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From developing a brand identity to cultivating the right conditions for musical exploration, successful recording artists are masters of the creative process. Hosted by Stanford professor Bob Sutton, Sickamore, a hip-hop artist, photographer and the creative director at Interscope Records, joins Sam Seidel, director of K-12 strategy and research at Stanford's Hasso Plattner Institute of Design, for an intimate conversation about what entrepreneurs can learn from the music industry, how to navigate ambiguity, and why it's important to strike the right balance between open-ended creativity and project completion.



Transcript

- [Announcer] Who you are defines how you build.. - Sickamore and I both come from hip hop culture and in hip hop culture we place a premium on freshness.. Right? Like, somebody could say a rhyme one day and it's incredible and it blows everyone's minds and then if someone else comes and says the same rhyme the next day and thinks they're gonna get the same reaction and everyone's like, that's whack, I heard somebody else already say that, like I'm not impressed.. Same with graffiti.. Same with dance moves.. It's like the premium has always been on innovation in hip hop culture and there's also often a competitive spirit to it.. So, I've studied every interview that you've done at Harvard, at UCLA, Rap Radar, and my goal is to be fresher (audience laughs) and get all new content, all new stories, like ask different questions and just make it a whole new thing.. - You know, I kinda swiped the story, your freshness.. It's for the story on, Is that an echo? - [Sam] Yeah, we get.... - It's for the story on, when I was in eighth grade everybody's having like a freestyle competition, right? And I probably went to school maybe like three blocks from my house in Brooklyn and maybe four guys went and they did their rhymes, right? So, I'm not a rapper..

I wasn't back then.. I'm not now.. But I really wanted to get into it, but I knew rap really well.. So, I went up and I said, I got a verse.. And I said this like old Busta Rhymes verse that from an album maybe was out for a week but I knew nobody knew and I said the verse and I sped it like double time (imitating fast beats) and I went in for like 32 bars and the whole crowd went crazy.. (imitating crowd cheers) Everybody was like, you coming to do, that was Randal, That's my government name.. That was Randal? That was Randal? And after that I was like, oh yeah, I wanna be in hip hop.. That was like the moment I decided this was gonna be kinda like my life, where I wanted to go 'cause before that I wanted to be in sports.. I wanted to be a sports agent but, like, it's nothing like hip hop culture, you know, 'cause you know, like, it's hip hop.. Everybody hears like hip hop versus rap..

You know, rap's something you do, hip hop's something that you live.. And something cool about hip hop it's not really about how much money you have.. It's really about where you came from and where you made it to.. You know? So, it's like, if you really started high and you made it even higher it's no real clout with that.. But if you really came from nothing and you made something, it's bragging rights on every little part of hip hop.. - So, let's talk about that piece of flipping something out of nothing, which is, in some ways, one way you could just define what hip hop culture is and whatever creative medium, whether it's rap, visual art, entrepreneurship because it's so related to what creativity is and in my book I have a quote from a philosopher named Nelson Goodman, and somebody asked him, "Can you teach people to be more creative?" and he said "Yes." and they said "How?" and he said, "Give them harder problems." And I've always felt like hip hop embodies that.. And at the same time, Raw Goddess talks about how we can't make it seem like you have to be suffering and struggling to be creative.. There has to be a place for you to be able to eat and be healthy and still be really creative and I'm curious about how you view that tension within hip hop culture and within creativity, especially as you work really hard to support artists and make sure they have an abundance and make sure they have all the things they need to be comfortable but you still want them to have that creative edge.. - Yep.. I think my main role with artists is I could really help artists finish their projects and get out their albums, get out their films..

Some of the artist I work with like, Why G and Travis Scott, are probably the two examples I'm gonna use the most because I worked with them the longest, about three albums each and I did a short film with Why G.. Me and Travis have artists together like Sheck Wes.. So, it's really about protecting their idea 'cause at the beginning it always starts with an idea

like, hey, I wanna come up with a album about a day in the life in Compton but I wanna do it different than Kendrick or I wanna do an album about re-creating my hometown theme park that was destroyed but I wanna do it musically, you know? And you lock in and to this concept for months, years, you know, every single day and my whole role is to get the right people in, keep the process goin'.. That's why I did design school.. The D school is so interesting to me because it's new ways and new processes of how to do things and that's all I'm about, especially when you have these new cutting edge artists.. They always wanna find an edge, you know? So, one of the things that I always, that's really been hitting home is spaces.. You see? So, right now everybody knows the studio.. That's, like, the basic thing.. You go there.. You stay there for 12 hours..

You record as much as you can and you leave.. So, there's always tips.. There's old school tips about that, like make sure you write before you get to the studio and when you get there the idea for productivity but the next level of it has been the home studios.. One thing about the D school, and Bob gave me the tour, is that you can come in here 24/7.. Right? You can come in here at three o'clock in the morning.. And that's, like, the best place to make music because if I have an idea to make an album and I have to leave at 12 o'clock and I have to come back the next day 12 hours later, I gotta drive home.. I gotta fall asleep.. I gotta wake up.. I gotta get myself in gear.. I gotta get to the studio..

Then they gotta smoke.. Then they gotta watch them play some video games.. We gotta play 2K.. - [Sam] It's mandatory.. - It's a whole process, you know? So, if you could just live in the house, that's the one thing that Travis use to tell me.. He said, look, when we first started workin' together, if I could just, 'cause I lived in one of those entourage kinda places with two other guys.. You know what I mean? If I could just live in a house like yours and I didn't have to leave, I could finish my album.. So, it was about finding a space, finding a house with different rooms, adding different producers in there.. Like we got people like Metro Boomin or FKI and maybe eight nine producers.. It's like the producer Olympics, you know, and have 'em all living in one space so they could always be falling asleep, working, still playing 2K, still smokin' but still staying in one spot and never having to leave it's kinda like a heaven for artists..

And you could stay there for months at a time until the idea is complete.. You get (snaps fingers) way more productivity out of the situation.. And so, now, along with Skyler, I've been really obsessed with finding new age spaces and spaces that foster this level of collaboration and creativity.. And if you could take this same kind of design thinking and really improve business, improve design, imagine what it could do for the arts.. You know, if you really start takin' at 'em, imagine what it could do for your overall projects.. - It's really interesting because I think design thinking borrows a lot from artists and has turned that into a set of processes, processes and abilities and mindsets that now you're taking back into the art realm and there's like a cycle to it.. So, with a project like an artist coming to you and saying, the theme park concept, what is your role in making that a reality? 'cause it's not just putting anybody in that house.. You have to be really thoughtful about how you curate who, who comes into the space, what pieces of inspiration are there, the duration of time, like, how the space is set up.. Can you just walk us through the process from the point where the artist comes to you and says, "I'm thinking this theme park concept might make sense," and you feel like that idea is working, like how you take that to the point where I'm picking up the album or streaming or start to be exposed to the content itself? - Okay so, the hardest part is, like, the goal, right? Having the people who just knowing what that concept is.. About eighty, ninety percent of a lot of creative projects people kinda say, I'm just gonna start and then kinda figure it out from there..

But the project doesn't really start until you have an idea of what you wanna do.. The name could change, what it looks like at the end could change but the idea doesn't really change.. It kinda like manifests and takes form.. And then you have to kinda build a team.. So, like in music, the first thing we have to do is find, like, a solid engineer.. The engineer is kinda like the offensive lineman or he's the person who's gonna be able to keep track of all the music, you know? Then, come up with a laundry list of producers that we want in the studio.. And I kind break it down into four quarters, you know, like football or basketball.. The first quarter, like, is nothing wrong.. It's almost like a two year old child, everything is great.. Everything they write on the piece of paper is great..

Oh that's nice, everything, more ideas, more more more, oh it's nice.. Everything goes in the fridge, you know? And after the end of the first quarter you start looking back, like, okay, cool, now I at least have something to play with, now I have about five, ten, fifteen ideas that are pretty decent and we could really go for.. Then the second quarter's exciting 'cause now you have a base and now you start workin' on more stuff.. You start bringin' people in the studio.. They start givin' you feedback and you start thinkin', oh, you have the greatest album ever, you know? Like everything's perfect, (audience laughs) everything's done, you know? Exactly, that's how I feel too.. (laughing) and then you're about half-time.. And around the third quarter there's usually like a song or a moment that happens in the studio that you're like, (snaps fingers) okay, cool, it's time to finish this up because this is the moment where you know, we gotta get this out, 'cause music, especially, is about timing, you know? I think, the thing about film, a lot of it is, some films are timely but there's people who could work on their film.. You hear stories of people who've been moving around a script for 20 years until it's get married with the right person and they really nail it.. Music's not like that 100% because (snap fingers) music's like a collective thought.. You ever go to the club or go to a party and it's like, yeah man, all these beats sound the same..

It's like everyone's listening to the same thing at the same time.. So, you kinda have to time it and it's based on what people are wearin', what kind of alcohol they drinkin', what kinda other substances they using and (snaps fingers) that's why I like, in the '60s everything was really psychedelic because everything was based on psychedelics.. In the '70s things started (snaps fingers) movin' faster.. A lot of that was cocaine.. (laughing) and things started slowin' down in the '80s a little bit and

in the '90, like right now the music started getting slower.. That's because the opiates.. You know what I mean? Everybody started doin' things.. So, a lot of the, I'm not gonna lie to you.. A lot of the influence in music really comes from other things.. And you mix that with (snaps fingers) just the different (snaps fingers) the different rhythms that are happenin' and you have to time it..

So, if you do a great song, if I put out Before I Let Go, it's an all time great song.. It might not be a big big song right now because what he's sayin', the time, the slang, everything about that moment was from that year.. So, you have to also get the music out in a certain period of time.. So, after you get through that third quarter and you're like, okay, cool (snaps fingers) things are happenin'.. Now you start sharpening up ideas.. Now you start going in each song, let's do two more sessions on this one song, let's do five more sessions on this other song, let's start lockin' in this concept.. And in the fourth quarter, it's a process I like to call "killing your babies," because let's say you have an album and you have 20 songs that you absolutely love that you can't live without.. So, what we do is, it depends on what kinda album you're making.. If you're making a linear album like a Kendrick Lamar, Good Kid Maad City, then everything has to kinda fit in a story.. If you're makin' more of a vibey album, think like a Drake or a Shaday or a Fucshia then you kinda, those albums you can have more of the same type but you gotta make sure everything kinda fits in that vibe..

And things that don't fit that you musta loved since the first part of the project might not fit the overall body of work.. - So, that's so interesting 'cause we talk a lot in the design thinking process about prototyping and failing forward and learning from quick (snaps fingers) like scrappy, put together a scrappy prototype, see how it plays and then learn from that.. Would you say, the leaked track, what are the equivalents of that in your work? - The thing that's different, I had dinner with a guy from, an advertising guy and he kept using, he kept trying to take the advertising principles into the music space.. And he kept tellin', his big example was Starbucks Blonde.. He says, "You see how Starbucks Blonde is? You can put out Blonde and you can market it and it'll blow up and everybody wants Blonde," you know? And I was tellin' him like the difference between Blonde and artists is Blonde doesn't have a mind, doesn't have a Twitter.. It doesn't have to go outside.. So, if somebody doesn't like Blonde, Blonde doesn't have hurt feelings.. Blonde doesn't have any emotions.. It's just a product.. So, I think the biggest difference between designing and marketing a product or business verses putting out a real person with feelings and real art, whether it be a photographer, a musician, a clothing designer, is you got people there who really care..

And I think sometimes that gets kinda lost in translation.. - I also think it's, the audience and fans can be kinda unforgiving about what artists do.. We get really attached to an artist off of one project and then if they start putting out something that's different in some way that doesn't resonate with us, I think sometimes the, especially with social media, it can be a little hard to back out of that.. I don't know if you've seen that or if you feel like social media has impacted that but.. - You know, it's ten times worse.. It's like sports.. If you have a bad game out, everyone's tweeting at you, they're "at-ing" you, they're putting the Michael Jordan face on Joel and B.. - Right.. And somebody has that four second clip of what you did and they keep putting memes to it.. - Yeah..

You don't get to escape it.. You know what I mean? It happens in real time but the opposite happens in real time.. If people like it, you get instant feedback right away.. So, it works both ways but it's kinda, it kinda is a price you pay when you wanna be a professional artist.. You know, if you wanna go about it promenade and play a guitar and have anybody just drop some money in your guitar booth and that's cool, you know? But as soon as you say, you know what, I want you to buy my album, I want you to come pay for my record, I want you to pay for my T-shirt.. Now you're a professional.. You're a professional artist.. You know what I mean? You have to take it serious and you have to take the pros that comes with the cons and that's the feedback.. Now, what you talkin' about, the success, is really the hardest part.. After you fail there's no real expectations..

You could go and like, we gonna shock the world with this next album or this next project.. So, people don't really get the response that I wanted.. But after you have a hugely successful project, the pressure is like ten times greater because the thing is, like, you might have made this project to, like, get back at like your ex-boyfriend or you mighta made this project to like, 'cause you been workin' on it for eight years but when it's time, after you had success and you toured and you traveled the world and people know you for somethin' and then they want you to do the same thing, it gets tough.. I think it was Henry Ford, if I miss the quote, if it's not Henry Ford don't kill me but I think he said, he said... What'd he say? He said, if I wanted, if I gave the people what they wanted - Faster horses.. - I woulda got faster horses.. It's the same thing with music.. The best example I see in recent time was Kanye West fourth album with 808s & Heartbreaks 'casuse he, after his first three albums, We have any Kanye fans here? - [Audience Member] Old Kanye.. - Old Kanye? (laughing) - [Audience Member] Graduation.. - Graduation? Well, that the point..

I was talkin' about graduation because the first three projects, I think Kanye Outkast had the best five album run in hip hop history.. Some people can argue A Tribal Called Quest, I win.. And, especially the first three albums were perfect.. Like College Dropout, Late Registration and then Graduation.. They were like almost like masterpieces and then because the passing of his mother and everything that was goin' on he wanted, because everybody was waitin' for the album Good Ass Job, which was supposed to be more in line of Kanye, but he went totally left and made this very ambitious, singy kinda sad 808 and a Heartbreaks that was really got mixed reviews at the time.. People were really confused but it hit, not the people.. Critics were really confused but it really hit a nerve with the people who were actually buying public.. And now, when you look back that might be, if not his most influential album, one of the most influential albums and we wouldn't have a lot of people like Drake and a few other people who just cam from that one pocket.. Yeah, I give a lot of props to Kid Cudi too, who

helped curate that sound.. But that's an example of somebody takin' a major risk in the prime of their career..

Another older example is David Bowie one time bumped into, Who's the guy? Not Justin.. It's a famous guitar player (snaps fingers) on the front song.. It'll come to me.. - [Audience Member] (muffled voice) - [Sam] The Edge? - No, what's his name man? He has dreads.. He was on a song with Daft Punk.. - [Audience Member] Nile Rodgers.. Nile Rodgers.. He bumped into Nile Rodgers in a club in Berlin and he was like, man I want you to work on my next album.. And he's like, why, have you heard my music, you know, why do you wanna work with me? And he said, 'cause you make hits.. And it takes a strong creative to be able to take a risk after you had success..

It's easy to take a risk when nobody knows you but it's really really hard to take a risk after you have a certain, any level of success.. You could have your Instagram goin' on and you might not wanna mess up your feed by throwing a different kinda picture as a photographer.. Anything could throw you off.. - So, you've now worked with artists who have been in this kind of fortunate predicament of having had pretty major success and needing to follow up on it.. How do you work with that artist? How do you support them in sort of releasing that pressure and feeling confident to explore a new terrain even while all those eyes are on them? - You gotta find a concept that you guys could lock in that has nothing to do with the commercial success.. So, if you say, okay cool, we're gonna make this day in the life album, it's gonna be good.. So, I can give you an example of Why G.. So, when I started working with Why G at Def Jam as his A and R.. The big thing was to make people forget about Toot It And Boot It 'cause all success isn't equal, especially in art.. You could have, I don't know..

How many people are here paint or do photography or do anything besides music? You ever put something out, however you put it out, it coulda been a gallery or whatever and the work that you probably spent the least amount of time on got the best response? And I'm like, man, I spent fucking four weeks doin' this and you like this? You know what I mean? (laughs) and then people, now you have to force to make more stuff in that world 'cause then maybe you have a gallerist who wants you to do a whole show in that space or you want people with more posts in there and everything you post it's not like that it gets less like or whatever.. It's a mind trip.. So, after the first album we had a lot of success, we had big hits, with My Crazy Life but it happened from a great place because it was a concept album and we really wanted to create this 24 hours in the life inverse of Good Kid Maad City.. So, when we came back with the second album it was a tougher record because you had, he just had a fallin' out with his core producer DJ Mustard.. He got shot in his music studio so nobody really wanted to keep him in the studio.. So, we made this more darker still concept album and it did well but it didn't have the success of the first album.. And then after two albums later after that then we hit a crossroad.. Then it's like, (sucks teeth) he was like, yo, F this concept stuff, I wanna make hits.. And then it's kinda like a mentality you are as a creative.. 'cause when you shift into that zone it's hard to kinda shift back 'cause it's like, if I'm not doin' it for a higher goal it could get tricky fast 'cause then you'll get a hit but then you'll start losin' the critical stuff and if stuffs comin' about money and they say if you do stuff for money God leaves the room, especially creative things..

And I really believe that.. So, that was kinda a tough moment for me tryin' to balance somebody's commercial success with their artistic success.. - And have you found a way to do that? Have you found a way? 'Cause I feel like part of being an A and R, from my understanding, is you're constantly in that balance because you've got the label on one side or whoever that's really concerned about completion, that's concerned about budget, that's concerned about all these things and you're tryin' to almost protect the artist and really create the space for them to work.. So, it seems like you're often in that position of having to hold both realities.. - I think, initially, I work with the belief that if you do your best work and you really put the right hours into it and you have the right intention, you can have success.. So, initially, I use to get into a lot of fights with the label about being over budget or why is something taking so long or our different views of success but what's happened is if you do things the right way, and we'll talk about it later, like have a seven step process of it, I really believe that you're gonna get the right result.. It's the second that you start doin' things for the wrong reasons, the results go bad.. So, now recently, with the new artists I'm signing or the new projects I work on I kinda have, what happens if you, like, if you bet on your creative space and you don't compromise and you have success, it's the best space to be in because then people will leave you alone and they kinda over fund you.. You know? That's that space you wanna be.. (audience laughs) - [Sam] It's true..

- It's because it's like, 'cause now it's like alright, they lookin' in there like, leave Alexa alone, she's just gonna, she's got it.. You know what I mean? Like if Frank Ocean, Any Frank Ocean fans here? - [Audience Member] Hell yeah.. - So, Frank Ocean, if Frank Ocean doesn't drop an album for another six years would you not listen to it when it comes out? - [Audience Member] I would.. - You're like, na, it's gonna be the greatest album ever 'cause it's Frank.. It's because that's his process.. He gives you these big bodies of work and then he'll give you a whole magazine that he shoots himself with the music or Beyonce will give you a whole film and then work on the professional for eight months and then work on the Netflix documentary for a year.. I think people really appreciate the time you put into something.. And I think you gotta figure out what kinda space you wanna be in even when you're in design and do you wanna be in a space where you're really goin' for something, you wanna be in a space where you're having commercial success? There's nothing wrong with Fast and Furious and there's nothing wrong with Roma.. You know what I'm sayin'? But you gotta, you gotta pick one.. You gotta know what you're doin' 'cause if you're like in Fast and Furious, you're tryin' to make \$250 million, it's good but just know you're not tryin' to win a Academy Award and if you go with Roma you know you're probably not gonna feed the family for the rest of your life but (audience laughs) you're gonna have your props..

And it's cool to pick your space.. But just, the problems start when Fast and Furious wants to be Roma.. - [Sam] Tries to

be, yeah.. - Yeah, that's when people start gettin' it wrong because then the goals are shifted.. You can't compromise in each one.. If you're gonna do it just do it.. You know what I mean? But don't, don't, don't, don't.. They say, they horse by committee is a camel.. It's like that kinda, that theory.. It's the same thing in the creative process..

- So, you were talking about Kanye and what he did with 808s and Heartbreak.. The next album he did something really different and have you listened to the podcast Dissect? - Uh-uh.. - So, it's this dude who breaks down albums.. He actually did Frank Ocean and he spends a whole season of the podcast just getting into every track, each episode is one track.. And so, he did that with My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy.. And he was talking a lot about how they created that album, renting this house in Hawaii, bringing all these people in.. He had engineers 24/7 in suit and tie just there in case anybody needed to come in.. And he breaks down, there is a actually, there was an interview where he was talking about coming down and being a part of it and the schedule they were on.. It kinda reminds me of what you were talking about about your schedule in Atlanta, when you were there working on, was that My Crazy Life? - Mn-hm.. - But one of the things that Bob was really excited about when we were talking about doing this was understanding how you build around a particular project a temporary organization and there's all sorts of chemistry that has to go into that, of the right people, of the right place..

Maybe you could walk us through with a particular project how you pulled that together and dismantled it in the effort to produce something, a really great creative product.. - I'll do two simultaneously so I'm not puttin' two pressures on one.. I'll do Why G's first album My Crazy Life and Travis' last album Astroworld at the same time because the same basic principals of both happened.. The first thing that was identified is the concept.. I think Travis had a stronger concept with Astroworld.. He knew he wanted Astroworld to be his concept for his third album before his second album came out.. You know what I'm sayin'? So, before Birds In A Trap came out he had Astroworld in his head so the whole process with that was two and a half years.. While Why G and I were talkin' and my favorite song for Why, Anybody like Why G? - [Audience Member] Yeah.. - Okay, cool.. So, my favorite song with Why G was a song called Bompton when I met him..

I was like, I love this song.. And he's like, I was like, that's my favorite song you wrote and he was like, yo, that's my favorite song too.. So, (audience laughs) we decided to create a concept, a story about how you could still be hard and do it but the tough, there's always challenges.. So, the challenge with Why G was just the people in the studio 'cause I don't know how people from LA, like LA LA, for real.. So, anytime we go to the studio the studio sessions will start around two three o'clock, be really productive.. Then the homies'll start comin' in at five or six o'clock and a few people comin' in and everything, start talkin' about gang politics and who shot who and who did what and da-da-da-da.. And I was like, yo, we gotta get outta here, man, we gotta go somewhere.. So, we decided to go to Atlanta because Young Jeezy was there.. - [Sam] And what was the Young Jeezy connection? - He was the executive producer on the album and, - [Sam] That was already established at that time? - Mm-hmm.. And the label, at the time, they felt like Why G was a local artist..

They never felt like he'd be bigger than LA.. They felt like him and Mustard's sounds were very localized and they were like, okay, just get the album out.. They didn't really want me to start expanding his sound, have him work with different New York producers like DJ Premier and just stuff that didn't really make sense.. So, we went over that and we said we're gonna make the, do the opposite, do a super west coast album and we're gonna lock in here for the whole summer.. And we went for the whole summer of 2013 and said we're gonna go on a schedule.. So, we, it was like a job.. So, from Monday to Thursday, We lived in the apartment.. So, I lived on the second floor Corporate Apartments.. He lived on the fourth floor.. We'd be in the studio from six p.m..

to six a.m.. Then around 12 one o'clock we'd go have lunch.. We'll go over the songs we did before.. We'd have a white board with the structure of the songs and what went where and who did what.. And we'd go back to the studio.. And then from Friday to Sunday I'd tell him, you gotta go live life, go do shows, go travel, go have somethin' to rap about because if you just lock into the project every single day, after awhile you start (snaps fingers) losin' sight unless you step back a little bit.. So, anybody tells you, I been workin' on this 30 straight days, tell 'em get the hell out the house.. (Sam laughs) (audience laughs) 'Cause you need to have more of a view on things.. So, that was a process and that was what we committed and it's really important that you commit to a time frame.. Skyler always says, deadlines are your friends..

You know what I mean? Deadlines are important because you need to know this is gonna end.. So, that was our goal.. While Travis was like, okay, cool, we're gonna work on this project with unlimited time but we're gonna work on this for years and we been workin' on this project.. We been workin' on it and workin' on it everyday in New York and LA and the touring and workin' on this chippin' chippin' chippin' away until finally it was time to finish it and I was like, okay, where we gonna actually go back and focus and finish the album? And that's when, 'cause of My Dark Twisted Fantasy we said you know what, that was made there so why don't we go to Hawaii? - [Sam] Oh wow.. So, it was inspiration off of having seen the process and the kinda temporary structure that Kanye created that brought you all to Hawaii? - Yeah because one of the things between Hawaii and Atlanta, they were both out of the artist's comfort zone because they both lived in LA, one's from Houston, one's from LA but we needed to get out your zones.. So, that's a very important part of the process is getting out your own space.. You gotta make yourself a little uncomfortable and it's gotta be a place that you don't have that much to do.. Like Hawaii is nice, right? But it's like what else can you do? You could go to the beach.. You could go have a, drink a coconut or whatever and a daiquiri and there's nothin' else to do.. You know what I mean? So, you might as well work and the same thing with Atlanta..

You could go out but no one's really up and running from six p.m.. So, there's nothin' else to do.. So, you gotta give yourself a place where you're, okay, I'm gonna lock into a space then you gotta figure out who your, after you worked on the project for awhile, and both projects we worked on for a lengthy amount of time, we identify who our strongest collaborators were.. So, whether it be DJ Mustard or whether it be Mike Dean.. We're like, okay, cool, let's make a list of people who are gonna come out with us then have 'em in the schedule.. So, what happens then, it's like, - [Sam] And what was the criteria for how you picked who was part of that team? - 'Cause remember the first two quarters, the first three quarters? Whoever worked with us the best in the first three quarters it's like sports.. You want to put your A-team in for when it's crunch time.. You know who's gonna fold.. You know who's been missin' shots.. And you know who's gonna be there..

And sometimes it's not the people you think it's gonna be.. It might be somebody you just met might be the person to lock in on your team.. Just have one of those moments.. So, that was really our criteria.. After the first three quarters you go into the fourth quarter.. Who are we going into this fourth quarter with? Who are we gonna finish this game with? Who are we lockin' in with? So, that was really important and kinda goin' with a goal of what we need to finish, whether it be the track listing, the structure, the mixing, all that process.. So, that's a big part of that process.. - And what was your role in balancing all the personalities and all the, Everyone has to do their best at their role and work together really well.. Is that, are you the coach in that scenario? - It's kinda like a coach.. You know what I'm sayin'? And it's like overall it's like, Do you ever see those big movies where you see a lot of big name actors and you like, no way the coulda got paid full rate for this..

They way that they do that, if they know they're gonna be part of a successful film, they'll take less money, they'll take whatever the basic rate is in the film is as an actor and they'll go and sign up 'cause they say, okay, cool, this is Quentin Tarantino, man, I always wanted to be part of this film.. So, especially in art, when you start comin' at people and you start pitchin' 'em based on money, like I could pay you for this, da-da-da-da.. Subconsciously, it's like a little bit of a turnoff because people don't really like, artists don't become artists for money, per se.. They need money to continue being artists but they don't become an artist just because of that.. They would become a banker or something that's guaranteed, your stockbroker or whatever.. So, you gotta kinda sell people on this project so when you call 'em you have to make the call like, look man, we're goin' to Atlanta for two weeks, we really think there's three parts of this song that you're gonna be great on, this is the overall concept.. You show them that they're a sum of a bigger part so it's a bigger goal and this is how they fit and they're like, cool (claps hands) sign me up.. So, you also want places that are destinations like Atlanta, Hawaii, so people will really wanna go.. And when you go then you pick people, you also have to give them very clear direction of what you need 'em for.. So, you have to pick specialists..

If I need you just to play keys, I want you to collaborate.. This is gonna be your space.. And it's very important that people have their own spaces to work.. And it's also a place that they can come through at the end and mesh the ideas.. So, in both places we would have, in Atlanta we would have two studios goin' at the same time with about six, no three studios goin' at the same time, two big studios, one small studio and about three or four communal areas.. So, people would go, disappear and come back.. One of the best stories I have from it was one time we put DJ Mustard in this really small room and Mustard hates small rooms.. He likes big rooms.. And he was in a small room and he was mad.. He didn't say anything about it but you could just tell that he was fumin' a little bit..

And there's all these other producers around.. He's use to being Why G's only producer.. So, he was just, we didn't hear from him for like, 'cause one day we didn't hear from him for like six hours.. We could see him 'cause it's like glass so it's like lookin' at somebody right there but he didn't come out that room and he just walks in the studio one day.. He just steps in.. We're talkin'.. We're playin' music.. He just cuts the music off we were workin' on, drops his laptop, plugs it up and he plays the beat for Who Do You Love.. And it was just like (imitates beats).. And it was, we were all like, wow..

He still didn't say a word the whole time and at then end he was like, I told y'all.. (thumps down hand) and slammed the laptop.. (laughing) and walked out.. And then, we knew that beat was a hit but we didn't know what to sing on it.. So, it was about 20 to 30 more sessions just for that one song.. It probably took us four to five sessions.. First the name of the song was a song called Hit A Lick.. And it was Tory Lanez in the hook and it was like, hit a lick, hit a lick.. I was like, yeah, that's cool.. Then Why G came up with Who Do You Love and we're like, okay, this one's gonna stick but we need somethin' in those open spaces and we had about 12, 15 more sessions tryin' to figure out different things in the open spaces..

So, finally we said, you know what, why don't we just leave it open and that's how it happened and Drake wanted to be a part that movie too.. He was like, oh, I see what you guys are doin', this is goin' on so, (claps hands) - [Sam] So, how did he see what you were doin'? - Drake's like the best A and R (giggles) in the world.. You ever notice that Drake's always on the right record at the right time? - [Sam] Yep.. - He has that mind.. He's like, okay, cool, this is goin' on, I'm about to get on this one.. (laughing) - [Sam] But was he physically there.. How did he come to know, to hear the beat because it wasn't out yet? - He asked, he was hittin' Why G up and he says, somebody he knew from around and he just said, hey, what you workin' on, heard you workin' on some things.. Because another good thing too when you start doin' good work and it's collaborative with different people, (claps fingers) people start to talk, especially creative people.. And if people that you trust start to tell you that great things are happenin' it starts getting around.. You know what I mean? And the word around the industry, like, oh, they're makin' this great thing..

So, it's like I'm makin' this great album, you're makin' this great film.. And he got in and he just reached out and he said,

can you send me a couple options and we sent him two songs and he sent back that song.. It was that one and, we sent him that and a song called I Just Wanna Party but he wanted to get on Who Do You Love.. And like I said, Drake's the best A and R so he (snaps fingers) he knew which one to get on.. - [Sam] Get on it, yeah.. - Yeah, he knows the hits.. - Do you feel like the energy is different when folks are working in house the way you were doing in Hawaii or Atlanta verses Drake sending a verse from remotely? - It's little energy 'cause it's more tailor made to the project 'cause you feel the essence of it.. You start being able to say things that you could feel just being there.. While Drake's verse took us over the edge, it was almost like in that kinda movie that we were speakin' about so many people just come through like a random cameo at the end, that was like the Drake cameo.. But Ty Dolla Sign would be on three or four songs on the project because he was all the way there..

So, there's people who are the core of the record and then there's people on the peripheral that you need to make the whole thing complete.. I think with the Travis record some of the core people who were like this guy name Alan Ritter, he knew the engineers, Mike Dean and then somebody will come in like a gunner at the end or some other people come at the end and just add a little bit of sauce but it's almost like you have to be a director and Travis is an incredible director so he was like, yo, I need you just rap right here in this part but I need to rap like you rapped on this particular song.. I need you to do it like this.. And he's like the ultimate director in that sense and curator.. - How do you handle creative conflict? - Creative conflict's good.. It's actually what you want because if you're in a space where no one's disagreeing and everybody's having the similar ideas and there's no conflicting ideas you're probably not makin' something great and you probably don't have the right team the right team kinda challenges you and pushes you.. I think something that Kobe Bryant said once was anytime the Lakers had a fight in the lockerroom they won the championship.. And anytime they didn't win that's when everybody was cool.. You need a little bit of angst.. You need a little bit of Kevin Durant and Draymond Green fighting..

You need, - That's kinda the Mustard laptop story.. Like, you got that, - You need a little Mustard laptop.. You need, you need, - So, do you purposely cultivate that? Did you put him in the small room 'cause you knew it was gonna lead to that? - No, no, no.. (laughing) it kinda happens itself because everybody has egos.. And then my job is to make sure everybody sees the higher purpose.. You can't let anybody's ego win.. So, I do a lot of times takin' people to the side, talkin' to 'em about stuff, tell 'em what their role is, why they're here, so on and so forth.. And those conversations are never really about money.. It's about time and space and not gettin' enough time in the thing.. So, it's like creating a flow..

So, it's about having a place where everybody could come, drop their stuff and do it.. And it doesn't happen right away.. It happens after, you know, third, fourth quarter, that's when the flow (snaps fingers) the flow really starts happenin' in the third quarter.. You start seein' some signs of it happening early but it really, the magic really starts happenin' in that third quarter.. Some of the things that are important like D school is havin' collaborative space.. I walked upstairs and I saw, like there were white boards everywhere but nothing was, like, closed.. You know what I mean? You could go in almost anybody's room.. Me and Bob just ran into some people who had a conference call goin' on.. We just ran into 'em.. (laughs) - [Bob] We got there early..

We interrupted them.. - We went to interrupted all them.. But it was cool.. He was really cool about it and it was like (snaps fingers) you need spaces like this so you could always just drop in because you know, especially when you have a fresh idea you wanna be able to just tell somebody right now.. You're like, look, this is what it is.. Especially while you're excited about it so the ideas can mate and become bigger ideas.. So, you need that kind of collaboration and you also need, again, you really need a time frame because when people, I need a time frame for multiple reasons but you ever notice, you ever hear stories of, oh, the last song on the album was the biggest song and it's not a coincidence.. It's because when you're close to then end of a project and you're finishing up a show for a gallery or you're finishing up anything that you're doin', any kind of creative project you know what your missing at the end.. So, you go back with an extreme focus at the end of the fourth quarter that you didn't have at the beginning of the first quarter.. You're like, okay, I really need a up-tempo song about my mom or something, I need something, I need a picture here that's full color and wood framing, I need this on this spot..

So, at the end of the project you're always gonna know exactly what you need.. And usually when you go in with that level of focus it could be your biggest work.. - So, that's interesting 'cause I often think when you get down to that point in the creative process it's almost like a Rubik's Cube.. Sometimes you work yourself into a corner where you've got all the other pieces where you want 'em and then finding that perfect last piece can be almost the most challenging 'cause everytime you move to get to it you're messing something else up.. - But at least you have four sides done.. You know what I'm sayin'? It's like the first, when you first have that Rubik's Cube it's like, aw, shit.. You know what I mean? You're just doin' this for days.. You know what I mean? So, when you got to that last part at least you know the end is near and then you have a laser like focus to get those last greens.. You know what I mean? You're not gonna move from that point.. It's easy to put the Rubik's Cube down when you only have half a side..

- Have you ever had a project that got to the third quarter and then it just it didn't make it? - Did I have that project? I think so.. And there's two projects in particular.. I won't put the names out there but I'll tell you both of 'em.. One didn't make it because they didn't see it all the way through.. He ended up just leaking the whole thing as a mixed tape.. So, they didn't have the real promotion and it's like why work on this film, I like comparing to films a lot 'cause it a complete idea.. Why work on this film just to leak it online to I don't know, LimeWire, wherever you download movies right now.. That was really frustrating.. And the second one was where I got that example of I dealt with this singer from Chicago, who we had, we pretty much had the album finished and at the end he didn't wanna shoot the video, he didn't wanna do anything and he put the

album out a year later, pretty much in its entirety but two songs.. We used the same artwork and everything..

So, the trick with, the difference between films and movies is, I mean films and music is if you don't put something out for a year (snaps fingers) a lot of the ideas you had are out.. You know what I mean? They're out in the universe.. So, he had a point where he was a leading person in music and R and B and then everybody started (snaps fingers) takin' a little piece and takin' a little piece so by the time he put it out, he wasn't an original anymore even though he had the music ready.. That's why I say timing's tough and the hardest part for an artist to do is somebody be like, okay, cool, it's time to finish.. You know what I mean? It's time to press send.. It's time to let it go.. That's really the toughest part of artistry.. And if you can convince somebody to do that then somebody convince you like, this is out, then you're a producer.. - So, we're gonna open it up for our Q and A from the audience in a minute, but you've been working on a sort of a formula for creative process or creative confidence that, Yeah, I think it's the next slide in the, - Ha.. - Right there..

And I'd love for you to share with everyone, including myself, how this formula works and if possible to kind of attach it to a particular creative process.. And one thing that we haven't really spoken on is your, we've talked a lot about your work as an A and R but we haven't actually talked about your previous life as a mix tape DJ or your current sort of other life as a photographer or any of your other creative endeavors.. So, feel free to connect it not just to, I mean, you absolutely connect it to music projects but if there's other creative endeavors that illustrate it, please bring those in too.. - All right.. I get really excited about this.. I'm gonna stand up.. (laughing) Alright so, I been workin' on this concept for about two years now and basically, I feel like anyone could be creative like anyone could be healthy.. Like a lot of times to be healthy is really hard.. You start eatin' veggies, you start workin' out, you start watchin' your carbs, countin' your macros.. You know what I mean? It's like (snaps fingers) it's a process..

And I think it's the same thing with creativity and a lot of time I meet people and they say, look, I'm not creative, I'm not a creative person, creativity is not me.. And I don't believe that.. I just feel like people that think the problem with creativity there's no process for it.. In school it's easy.. I work hard, I take my honors classes, I do an application, I get into Stanford, 120 credits, I get my GPA up, I graduate.. I could go to master's grad school.. It's a system.. It's a easy system you put in here.. You go to the army, you start as a private, a general.. You can move your way up..

Corporate America, same thing.. It's a, I'm an intern, assistant, manager, director, senior director, vice-president, senior vice-president, executive vice-president, president, CEO.. If you work in sports, high school JV, varsity, I make the team, college, get drafted, NBA, 82 games, preseason, it became, 47, 47, 47, 47, I'm the champion, right? (laughing) It's an easy process but being a creative it's not like that.. No one can tell me my step by step process of how to be an incredible artist and that's the tough part.. So, what I try to do here is show people a way that you could structure yourself.. So, I think we talked about it a lot, Sam, is a goal.. And you need a big goal that's gonna wake you outta bed.. It can't be somethin' small.. It has to be somethin' that's huge and I know everybody, I see some people with paper.. So, if you have a piece of paper just write down what your biggest creative goal is..

It could be to win a grammy, to do a tour, to do a gallery show or international gallery shows.. Whatever your biggest goal is just write it down.. It's really for yourself.. I just wanna show somethin'.. And the second thing is the intent, the intention behind your goal.. Everything is done with intention and I think why do you want this.. And usually if that goal has something to do with money you're probably not gonna get there because (snaps fingers) the money comes in different ways and fast and sometimes, even knowin' it, when it happens it's like do you not care about the goal anymore.. It's weird that art and money it seems like it's there but it's not.. It has a magnetic pull that doesn't really attract it but if you don't chase the money, you chase the art you get more money ever.. So, try to keep your intent away from your actual goal and what's your intention..

It could be because you wanna put your hometown on.. It could be you wanna make your parents proud.. I was tryin' to sign into artist right now who's dad was, his dad is a singer or used to be a singer in a huge band from the '70s and '80s but he wasn't the original singer.. He was the, you know when they replace the lead singer after their prime, so he use to get treated bad so the artist just came in he was just like, he wants to be the next level.. He wants to be better than his dad.. That's serious intention.. You know what I mean? Because there's a lot of things that they'll play there.. It's family, it's goals.. You need, These people have some real motivations out here who are trainin' for this and because you don't get medals along the way it's harder to stick with it, especially society.. When you're a kid it's easy..

Remember we were talkin' about the fridge, like oh, everything nice, everything goes on the fridge.. By the time you're 14, 15, 16 stuff stops goin' on the fridge.. They're like, hey, did you apply for that college yet? (laughing) Did you get a job? How's that internship goin'? People, the conversations change when you start gettin' in your 20s and people stop lookin' at your goals like that, your artistic goals, so it's really gonna come down to you.. And alright, that comes down to the third part is your sacrifice.. What are you willing to give up to get the goal? Is anybody here not from California? Okay, so everybody here knows that's a sacrifice.. You coulda went to your home school.. It woulda been a lot easier to go to your state school, to a school in your local city but you wanted to get the hell outta there.. You know what I mean? You wanted to make a sacrifice and come here to one of the hardest institutions in the world to make it in and that's a huge sacrifice and sometimes it's about travelin'.. Were you sayin' the story last, about the guy who took a first class flight? - Yep.. - What was it? You tell 'em? - I think it was in this book Deep Work, that my colleagues here Laura gave me, that he was talking about how hard it is to focus with social media and everything..

And you may know who this is Bob.. I don't remember.. It was an executive somewhere but he booked himself a business class seat to China and back just to be somewhere where he couldn't have cell phone or internet to write his book.. And that was his way of hacking the world we live in now to have the creative space and focus to do that deep work.. - Yeah, that's like a sacrifice.. Goin' to Atlanta, goin' to Hawaii, separatin' the stuff.. I remember I interviewed Travis for the Grammy's or something and I asked him this question, what was your biggest sacrifice through the whole process of makin' the album and he was like, not seein' my new born baby, I had a new born at home and I never really, I go home at 11, 12 o'clock.. And that was a big sacrifice.. And I'm with him everyday and I'm like, man, I don't even think about this.. You know what I mean? I don't think about, a lot of times havin' a new born is the biggest thing in somebody's life..

They shut down.. They go on maternity leave.. And he's in the studio everyday.. So, you gotta figure out what you're willin' to sacrifice.. And from what I was sayin' before is the faith.. When the stuff stops goin' on the fridge and people don't like your pictures, your sound cloud's not goin' crazy and you gotta, you need a faith that's kinda like bigger than yourself 'cause that's the part when most people quit.. 'Cause enough people kinda stab at you is the worst.. I remember one of the worst feelings I had was I remember one time I went home and I went through a real dark rut in school.. Not school, in music and it wasn't goin' well.. It was before all the good stuff started happenin'..

It was between when I was in mixed tapes and before they Why G album I had a four year gap there where it was real shaky for me and my mom was like, hey man, you think you should get a job or do that.. And it's one thing when the rest of the world says it.. When your parents say something to you, it's like a whole other level of (claps hands) shaken belief.. So, you gotta really find out what your faith is and what really gives you your faith, whether it be religion, whether it be meditation or whether it be a family member.. Sometimes it's one person.. It happens in sports a lot.. They got one person who just (pounds fist) really believed and really pushed to really lean on that person to get a faith because everyone's faith gets tested and the only way you're really gonna get there is if you are able to shake past that moment.. And then after you get the goal, you have the right intent, (snaps fingers) you made the sacrifice, gettin' your faith from somewhere that's when you start to get in the flow.. And before you get in the flow you need a routine.. The best book that I've seen about routine is The Power of Habit..

So, if anybody hasn't read that, read that.. It's a great book on how to build a routine.. And building a routine, and all the stories I was tellin' is really about the same thing.. It's going to the same spot everyday, goin' to the same goal.. Doin' it over and over because it's not gonna happen the first few weeks, maybe even the first month you start but after the month or two then the magic starts happenin'.. You start stayin' in the D school for a long time.. Then it's like after six weeks, oh now, (snaps fingers) we're really cookin' with gas and that's when all the serendipitous moments start to happen and things start to (snaps fingers) really cook.. So, that's when the flow hits.. And after the flow hits that's when the magic starts to happen and you really make that work, you really have that breakthrough moment.. The label calls you who wants to sign you..

You start getting your first gallery show.. You get representation and that's kinda like the magic.. The problem with the magic step, 'cause when I first started this I only had five steps.. I didn't have faith and I didn't have legend.. When I did this at Harvard I only had five.. - See, you got seven here.. (audience laughs) - And I came up with legend because I realized that the magic's like drivin', What's those fast cars? A F1, like and F1 car, like Formula car.. It takes a long time to be able to learn how to drive it but the second you start thinking to not do everything you're supposed to in a car and taking your eyes off the wheel and showin' off is the second you crash.. And that's like bein' in the magic.. That's like bein' in that quantum field..

When everything starts happenin' you can't take it for granted 'cause you get there from steps one through six.. So, that's where most people go bad.. I always use the example Tiger Woods.. 'Cause usually when it stops, when you break out of this, doesn't end good.. It ends bad.. For Tiger it ended with his wife chasin' him outta the house with a golf club.. (laughing) Because he started takin' steps one through six for granted.. You start forgetting the goal.. You start forgetting why you did it.. You start forgetting the sacrifice you put in..

And you start losin' your faith.. You not (snaps fingers) doin' the routine anymore.. And it takes so long to get back to the magic that sometimes you never get back there.. And you live your whole life thinkin' about those moments when you had it and you had to stay locked in and you didn't or you had it for a moment.. That's why you see a lot of one hit wonders.. That's why you see a lot of people who did one great body of work and they don't know how to do it again because they're not willin' to go through the hard steps it takes to go through steps one through six.. So, let's say you do everything, you do steps one through six and then you do it again for another project and do it again for another project and you do it again.. So, I got a timeline on this.. Me and Sam disagree on the step a little bit but I think after about 10 years of consistently doin' somethin' that's when you can start talkin' about the legend stuff.. And I think, I always use an example of sports, as you can see..

Like Paul Pierce.. He use to play for the Boston Celtics.. He gets in a lot of trouble talkin' about if he's better than Dwayne Wade or whatever and Paul Pierce was a really good player and he probably had eight NBA allstars.. He might make the Hall of Fame but he's not like a legend.. Dwayne Wade's a legend.. You know what I mean? He's somebody who was all-time.. Kobe's a legend.. JZ's a legend.. Some people are gettin' there.. I feel like, I love Tayman Paula but they probably got five more years before they become legendary..

So, it becomes a consistency that you have to hit over and over.. So, I give it about 10 years or maybe like five projects on

a big scale before you're an absolutely legend and you do it over and over.. (snaps fingers) and legend doesn't just mean commercial success.. It can mean, it's kinda like, What's that Searching for Sugarman? You ever seen that documentary? Who's seen that one? Yeah, I didn't see it.. I just know the concept of it.. (laughing) But the concept is he's in Africa, right? Where is he? I think he's in, So, the story is this guy, he's makin' this music somewhere and he become a legend.. Everybody wants to go there and try to find him and only think of somebody can be in your neighborhood who's been doin' for a long time.. That level of consistency for doin' it for a long time is what takes you over the top.. So, that's kinda the seven steps that I've put together.. I'm really happy with the seven steps and I think that anyone, if you follow these seven steps, could really take your creative goals to the next level and you could use this as a check mark for your creative goals..

You can use it for everything, in my opinion, but definitely for any kind of creative project.. I'm gonna sit back down.. - Beautiful, thank you.. (audience applauds) So, we can do this forever and we were doin' it last night and this morning and we'll keep doin' it but we only have a few minutes with you all here so I'm gonna stop being selfish and open it up and I think Bob is gonna help us a bit with the Q and A.. - Yeah, so I thought that the person we should start with to ask the first question is Skyler 'cause he a good insider and so after hearin' all this, what's your question? - I'm curious, so the faith part's new.. I'm curious a little bit where that came from and also in line with faith, how would you sort of measure your progress along the way with something as ambiguous as a creative project? - So, the first part, the faith part actually happened here in the Bay.. I was workin' on this project, with Skyler actually, and I was raisin' money for something, for a new project and the day of the project they had this big meeting right here in San Francisco and everything started goin' bad.. First the big talent of the project said they couldn't make it, they weren't gonna make it and everyone had to fly to SF and the second thing that happened was the manager went to the airport and his flight got canceled and he can't get on cause it's a bad thunderstorm and Skyler was suppose to come.. His flight was stuck in the airport for like eight hours.. And so, I was the only person who made it and it was pretty bad..

I was just like, alright I'm just gonna go by myself.. So, I went there early.. I met with the people.. I told 'em, I'm the only one who made it.. They were pissed.. They're like, where's everybody at, you shoulda told 'em, da-da-da-da.. So, I just sat there in the meeting.. The meeting was suppose to look like this, it probably just looked like the first row (laughs) because everybody didn't show up.. But I sat there and I still did the presentation and I felt really good about it and I still have a really good relationship with the people up to this day.. And when I went home that night I was like, you know what, I'm on the right path, I'm suppose to do this, I'm not gonna let this kinda shake me and I wanna make sure this goes all the way..

And then it ended up workin' out really well from there.. And I was like, oh, this was a lesson, God kinda put me, the universe put me in that as a lesson that you have to have faith and really have faith in yourself when everything's goin' wrong.. And that's kinda the moment when I realized and I start talkin' to more people about it I realized how much faith plays a factor in so much success 'cause if it wasn't for faith, most people wouldn't be here.. Most of us wouldn't be in this room right now if it wasn't just to have faith.. There's a lot of people who probably told you you'd probably never get into this school, you couldn't afford it, or you can't get into this program or whatever but you made it here and made it here mostly your faith and maybe faith in you, faith in your family, faith in your friends and that's how the faith one came up.. - [Bob] All right.. Another question? Oh, way up there.. - There's on all the way in the back too.. - [Bob] Okay.. I'll get the one in the front..

That way, you get the one in the back.. Oh, here we go.. Great.. Alec.. - Yes, hi.. Sorry I'm kind of losing my voice but my question was so, I know in record labels, I used to work at one and it's like there's the artist facing people and the kinda consumer facing people, how do you make sure when you're working in the framework of a record label, if you want to be working with the artist and really serving the artist's interest, how do you navigate that in the space of that organizational structure? - I believe, with my mentor, he always taught me to believe that record labels work for the artist.. That's their customer, no matter what the record label tells you.. And I believe that.. The thing, you're bookin' studio time, you're marketing them, you're promoting them.. They kinda flipped it to make it think that the artist works for the record label but it's not..

The purist record label is suppose to work for you.. It's supposed to be a service base and I think that's more where it's goin' and that's why you see more aggressive deals where artists are becoming more partners with the labels versus be like, oh, I'm signed to this.. There's certain smaller labels who are more incubators who do more things like the classic like Motowns or the current TDEs or Excel Recordings who do more a sense of artist development but I, to answer you question, I'm more artist based and I really fight for my whole organization to be more artist based.. Like I had, I was gettin' into something with somebody who worked under me like a junior A and R and she was checkin' outta the project because she felt like the artist wasn't listening to her ideas and I was like, well, she doesn't have to, you're suppose to listen to her ideas and supposed to just help build on her ideas, she doesn't work for you, you know what I mean, we're tryin' to help her get out her thing.. So, I think it should be, I think the best labels are artist driven 'cause the artists really work from the point of the fans.. That's their checks and balances.. They have to go on Twitter and they have to get the feedback.. They're putting out the risk.. Nobody cares that Interscope put out an album.. They care that Kendrick Lamar or Lady Gaga put out an album..

They're the ones who put their name, face on there and they're the ones who risk it.. So, I feel like the record labels work for the artist.. That's their customer.. - [Bob] Let me ask one question.. One thing that you said, repeatedly and in multiple ways, the best was that when people start talkin' about money God leaves the room? - Yeah, I got that from Quincy Jones.. -

So, who's a really rich guy, by the way, right? (laughing) So, how do you do it? It's an ambivalence or a duality.. So, how do you deal with that? - When I say God leaves the room is when you start making the art thinking like this is gonna go financially, like, I'm gonna make this song because it's gonna do well on the charts versus I'm gonna make this song 'cause people are gonna love it.. Like I'm gonna make this song without a function.. If I'm gonna make this song 'cause I think people are really gonna slow dance to this one, that's like a real intention.. I'm gonna make this song because I think it's gonna make me \$1 million, it's probably not gonna be a good song..

And you could always identify the songs on the album that are the straight shots that people are takin' the risk.. They usually don't fit in the rest of the body of work or you know, if something that the gallerist told somebody, you know what's really hot right now, I don't know, what's a hot thing in art? It could be flowers.. Do more flowers, people love flowers.. That's the thing that they sell and then it doesn't sell, man, I listened to this guy.. But it's not his art.. So, that's what I mean about the money.. You need money for booking studio.. You need money to do shows.. Artists get paid, obviously.. I'm talkin' about the intention of the actual pieces of work..

- So, we had, in our class, on Monday our visitor was Ed Catmull, whose brand Pixar, started Pixar, and hardly talked about money at all and just kept arguing quality's the best business plan 'cause funny, we just heard this from you almost exact same sort of things.. So, kinda cool.. - This is true.. - [Male] In the back row.. - [Demarkus] Hi.. My name is Demarkus.. (clears throat) Excuse me.. Streaming is definitely contributing to, I think, artist's ability to put out art just almost instantaneously but with that being said, I think it's contributing a lot to just the number of art, or the amount of art that is out there.. So, how do you think the longevity looks for the industry today because now people are becoming more forgettable or art is becoming more forgettable just because the sheer amount that we receive on a daily basis? - Do you mean how the long term in the business side or the art part? - [Demarkus] I feel like now they kinda go hand in hand in order to be an artist with longevity you kinda have to be a business man or woman.. So, does that make sense? Basically, how do you create a art that lasts? Is it being the most honest that you can be or is it, I don't know..

Basically, that's my question.. - I'm a firm believer in puttin' out the best art that's closest to you because then you could always build a real fan base from there.. And it's better to have a small, strong fan base than to have a fan base that you get overnight that might not be there.. Like, what's the guy, Lil X Nas? - [Sam] Oh, I knew you were thinkin' Old Town Road.. - Yeah.. I'm sure he's a good guy.. Anybody fans of him though as an artist? It's tough to be too because it happened so (snaps fingers) quick for him.. He went to the top so fast without building a strong core fan base.. So, now everybody knows who he is or they know his song but he doesn't have a core and because streaming, because of the narrative it blew him up but now he's gonna have a really tough time not being the Old Town Road guy and havin' to build a thing.. So, that's why it's better to kinda build your fan base..

You almost don't want your first project, your first song to be successful 'cause it'll haunt you for a long time.. I remember I always see Ternet James and he's doin' good now.. He's a songwriter.. I think he mighta won a Grammy the last year writing something but his first mix tape had nine songs.. It was his first nine songs that he created and one of them is All Gold Everything and it was tough for him to ever live that down.. It's better to have a strong base that you can build for time and if something hits it's cool but you always have your base versus something going really fast, like Dave Chappelle quote, it's what he said about famous versus infamous.. You knowing you can't get unfamous you just get infamous.. It's like, oh ain't that that Lil X Nas, what's your name again, what are you doin' man, you still around.. You don't wanna be like that.. You rather be somebody who's consistently doin' things for a long time..

And so, I think in the sense of streaming, streaming kinda hurts.. This is my argument against the art of streaming.. I think it gives people, people don't commit as much anymore.. Everything is kinda like, oh, this is a project, oh, I just worked on this.. They keep givin' themselves a creative out 'cause it's so easy to upload.. So, you get a lower quality of music not because it's the platform, it's because of people kinda cheat themselves.. No one comes in and says, I put my all behind this album 'cause they could just upload it really quick.. So, they cheapen themselves in the art.. So, that's what I don't like about streaming.. I love that anyone could put out music from anywhere..

Skyler put me on to the al-tea movement and Legos and I think that's an incredible movement but they've already committed.. They don't take half steps.. I don't like the people who just come talk to me about the music and then be like, well, you know, this is a project, but I just worked on this for a week, and you kinda like, so if you like it cool but if you don't like it.. I don't like that.. People like, na, (snaps fingers) this is it, I worked my life into this.. - [Bob] Hands up.. Alright.. - [Audience Member] How do you know when a project is done? - I hear Kendrick say this once and I kinda just go with this.. The exact quote was, "I know my album is finished when I start fuckin' with shit that don't need to be fucked with." (audience laughs) Which means if you start, at a certain point you're gonna start messin' it up if you keep playin' with it.. You know what I'm sayin'? So, you just gotta let it go 'cause you'll start ruining and overproducing..

- [Bob] I got the hand up here but it's interesting when I work with PhD students when they start goin' back to the same problem over and over again, it's not gettin' any better, they're just makin' the same mistakes, it's time to ship.. There was a hand here? Oh yeah.. - [Audience Member] Hi.. So I recently watched the Defiant Ones, which is a really great Dr.. Dre and Jimmy Iovine documentary on Netflix, I don't know if you've seen it, - I saw it, yeah.. - [Audience Member] So, basically the documentary kinda follows their individual journeys and then talks about how they came together through the Beats and

Apple merger, which obviously was a monumental event in hip hop and in tech.. But there's this really interesting quote that Jimmy Iovine says which is, "Culture and product coevolve." And he also goes to say that you can't spend any amount of money to create culture and in that it's brought to product.. So, first I guess, I wanna ask you if you believe that.. And secondly, if so, how has our current culture and kind of our generation impacted the products that you create now? - So, the question was how, could you say the question again? Just the question.. - [Audience Member] Culture and product coevolve and you can't spend any amount of money to create culture..

So, in terms of how you create your own product how has our current generation and the values and the things that are going on in this world right now, how does that impact the product that you make? How does culture compliment the product that you make? - I'm learning a lot about design thinking and I've been building up a new venture and I've been studying a lot versus like product versus business and business models and the best thing I've read about it so far is I've learned about OS, you know what I mean? And how you build a OS and kinda build the business model later and the product later if you have the right concepts.. So, something like Travis and these sneakers, right? If I get one more phone call about people hittin' me about these sneakers, I'm just gonna change my phone number and it's like (audience laughs) and it's like, but the good thing about it is he did something great in one space and you kinda know what his OS is so it translates into shoes, so his shoes sell and that's how you sell the product or Dr.. Dre had such a quality for music that it kinda translates into his headphones.. So, you're like, okay, cool, this makes sense, these are his headphones.. It's not really about the sneakers or it's not really about the headphones.. It's really about what that person and what they represent in their music and the level of quality they put in there.. So, I still think it comes down to nothin' really happens until, nothin' really happens until you make that quality and you're true to yourself and then can kinda sell anything you want after it but you need to still get that core, that core creative down first and you need to get that out first before you even think about product.. So, I agree, you can't buy culture but you can create culture but it's just very hard.. And it's not a dollar amount that creates culture.. - [Bob] You got somebody in the back there..

Oh.. Emily.. - [Audience Member] Hi.. I was wondering if you could talk a bit about your process for creating the visual aspects of an album, so like the album cover, the music video, what goes into that? - Well, you kinda got the concept of the album and you kinda want everything to match.. So, after you know the idea, if you're doin 24 in the day or you're doin' Astroworld or Sheck's album was called mud boy, you know, then you have to find the best creatives in that space who really understand.. The best way to do it is to get people involved before the project is finished so they can feel a part of it so that you can kinda be creating it with them.. I know Travis brought in, now why's the name blankin' me? The photographer.. - [Audience Member] Grey? - Uh-uh.. - [Audience Member] Frank Chillemi? - No the big one.. - [Audience Member] LaChapelle? - David LaChapelle..

And he came to the studio and he listened to the album, he heard the concept and he came up with the inflatable head concept.. So, we had that concept before the album came out and worked on that cover simultaneously while working on the album.. So, that's something you really wanna get different creatives and partners in earlier rather than later for your process, especially, and everybody needs partners.. So, if you're doin' a photography show you might wanna get the framer involved early so you know what photos you're gonna pick that match the frames.. If you're not thinking about that and you wait til the end you might change the whole lineup and if you wanna change your album you wanna bring the photographer in to get everybody in.. The best thing to do is get people in on the ground floor, especially in that fourth quarter.. You don't want 'em in too early 'cause the idea hasn't formed enough but you get 'em in in the fourth quarter and you get the other creatives but before it's finished, that's probably the magic sweet spot to get the other creatives in early.. 'Cause you wanna start expanding your team around the fourth quarter.. - Alexa, I'm gonna get you next but I have a interesting, 'cause you keep talkin' about this time rhythm in the fourth quarter in particular, and since a lot of your job is to keep things on track, what's the sign to you you're in the fourth quarter and things aren't goin' right and you gotta do something? - It's when they rush to the finish line.. It's everything..

It like, okay, now it's done.. You know what I mean? You can't just cheat.. I don't wanna just put stuff out.. It's all about presentation.. I had a mentor who use to teach me that.. He'd say, you know what's the problem with your generation, there's no presentation.. You know what I'm sayin'? That was his big thing and he's right.. Everybody wants to just put a sound cloud link, one of my, we talked about a lot of good things about Kanye.. One of the things that I really hated was his roll out for his last album, Yay.. He was like, I made this art on the way to the party and da-da-da-da..

That's like the stuff that I hate about (snaps fingers) just the do it right now stuff.. You know what I mean? It's like a cheat code.. You didn't wanna work that hard.. So, when you're in the fourth quarter it's suppose to be tight, suppose to be aggressive, it's suppose to be, audience suppose to be bouncing, it suppose to be really well thought through.. You can't rush that process and why I work so hard for three and a half quarters just to rush it for the last six minutes.. It doesn't make sense.. - [Bob] And then you see that in your model.. Once you start skippin' stuff you're in trouble.. - Yeah, you can't take any part outta here.. Or the whole thing'll crumble..

- [Bob] Alexa.. - [Alexa] So, you speak a lot about timing and it has me curious about your approach to creating something that's relevant to the time but that can also last and can also work to push culture, push the current movement.. - Timing's important because you just want, the deadlines are important because you wanna put a little bit of pressure.. You don't wanna have no pressure on a creative because then you'll never come out with an album, you'll never come out with a project, you'll

never do the gallery show, you'll keep puttin' it off.. So, havin' a deadline is nice because it gives you, you need a little bit of that frantic energy to kinda close it.. I think it's called Parkinson's Law and it's the amount of time you have to complete a set task is the amount of time it'll take to complete the task.. It depends like if you have two weeks to finish a project at school and you're gonna cram the night before because it's due tomorrow.. It's the same thing with a creative process.. You know if you have to put it out this date you got that pressure.. So, sometimes it's good to have, but remember as a creative, it's not like school, it's a self imposed pressure..

So, you have to give yourself your own deadline and stick yourself to it.. So, I think deadlines work for a reason.. Deadlines work in all aspects of life and if you take deadlines out of creativity you just get lofty dreams and you never get results.. - [Alexa] But also in terms of the sound, I don't think it's wise to go completely against the grain of what's relevant at the time.. So, how far is too far in terms of moving to what could, your next sound? - Can you all hear the question? So, it was how do you know how to not go too far ahead of what the current sound is, right? To push the edges of it without going so far to the bleeding edge that you fall off.. Is that kinda, - [Alexa] Right, yeah.. - It depends on the goal.. It depends, I always have to have this talk in the studio about there are legends and there are originals and most of the time they're not the same person and a lot of times to be an original you have to sacrifice commercial success.. There's a lot of people, how I use the example of Kanye's a all time legend but I think future generations are gonna really have to study Kid Cudi but Kid Cudi now is a little bigger than he was when he first came out because of his influence.. 'cause he's more of an original..

Even though he's not as big as Kanye, who's a legend but I don't think Kanye's an actual, like I think Forel's more of an original.. He makes an original sound, he makes an original thing, it's original thinking.. So, to answer your question, it's really about your goal and the way you wanna end up in life and what you're happy with.. Some artists are very happy with just saying, you know what, I did an uncompromising body of work, and if they didn't get it right now, I get it, and my happiness is that I completed the idea that I know that I can accomplish.. And that's cool, you know what I mean? And like, you'll inspire originality versus commercial.. Like, what part of the spectrum do you want to be in, how hard do you want to work and what your goals are, you know? There's no right answer, just where you want to end up.. It's that Fast and Furious, Roma space.. - [Alexa] Thanks.. - [Bob] Question here.. - [Audience Member] Yeah, so on Monday in our class with Ed Catmull, he explained that Pixar has a 2:1 rule where to stay creative they introduce two new creative films for every one sequel they do to a financially successful one, I was curious since you're at a point now where it may be easier to work with artists that you worked with in the past to have been creatively or financially successful, how do you think about taking risk on newer artists without a proven track record? - I decided I'm not all the way Roma, you know? (audience laughs) I'm maybe like one step here..

I like having commercial success that also is really like kinda big and cool, you know what I mean? I like going to hear and like music playing out of cars, people hitting me up for concert tickets, I like being relevant.. But I also don't want to work on a Taylor Swift album, you know what I mean? 'Cause it's like, it wouldn't do anything for me even if it sells ten million records, it's just like, it's not the space I want to be in, I don't want to be a part of it, the commercial success doesn't mean anything for me.. So for you, it's like, figure out where you want to be, and kinda stay there, you know what I'm saying? Like Pixar is kinda close to here, you know? 'Cause even though, even the movies that are not like super, like, critical are still pretty dope.. You know what I mean? They never really end up over here at all.. They're kinda like in this range right here.. So it's just kinda figure out your sweet spot, what you're excited for.. I look at people like No I.D.. or Rick Rubin.. I like that space that they're in.. You know, I wanna be able to put out projects that people really love, or change a life, or is really inspirational, so for me, I have to work on projects for longer periods of time, you know? Like have off years..

Like I might not put out a project this year that's gonna be huge, you know? And I have to be cool with that.. You know what I mean? Because I know that next year, the year after, I'm going to put out something that's gonna be amazing.. So you gotta just be.... The hard part is being comfortable during the dead time, and locking into your idea when everything is going on around you.. So if you work on one project for two and a half years, three years, it's kinda scary because all these other things are going on and you're still locked into this one concept.. What if my concept's getting old, what if it's getting stale? What if the concept doesn't really work by the time it comes out? Are people really going to get it? And I'm not really getting the feedback from what I'm working on.. That's like the hardest place to be, knowing that you could absolutely fail.. And that's where the faith comes in, you know? - [Bob] So Sam, I think you should wrap it up.. - [Sam] Great.. - Can you ask, she's been raising her hand the whole time..

- We have one more question here.. - [Bob] One more! - And I do have a last question, so we'll do these two and that'll be it.. - [Bob] All right! - [Sam] Nice shirt by the way.. - [Audience Member] Thank you, I found this shirt, and I was like, dang, I really need this shirt.. So, I was thinking a lot about how Starbucks Blonde doesn't have feelings, and how people, especially artists, have a lot of feelings.. And I wanna know, just like, what kind of emotional fortitude does an artist need to build up either that, in themselves, or their teams, to be able to face all aspects of social media being very fast and responsive and cancel culture being something that people fear a lot, and another question is, how do female artists deal with that when maybe they have less space to have a voice in the first place, and if they do, I mean, this is in the context of maybe the prerequisite for female artists to make it being that they have to be quite hyper-sexualized in order to be successful, how do all of these broad broad thoughts, I just want to hear what you want to say.. - I think, for the first part is, I think a lot of the great people kinda put blinders on during that third and fourth quarter of their project.. It's probably not, at some point you need inspiration.. The number one thing that taps inspiration, that gives but also takes away inspiration is your phone.. Oh,

I'm really researching all these great things, ooh, look, it's a cat! (audience laughs) It's a whole, we're in the center of a place where people are spending billions of dollars every year to distract you, and leak into your attention..

So I think the best way to do it is like, when you're really locked into those third and fourth quarters, you have to just kinda like sacrifice and cut away distractions, just give yourself maybe 30 minutes a day on your phone, only check it for a certain amount of time.. Your phone is your number one enemy, because most of your distractions come from there.. 'Cause everything is tailor made to get towards you.. And then after the project comes out there's no hiding, it's coming right at you.. You know, but just right, that third and fourth quarter, just try to let it all go.. As far as about different women, and how they're hyper-sexualized in the industry, I think one person I've seen kind of taking back the narrative is Billie Eilish.. I think she's been doing an amazing job doing her own thing.. Controlling her narrative, not being over-sexualized.. The counter point to that is, what if I don't have to wear all my big clothes to do it, you know what I mean? It's like, I get both sides.. So I think the answer is more like inclusion..

I think it needs to be more woman-led teams.. Especially in the creative sphere, especially in music.. In the last year or so I've been really diving down and working with different female artists and different voices.. I signed two artists recently that I'm really proud of.. One, her name is Jayla Darden.. She's from Detroit and she like a singer, a songwriter, a producer, an engineer, she literally does everything herself, in her room by herself, and her music comes out absolutely phenomenal.. She mixes the music herself.. And I think that's an important story to tell.. Another one, another singer from Britain, her name is Ama Lou, I think she's incredible too.. She produces her music, she's very hands-on with all of her branding..

And I think in music, and in film especially, in music and film especially, there's kind of this thing I don't like where women always have to be presented, you know? It's like, and presenting so-and-so, and come out on stage and they start dancing, and like, man, can you make me more like, that's like creative geniuses or whatever, and I don't think that's fair and I think that's because a lot of people who are in power are kinda like tone deaf to what's going on.. Until you start having more women in these positions to make changes in the board room and the people who are really cutting the checks, there's really going to happen.. I think it's happening all across the world in different areas, I think it's happening slower in music though.. And as someone who has first-hand seen it, I can tell you that's the reason why.. Because some of the ideas you're gonna get in a room full of men for a presenting a woman is just not going to be great.. Until there's more inclusion, more diversity, especially in the higher levels, that's one thing that's really going to change.. - So, I want to wrap it up with one last question which is really about the future.. So, my work here is about bringing design and creative confidence to the K-12 education space and my colleagues Laura and Louie are here, my friend and brother Al, and my brothers Tony from High School for Recording Arts and Isaac who co-formed this whole concept of "Hip-Hop Genius" with me, which was all about bringing a hip-hop creativity to education.. And I know you went to an alternative, creative type of school, and that had some influence on how you move in the world and how you developed all this, and I would just love your thoughts about how we could apply all of these principles that are up on the screen, and the way that you've approached your work in these creative realms of music and photography to education.. What do you think the schools need to look like that are going to make sure that all young people have the opportunity to have the kind of creative confidence that you've been cultivating with the artists that you work with and in yourself..

- I think going to an alternative high school, you know, I went to a like, is that still a thing, or is it only charter schools now? - [Sam] Yeah, we have alternative schools, yeah.. - When I went to an alternative school I went to alternative high school in Brooklyn and it was kinda like, have you ever seen the movie "Precious" anybody? It was kinda like the classes they were in where there were like ten, twelve people and they were just like, if you graduated, success.. But the good thing about my school was sponsored by Goldman Sachs, so I got a lot of cool internships, like I worked at Fox News channel, I worked at Goldman Sachs, I worked at my local park.. So it gave me a lot of opportunities that I probably wouldn't have gotten at maybe at a normal high school with a level of focus.. But at the time though, I didn't know most of these roles that we talked about today existed.. In the design school, you see all these types of roles, and all these types of things that are going on here, but like I did a talk maybe about three weeks ago at Centennial High School in Compton.. And they don't have any of the green they have here and the funding and everything, and you know, when I say stuff like creative director, A and R, art director, all these things, there's not even a blip of a possibility that these roles even exist.. So I think just creating awareness from really like, really eight to twelve, that all these different options are available, like you know? That would help me a lot.. Everything I do now I didn't know was an option when I graduated from high school.. I didn't know A and R was an option, I didn't know creative director was an option, I didn't know any of this stuff were options..

I would just feel like, if I just even had this as a role, and that's why I really wanna teach a lot of this stuff in school, because if I just even knew, like, this creative process was an option, I think that, I think I like the way my life went out, the way it is now, but I think that I would have changed a lot.. I would've been a lot further, a lot faster.. Because if I don't have, like, the financial capability to go to like the big Ivy League school, even go to my local school, at least I have the ability to be creative.. And I just really want to show, you know, I think my time on earth is going to be successful if I could just show people, especially people who look like me, that this is an option.. And that's my overall goal.. My biggest goal.. (audience claps)..