ... if I had to really go back to the beginning of my current writing style, it's really just kind of like writing long email recaps to friends about something funny that happened. I would have gone on a funny thing, and there'd be some story, and I'd just write like a long email recap. I kind of had fun doing that.

Tim Urban: So when I started a blog on the platform Blogger 2005, and basically just took the long email to friends concept and just put it on the internet, and I would tell a funny story there instead or I would talk about a random thought I had. So that was this kind of very side project blog that I did for six years, and as I did it, it got more involved. I started doing drawings at some point, and it become more of an actual thing I was doing.

Tim Urban: It really kind of evolved out of nothingness into a legit side project blog. Then a couple years after I stopped doing that, started writing Wait But Why and took things up a notch. It still to me is this kind of long, single evolution.

Robert Glazer: Well, we can't totally let you off with that. Now, were you an English major? Was there an actual real job that came before this? Did you do any writing? I need a little more info on what came before.

Tim Urban: Yeah. So I'm definitely not an English major. I hated humanities and I hated writing, and I still do hate writing FYI. The nightmare thing in school is when someone assigned me a paper. I really liked math and science and I liked learning about history, maybe, and I liked reading the books that were assigned in English sometimes. I couldn't stand analyzing them, and I definitely didn't want to write anything about them and I didn't like writing thesis statements and topic sentences and counter arguments. It's just, I hate it.

Tim Urban: I definitely didn't ever want to be, never thought I would want to be a writer because of all of that, but when I bring up that like writing emails to friends thing, that wasn't part of that category for me. It wasn't ... I wasn't sitting down at an open Word document to write a thoughtful essay with a thesis. No, it was just ... I'm just typing out funny thoughts or whatever, and that I can do. That I don't mind. That's kind of fun. So that's the part of my life that expanded into the writing world, not the part that hated writing English papers.

Tim Urban: Now I did have another job while I was doing this first blog, side project, with my long time business partner, Andrew Finn. We started. We had known each other forever and we started a tutoring test prep company together. I had been tutoring on the side to pay my bills in LA after college while I was trying to write movie scores. I was writing music and then I was blogging on the side. I was doing all these creative projects that I liked doing, and then I was tutoring to pay the bills, and then I procrastinated from the hard pathways of these creative careers that I wanted to pursue deep down and dug into the business world and started turning this tutoring side thing into a real company with Andrew, which was really fun. It wasn't exactly what I wanted to pursue long term, but it was ... you know, it was a job and it was real and we were building something together. That's what I did for nine years after college before going full time on one of the creative projects, which was Wait But Why.

Robert Glazer: So there were a few of them. This was one of many experiments? Or one of a ...

Tim Urban: Yeah, we actually ... we started this tutoring company and then at one point we built a podcast app, an app to listen to podcasts. This was 2011, and for the record, it looks like we actually were on to something. That would have been a good time to start a podcast app. Unfortunately, we didn't really take it the full distance. We built the app and the guy built it in HTML 5 and it was kind of bad and we kind of didn't know what we were doing so we stopped.

Tim Urban: But we had the right instinct that podcasts were going to get bigger and now they really have. So we did that, and we started different ... you know, the current tutoring test prep company that we actually have is called Arbor Bridge. That itself was a spinoff of the original test prep company, which was just for in

home students. Tutors go into the homes and work with students after school, kind of a normal tutoring company.

Tim Urban: Then we actually ... one of our referral sources, the people who kind of send us students, college counselor said, "Can you work with a student who's in Brazil?" And we didn't have any tutors in Brazil obviously, but she said, "Maybe you can tutor her online." Okay, let's make this work. So we spend a bunch of days just researching, finding different mediums to use online and see if we can actually do a good tutoring session online, and we could. So that turned into a spin off company, which is now the entire test prep company is online because that ended up being a way more efficient, and actually in a lot of ways more effective way to tutor.

Tim Urban: So we were kind of just serial starters of things.

Robert Glazer: Tinkerers.

Tim Urban: Yeah, yeah. Wait But Why was one of those things. It was an extra meaningful one to me because I really, really wanted to do one of my creative side projects full time, and this was a way I could keep working with Andrew, we could start it together, but I would write on it. Instead of writing five hours a week on my old blog, I'd write 60 hours a week on this one, and what would happen if I put all my time into it? So that was kind of the Genesis of it.

Robert Glazer: What I find so interesting about Wait But Why is that unlike many blogs, it isn't really built around a specific topic. It's almost full Seinfeld-esque in that sense. So you just said 50-60 hours. What is your cadence, and I know people must ask you this all the time and I get asked that question, but how do you come up with the ideas? Is it a long development process or is it like something happened that day or a couple dots connect? I'm sure that's the first thing most people ask you.

Tim Urban: Well, the cadence has changed. I mean, early on, I was writing a new post every week. So I had a list, a potential posts list that was ongoing and growing. I still have that list and it's become huge because you can ... once you're looking through the lens of, "Would this be a good blog post?" At everything, suddenly you see blog posts everywhere.

Robert Glazer: Yeah.

Tim Urban: You know, someone has a tantrum at the airport, and you say, "Okay, that's perfect. I can see the stick cartoon of this tantrum, which will be part of a post that's nine things that annoy me about airports, or funny things about airports."

Robert Glazer: Does this make your friends and family nervous?

Tim Urban: No, because I don't really write about them in particular too much. We all have interesting conversations with our friends or their family and we sit there and you just have this really great dinner with someone and you really expound upon something and you feel like you came on something new together. Once you're writing a blog, I would write that down. Say, "Hey, I want to dig into this, and maybe write a post about it," or it just goes onto the list and maybe later it gets combined with three other things on the list into this one idea.

Tim Urban: Which this is what standard comedians do. You just kind of jotting down your thoughts and notes and observations throughout any day, and you end up with a pretty big list to choose from. So I started writing weekly posts like that. Then as time went on, I started digging deeper, and deeper, and deeper. So my posts became longer and fewer. Now they've almost reached book length for each one, something I may reign in again at some point. At the moment, I'm in kind of really expansive land with my writing.

Robert Glazer: What's the word count of a post these days?

Tim Urban: So these days ... I mean, early on, I tried not to go over 3,000 words, and I still did a lot. Then that turned into 6, then 8 and 10,000 words.

Robert Glazer: That really is a book. Yeah.

Tim Urban: Well, yeah. Now, I mean, the last few posts have been ... one of them was 40,000 words, which is actually a book. My current post is a series of posts that total over 100,000 words. So yeah. I've basically become without realizing, become an author more than a blogger and my posts happen to be online. It's kind of the way it seems at the moment. I don't know. Something about putting it online and people being able to for free just share it. It's good for drawings if I have a lot of visuals. That actually works better in a blog post than a book.

Tim Urban: It sucks reading stuff online in some ways, but in other ways, a big long scroll where you can embed any kind of images or videos you want throughout and link to things is a nice kind of flexibility that a book with pages doesn't have.

Robert Glazer: I mean, so 40,000 is sort of ... that's probably the length of a lot of smaller format books I've seen these days. So how long does that take you to do from beginning to end to get it online? I mean, if that was a book, that would be a year process for some people, but obviously you're posting more often than that.

Tim Urban: Well, it depends. On one hand, I can work really quickly under pressure. It's something I've always been able to do. So if I have a really serious deadline for some reason, if some external thing is scaring me into doing it, I can actually do a 40,000 word post including the research, beginning, middle, and end, revision, drawings, and posted in six weeks, eight weeks. That's if I'm under a ton of pressure.

Tim Urban: If I'm not under pressure, I can go the opposite direction and I can have a real problem getting it out because I'll just keep adding to it. I'll keep obsessing over, "Is this the right outline?" I'll want to perfect the drawings more. Stuff that doesn't actually really in the end if you keep doing that forever, it doesn't really make the post better enough to warrant the extra time. Time for me is very dependent on an external situation.

Robert Glazer: You made a nice segue into something I wanted to ask you about, which is your Ted Talk. I was going to make the assumption that you were a productive procrastinator. So you have this Ted Talk that everyone is a procrastinator. As I said before, I think 29 million views. Give us your philosophy on procrastination. Is it actually bad? Is it good? Or do we need it?

Tim Urban: Well, yeah. So there's ... procrastination is a complicated topic. There's one school of thought that like to say procrastination is good, and then another that says it's bad, which is kind of my school of thought. I think they can both be right, I think, if we're talking about different things.

Tim Urban: Adam Grant has a Ted Talk where he talks about being a precrastinator, which is the opposite of a procrastinator. So a precrastinator is the kind of person who they get an assignment, work, school, anything else, and they immediately do it and get it in well before the deadline because it just gives them anxiety knowing that there is this deadline looming over them, even if it's in the future. They get anxious right then and they will sit down and they'll knock it out and send it in, whether it's a book deadline or a paper, whatever it is.

Tim Urban: The procrastinator does the opposite. They get an assignment and they look at it. It looks dreadful, and they will then do whatever they can to ignore it and avoid it, even if it's bothering them. It's not like they're always cocky and laughing and saying, "Ha ha, I don't do it." They often really, really wish they could just do it like everyone else. "Just do it this time. Do it normally. Just be reasonable about it and you'll be happy. You'll do better on it," but they can't. They run into this force inside of them that will resist any work until you absolutely have to.

Tim Urban: So they'll do everything in the last second. The thing is, both of those people in a weird way have a similar problem is they both are actually rushing the work. When you rush the work too much, what happens is the only option you end up really being left with is doing some derivative of what other people have already done. Doing original things is hard. It takes toiling. It takes pondering. It takes frustrating brainstorming sessions that nothing happens and you come back the next day and at some point epiphanies hit and you come up with something really good and you work on it and you work on it until it's really excellent.

Tim Urban: If you're rushing to get the work out, to get it done and out and you just want to move, or if you're waiting until the last second, neither of those gives you the time and space to really do original work ethic. So what Adam talks about is he says that procrastination is a good thing, and I think that for those people who

are procrastinators, I think it is. I think those people need to learn to be more comfortable with the feeling of, "Yes, there is a deadline. It is looming and I'm going to have to live with that for a little while, and I'm not just going to get it done." Yeah, that might give you some anxiety, but that's something to overcome. That's a childish anxiety and I should mature out of that.

Tim Urban: What I would say, is that's true. For people like me who it's never a problem doing it too early. The problem is always waiting until the last second. Those people, I would say the opposite. No, your procrastination for you is a vice. It is not helping you. It is shoving all your work until the last second, giving you a lot of anxiety along the way and preventing you from doing great things.

Tim Urban: So I think that the key here is balance, and neither the pre or procrastinator have their handle on that.

Robert Glazer: Well, two thoughts on that. One, it sounds like you need a little bit of the dopamine and the adrenaline to do your best work. I think some of us just need that deadline and that pressure, and I'm sure you've written about that, too, but I think it also just goes into the concept back to the Eisenhower principle, people can't separate urgent and important. So in the case of the procrastinators like you were saying, getting something done soon may not be the right thing to get done, right? I think that's the biggest problem is procrastinating in the quadrant where things are now all urgent and important when you could have done some work on the important but less urgent stuff.

Tim Urban: Yeah, that's right. Both of these people have trouble with the important but not urgent stuff. These people both in a lot of ways, they respond to urgency. Urgency is what drives them. I call it the panic monster. For a procrastinator, it's the panic monster actually shows up and scares him into working. The procrastinator, it's the fear of the panic monster later, or maybe the panic monster in its own way just shows up earlier. I don't know. I really can speak most to my own psychology because I really know how it works. I know how procrastinators think.

Tim Urban: Procrastinators are aliens to me. I don't really understand how they think. I can't imagine doing things the way they do them. I guess I can kind of imagine the feeling of a looming anxiety and they just want to get it off their plate. I've had that experience in different situations, so maybe that's what they're going through. But either way, if you're driven by the panic monster, if you're driven by only this concept of, "There's a deadline, okay, now I have to," then you're not going to end up that fulfilled. You're not going to get to where you want to be because if you think about like ...

Tim Urban: I think if you define important as this kind of thing that serves your long term goals, values, or mission. So usually ... another way to think about it is stuff that might end up on part of your epitaph or you're lying on your death bed thinking back on your life and the things you accomplish. What are you thinking about there? Those are the important things, the things that writing your email,

getting your inbox zero on a random Tuesday. Not going to end up on your epitaph. It doesn't contribute to your longterm goals, values, mission.

Tim Urban: Now maybe it doesn't mean that you shouldn't do it. I mean, the urgent and not important stuff, you still, you know, you got to do your thing. But the fallacy is starting to convince yourself that you've been productive that day because you did a bunch of that stuff, and you did a bunch of errands and you paid some bills and you went and got to inbox zero and you did a bunch of meetings and you feel great. "Oh, yeah. I'm working. I had a productive day." You take a step back. Did you really move forward on anything important? The answer is usually no because most important stuff is not urgent. Important can be actual accomplishments, but it also can be spending time with people that matter. It can be getting to the gym. It can be breaking up with someone. That's a really important thing to do because it's the right move, but it's not urgent and you procrastinate on it forever. It can also be making a self improvement and working on actually learning something new so you can have more skills so you can accomplish more things later.

Tim Urban: So there's all this stuff that really makes a human life rich that really is what allows the individual in us to kind of live their best life. That stuff gets totally lost for procrastinators and probably for precrastinators, too. Then people end up way down the road in life looking back and feeling like they're not fulfilled.

Robert Glazer: Sometimes it's not just the sort of deadline monster. I think it's just people who are sort of addicted to the checklist satisfaction, right? So as you said, I can check off these eight things that I got done today, and they're done. They don't matter, but they're done. What I really needed was a deposit of 20 minutes on the book that I really wanted to write more than anything else in my life. It just seems easier or simpler to keep checking off the dry cleaning and the this and the inbox zero, than the 20 minutes to the book. Then it just becomes this big goal that we can never address because we haven't taken any chunks or bites towards the bigger goal.

Robert Glazer: So my analogy is always if it's a really big mountain and you don't want towards it, it's always this kind of big looming mountain in the background.

Tim Urban: Yeah. The checklist is a dopamine hit. It's not really different than getting a dopamine hit from eating a cookie. To me, it is just another thing our brain can get addicted to and it can feel really good just like eating a cookie feels good, but it is not actually doing something good. It's not actually doing something meaningful. I mean, again, it's not like the answer is to not take your stuff to the cleaners ever. Doing those things is like taking a shower, going to the bathroom. It's just stuff that you have to do. It's not work. It's not productivity, and that's not just cleaners. That goes for a lot of stuff that actually happens at work. A lot of assignments. You're handing in things that seem like genuine work, that really seem productive. If you take a step back and say, "Does this contribute to my long term goals, values, and mission in a serious way? Is this stuff that could lead to something that could be on my epitaph?" If the answer is no, that's like

taking a shower. It's like eating your breakfast. Okay, you have to do it. You're not getting work done.

Tim Urban: The other ... that should relieve the burden because you don't need to do eight hours of important but not urgent stuff a day. Like you said, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, an hour a day can do it. So it's on one hand you can think of, "Oh, damn it. None of that counts as work. On the other hand, I only have to work one hour days." So the one thing I think a checklist can be good for to this purpose is it can build up momentum. It's like a running start. So when I start doing the checklist, I start feeling empowered and good about myself. That's when I'm more likely to suddenly open that, like you said, book you want to write. Opening up something and actually working on it because you have these positive feelings.

Tim Urban: So sometimes I'll do a bunch of easy unimportant stuff first to kind of get myself in an optimistic zone and then get those dopamine hits going, and then I can kind of ride that momentum into something harder sometimes. But it's a dangerous thing because you can also just use your whole day on it.

Robert Glazer: Well, in the context of what is important, I think how I originally got introduced to your writing and the favorite thing that you've written was this post on the life calendar, which put a human lifespan in a very visual term. So it combined great writing and great visual showing the number of years, months, and days in a human life as small dots. You even took it a step further by counting all the Super Bowls you thought you had left in your life, pizzas, and Chinese takeout. I'm curious, what first inspired you to write that post and I have to assume you got some really interesting reactions from all over the world.

Tim Urban: Yeah. I mean, this is a little like I was just saying with the epitaph and your deathbed and goals and long-term mission. It's the same idea. I talk about deathbeds a lot and epitaphs a lot because it's a zoom out mechanism. I think that sometimes you only can be clear headed on that really zoomed out level. When you're hovering way above your life looking down on it and you can see it. Like if you're in a helicopter, you can see the whole coastline suddenly if you go high enough. You can get the picture of the whole deal versus when you're down on the beach. You can only see a little tiny stretch. You don't even know what you're looking at. You miss the big picture.

Tim Urban: So I always try to kind of come up with a mental helicopter to take me way above and remind me of what's actually going on here. Remind me what the hell I'm even doing and why I'm doing it and what's actually going on. Just, what is the story that's happening here? It's incredibly how often, how bad we are, because we're not really programmed by evolution to be good at that. It wasn't helpful to help us survive. So we're pretty naturally inclined to zoom way in on today and on this week and these little petty things going on when none of that actually matters. Then later in life, when you look back, you have all these regrets because you made all these decisions day after day that didn't make sense in the big picture and it's so clear when you zoom out. When you think

about your career or you think about something and you look at your epitaph and you try to imagine, "What do I want on there?" That can help recenter you and think, "Am I doing important work?"

Tim Urban: So this post was a similar idea, but it was more about relationships and it was saying, "If you take a big zoom out on your life and you look at it visually as this kind of little life calendar of weeks, you can see all the weeks on one page very easily of your whole life." You realize, okay, this is reality here, not this thing that goes on forever. It's this kind of little collection of weeks and I'll do them, and then that's it. Then I don't have any weeks left and that's the end. So what am I actually doing with these weeks? I think that's kind of an important thing to look at. It's not always fun to look at. Sometimes it's inspiring and it is fun. Sometimes it's upsetting, but either way it's reality. So I think it's always good to look at reality.

Tim Urban: Then specifically, I talked about this concept that especially with some of our most important relationships, usually most of our most important relationships, are ones that we built in the first 20 years of our life: our oldest friends and our family. If you think about it, you spend your first couple decades spending a ton of time with those people, whether it's your family who you're with everyday when you come home from school, every weekend you're with your family. You know, I mean, you're with your friends all the time. These old friends everyday at school.

Tim Urban: Then you go to college, and you graduate college and you move somewhere. Your friends scatter around and you might not be near your family and you end up seeing your friends a few times a year. Maybe you're lucky and you see them a few times a month, but if you don't live in the same city as them, you often, whether it's friends or family, you see them a few times a year.

Tim Urban: So what that means is you actually add up the total. If you just make a chart of all the dates you were going to hang out with those people, 90% of them have already happened. Just numerically. 90% of them happened in the first 20 years because when you go from five days a week or seven days a week to twice a year or ten times a year, either way, you're now in this very sparsely populated area the rest of your life of seeing these people.

Tim Urban: So to just remember that you're in the tail end, at least in person, with all of these important relationships. So I live in New York. My parents live in Boston. I see them a few times a year, but the point is that I'm enjoying the last few percent of my days with them every time I'm with them. That's just one of these ... this is true. This is not me doing some weird mind trick. This is reality. That is the very harsh reality. So you can either choose to ignore it and then one day they die and nothing like death brings out the zoom out. You know, someone dies and suddenly all of that time I could have spent with them, all of that wasted time, all of that ... it's all so clear because death just is a punch in the face and brings us way up in the helicopter and we can see reality.

Tim Urban: My goal with a post like that is to help people who are lucky enough to still have these relationships around, get that punch in the face before the person is gone. Not necessarily even ... yes, you should I think spend more time with people, but to appreciate the time that you're spending with those people as very, very precious, which is what it really is. This is it, you know? There's not much time left with these people even if you all have a bunch of years left. The actual time with these relationships is in its waning years. So it's another zoom out. It's a different form of zoom out.

Robert Glazer: The stat I think that hit a chord with people when I included it in an article I wrote, one particular who was sort of arguing me about it and I think, yeah, I think he was struggling with the math. It doesn't mean that the quality time is over, but what was the stat by the time your kids went to college, I think it was 80%, or was it even higher than that?

Tim Urban: I think it's even higher. I mean, if you just think about if for 18 years, you're spending most days with them, okay? Then just say you're lucky and your parents live until they're really old. So you have another 40 years after you leave. So 20 years with the parents and then 40 years after. So it's double the years you've got left with your parents alive, but going from 365 days a year, just say you're one of these people that sees their parents a lot. Like you see them 30 days a year. That's a lot, okay? So that's someone that sees their parents almost once a week. 36 days a year, which is 1/10 of 365.

Tim Urban: So what that means is that if you are spending 365 days with your parents, essentially, or close to that, for the first 20 years, and then the next 40 you're spending a tenth of that time, it's equivalent to only four more actual years. So 40 years divided by, you're seeing them 1/10 of the days now. Now you actually have four years left. So you've done 18 with them, and you've got four left. So you're actually in the very last, in this case, 20% like you said, but I think that a lot of people don't see their parents 30 days a year. I think some of them who don't live in the same city see their parents five or ten days a year.

Tim Urban: So now we're talking about you really have about 1/20 left. You've got about a year left. One of those years you did, junior year of high school. All the time you saw your parents that year, you have that cumulative amount of time left spread out over the next 40 years, if you're lucky. If your parents live a long life and so do you. So it's this very unpleasant topic, but it's unpleasant because reality is unpleasant. We think reality is more pleasant than it is, then we make that decision that we deeply regret later once it's too late, once we suddenly have the punch in the face and now we look back and say, "Wow, all those years just went by. I barely saw them, didn't get into any deep conversations with them, and now it's gone."

Tim Urban: You hear people say things like, "I would do anything. I would give everything I've got for one more day with my mom or my dad." I mean, this is really hard to hear, and yet those of us who still have these people and again, it's not just parents. It's spouses. It's your kids that live with you, if you have kids, because

that's the same situation on the other side. We can't absorb that fact that you would do anything for one day. When the people are still there, you just take them for granted. We just think of them as they're there forever. I'm here forever. They're here forever. I'll see them forever. It's just we're not programmed to see the truth.

Tim Urban: So this unpleasant post is important to absorb, whether it's a post or your own way of thinking about this because it's a downer but good because the good feelings you have is a delusion. So you don't want it. Those are not your friends, those good feelings of that they're here forever. You want to feel kind of upset about the situation. You want to feel kind of sad and stressed and kind of urgent to spend time with them. That is not ... it doesn't feel good, but it's way better than the regret you feel later.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, and so obviously you had to do a lot of thinking about this as you wrote it, because that happens to me while I'm writing. It forces me to think about something like ... did it compel you to make any major changes in your own life?

Tim Urban: Well, you know, I would love to say I made a ton of changes.

Robert Glazer: Called your parents.

Tim Urban: No, I'm still a human who I can say all this and then ten minutes passes and the delusion kicks in again because this delusion is really hard to rid ourselves of. We are programmed to believe all these things that helped us survive in 50,000 BC. We're not programmed to believe things that are real if they didn't help us then. So we are really fighting against our programming to try to absorb this.

Tim Urban: So I will say that little things like my family does a few trips a year. It will be a little weekend with this crew and then another weekend with this other crew and then we'll do a big thing together. I've become kind of very adamant about not missing those ever. So you know, I don't think of those as, "Eh, I can't make them this year, guys. Sorry, I'm just too busy." I don't ever say that. It always comes first. No matter what's happening. So that's one thing I've done, but I still live in New York. My parents live in Boston. My sisters live in Boulder, Colorado. So we're all over the place. Now one of the things that I have done well is most of my good friends live in New York, or at least half of them.

Tim Urban: So I will say that I'm in the best place on the planet to maximize the time with the friends that matter most to me. So I think I'm doing an okay job. I'd give myself a B-. A B- is still better than what I think probably me before and maybe a lot of other people are getting currently, which is more like a C- or a D. So yeah, I could do better.

Robert Glazer: That's a fair self assessment. I think one thing that's similar for me, sort of when I write my Friday Four Newsletter, that the process of writing is a lot of thinking. It doesn't mean you do it perfectly or whatever it sort of clarifies your thoughts

and philosophy around it. None of us are perfect, nor are we preaching perfection. I wanted to touch on a question about travel. I know you've done a lot of international travel, written about it. What is it about international travel that sort of widens a person's perspective? Have you come up with some of your best ideas when you're out and in a different environment or context?

Tim Urban: Yeah. I think to harp on the same thing here, I think the valuable thing is when you're somewhere else, other than all the other just fun benefits of traveling, it's a good way to get more in touch with reality in a couple ways. We have a couple programmed delusions that it can help us get out of. One is that we just are seeing our own life and our own world from the inside all the time. That's it. We're just in the middle of it. When you travel, even though it shouldn't actually matter because you're physically somewhere different, but somehow the more foreign environment you're in ... so it's not necessarily far away. If I go to Sydney and I'm hanging out with a bunch of ex-pat Americans in a house, that doesn't do the trick. It's much more about culturally foreign, culturally far away from where you are. The more you do that, the more you see your own world from the outside, from another vantage point than you normally do.

Tim Urban: That does a lot to help you assess your own priorities. I'm like, "Okay, now I can see this whole world. What actually do I want to be doing in that world and how? What am I so anxious about in that world? Does that make sense? Does the anxiety actually map onto reality?" So that's one delusion. You're supposed to just be stuck in your life, but we can travel now. We can move to different cultures for a little bit of time. You're not supposed to be able to do either. So that helps us kind of crack through this natural delusion of ours.

Tim Urban: The second time is we really do have the tendency to kind of feel like either other cultures that are really different, I think we both underestimate and overestimate how close they are to us. What I mean by that is on one hand, I think we think of them as ... we kind of forget that other people do what they do because they have a totally different set of life experiences and values and if you were behind their eyes living their life, you would also be doing those things. So it helps you have more compassion.

Tim Urban: It's not just foreign people in other countries. It's just people that are different than you. It helps you not judge. It's really unwise to judge harshly the behavior and actions of other people who are doing those things because they had different life programming than you that has made them that way and made them feel this way. You feel the way you are in the way you do and what you're doing because of a totally different set of inputs. So you had different inputs. Why are you judging the outputs of someone that had totally different inputs than you? So we forget that people are different in that way.

Tim Urban: We also sometimes think they're more different than they are in that when we are judging other people, whether it's kind of your political out group, the political people in your own country you hate or it's the other countries or whatever, and you dehumanize them. You demonize them in a way because you

just feel like they're almost not even people. They're so different from you. You could never even. Then when you actually spend time, I think it's a good reminder that everyone is a person and that right there gives you a fuck ton in common with each other because just being a person, we're all dealing with a lot of the same weird psychological things. We're dealing with a lot of the same physical things. Just people in some ways are really similar to each other even though we all have different lenses in the world. So I think it's just good to remind yourself that everyone is a 3D human just like you and that sometimes you overrate cultures. Oh, you know, this culture is so wise. No, they're shitty in a lot of ways, and they're good in a lot of ways just like your culture. Just like every person and every culture, they're all .5. there's no ones and zeroes.

Tim Urban: So I think it's a good reminder of that. It just builds compassion I think on both sides. Both of those techniques can build compassion for others, and then that first thing can help you zoom out on your own life. So that's to me, those are some serious benefits to getting out of your own world.

Robert Glazer: I totally agree. All right. Last question, and it's multiple choice. You can choose personal or professional and it can be single or recurring, but what is a mistake you've made and what have you learned the most from it?

Tim Urban: Yeah, man. Well, there's a lot to choose from here. I would say I'm the middle of a current mistake that I'm aware of that I learned from while being in the middle of it. The big overarching mistake that the other ones are all nested under is underestimating the challenge that each of us has. I don't care who you are. They're all different, but each of us has a beast of a challenge against ourselves trying to get control and take the reigns of our own lives from within. I'm pretty sure, and I can't speak for everyone, but I'm pretty sure that for most of us, the biggest challenge we have is from within.

Tim Urban: When I came out of college, I had absolutely no idea about that. I thought, "Sure I'm a procrastinator. Sure I can be kind of a perfectionist. Sure I can self defeat sometimes. That's just me being silly." The real challenge is out in the world. How am I going to make my way in this big, complex, competitive world? I need so much luck and I need to do all this ...

Tim Urban: It was just wrong. The actual out external world, for people who really have won the internal battle, I think it's a breeze. I think the external world, you've won the internal battle, it means you're, A, shooting for the right things because you're wise internally, and you actually can do the things that you want to do. You can make progress in the ways you want to make, and that is ... the world is quite unique for those people. I think even whether it's that you actually become less ambitious once you know yourself well and you just want to live a balanced, happy life and then the world is easier for that person because they can do that. Or even if someone really wants to do super ambitious things out in the world after they've gotten to know themselves. They still want that. I think the world is not actually that hard if someone is just doing all the right things. We all know what to do, somewhere deep down [inaudible 00:38:17] in most

cases, even if that thing is learning about what to do, but we don't do it. We defeat ourselves.

Tim Urban: So some people defeat themselves by overeating. Some people defeat themselves with drug addictions or alcohol. Some people defeat themselves with procrastination. They sabotage relationships. They don't exercise. There's so many ways we do it, and I just think that that's the big mistake that I made right out of college. I totally underestimated the big beast that I was battling, the big dragon. I thought I was battling this little dragon, and I would say I'm still working on that.

Tim Urban: Now at least I think I know where to work now. At least I'm aware of where the problem is. I don't underestimate it anymore, but I'm still working on it. I'm still battling the internal battle everyday. So I think that that's something that everyone should think about probably.

Robert Glazer: Yeah, that battle rages on for most of us. Tim, how can people get ahold of you?

Tim Urban: Yeah. Well, I mostly do my stuff when it does come out on waitbutwhy.com, and people just subscribe to the email list because that's the easiest way to just ... since I'm very irregular with posting, that's the easiest way to get something new. When I have something new, it will just come to you.

Robert Glazer: So very [inaudible 00:39:32]. You got to sign up and wait for it.

Tim Urban: That's right.

Robert Glazer: I wonder why.

Tim Urban: That's correct.

Robert Glazer: Tim, thanks for sharing your story with us. You're an amazing example of what we can achieve when we focus on why we do the things we do and what we want to do, and I really appreciate you taking the time to join us today.

Tim Urban: Yeah, thanks so much for having me on.

Robert Glazer: Great. Well, to our listeners, thanks for tuning into the Elevate podcast today. We'll include links to Tim, Wait But Why, his Ted Talk, and particularly the post on lifespan on the detailed episode page at robertglazer.com. If you enjoyed today's episode, I'd really appreciate if you could leave us a review as it helps new users discover the show and the content. If you're listening in Apple Podcast today, just scroll down to the bottom of the episode page to leave your review. If you're listening in your browser on a different app, you can find easy links to review on other services such as Google Play and Stitcher by following the subscribe page link under the podcast link at robertglazer.com.

Robert Glazer: Thanks again for your support, and until next time, keep elevating.