



Episode 35



Ari Meisel

In 2007, Ari was diagnosed with Crohn's disease, an incurable disease of the digestive tract. Through yoga, nutrition, natural supplements and rigorous exercise, he was able to cure himself of all traces of the 'incurable' disease, and competed in Ironman France in June of 2011. Ari has since spoken at seminars and at a regional TED Talk about his struggle against a seemingly insurmountable opposition.

Voiceover This is Business Reimagined. Every week we talk with thought leaders and revolutionaries who are bringing innovation to their industries, like today's guest Ari Meisel.

Ari *The rate that technology is improving and expanding is just, it's whirlwind speed. We can literally automate things now that 3 months ago a person had to do manually.*

Voiceover This is Business Reimagined with Danny Iny.

Danny *Ari Meisel is an author, TED speaker, and business consultant. From the outside, it looks like Ari is burning the candle at both ends, but that couldn't be further from the truth because Ari's work is all about mastering productivity through a process of optimizing, automating, and outsourcing. It wasn't always that way though, especially in his 20's. After graduating from college, he immediately put himself to a grueling test.*



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Ari

I went to work in construction which was very weird because 95 percent of my colleagues and my classmates went into finance because that's what you do if you go to Wharton. I went into carpentry basically. I went to upstate New York to visit a friend of mine, while I was there he showed me these old buildings from the 1880's, and there were these old warehouses, and they were very cheap. He was like, "This is like SoHo," 30 years ago or 40 years ago, at the time. I made an offer to buy the building that day, and the deal was that anybody who worked on the job had to teach me their trade. I started a long process of converting these buildings into loft living, luxury lofts, and learning and doing every construction trade imaginable, including dealing with all the politics, the zoning and legal aspects, town boards, and everything.

I had the most amazing crash course in real estate development that anybody could ever have given me. I mean, I broke my body in the end. I also learned a hell of a lot about managing teams and leadership and project management and budgeting and sort of everything in between.

Danny

You heard right. At age 20, Ari not only purchased several rundown buildings, but also converted them into luxury lofts. He did it at the expense of his health with 20 hour workdays, eating poorly, and drinking every day. He finished the project, but as soon as he slowed down, his world came crashing down with the diagnosis of acute Crohn's disease.

Ari

It was bad, and again, I was in the beginning stages of this really important relationship with a girl. She was going to become my ... I didn't know it at the time, but she would become my wife, and right at the beginning, and she saw me through everything. I was on systemic steroids for months, so I was an aggressive asshole. I mean, it was just bad in every possible way. I was put on medicine though, which did additionally make me a lot sicker, a lot weaker. One of the medicines that ended up being really helpful was called 6-MP or



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Mercaptopurine which was like a 40-year-old leukemia drug. I basically had morning sickness for 6 months. I was throwing up. It was just debilitating as all possible it could be. Again, I was on the systemic steroid, so I'm was puffy and aggressive and hormonal. I was working out at the gym, and I was just angry. I was really angry.

Danny *After 1 particularly bad attack landed him in the hospital, as he sat in his room Ari realized that the medicine wasn't enough to help him. The stress was killing him.*

Ari *It's one of those things that is so self-worsening because you're feeling stressed, and you know the stress is making it worse, and you know that if you don't stress it will help, and you just ... It just doesn't get better. I basically, I made it through the night, and I decided I had to do something different. I went on this long journey of self-tracking and self-experimentation. I didn't necessarily have a plan per se, but I'd had all this data. I'd been getting blood tests every 5 weeks for so long, and I just had these numbers. I was like, you know what, let me just try something different. First of all, I'm going to go drastically different from what I'm doing because it can't be any worse, and I'll see if there's anything I can figure out with this data.*

Danny *After years in the grips of severe illness and ruled by his poor health habits, Ari finally felt like he was in control. He used that data, learned what he could, made changes, and experimented. The results were immediate.*

Ari *I started to see psychological results immediately because again, I was starting to take a little bit of control over what I was doing. I was starting to feel better. I started working out at a very basic level. It was really funny. The way I started working out was with the Wii Fit, you know, the Nintendo. That was what it took because I'm was like, I'm not going to go to a gym now. I'm not going to run a marathon or whatever. I'm just going to start really*

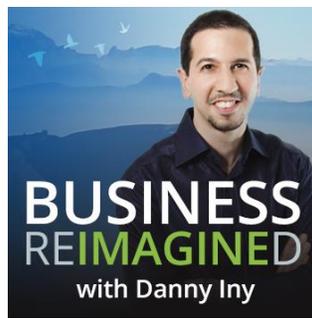


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basic, and that was it. I outgrew that in about a month, and then I got really extreme immediately and I went with the Insanity workout which was awesome. I lost 22 pounds in 2 months. I'm starting to feel better, and I'm not having any attacks, and I'm starting to ween off my medicine myself. Again, it was a vicious cycle in reverse. Now I was starting to feel more in control, and the control was making me feel better about what I was doing.

The whole time, I'm developing these processes for being more productive with the time I have. It really started as a personal system, but it very quickly evolved into what we're now calling BPO which is business, process, optimization. We're working with some of the largest organizations that you've definitely heard of in terms of revolutionizing the way they communicate, manage projects, and manage their processes.

Danny *Talk me through what is the process. What is the system at a high level? How does it work? If I want to, all right, less doing, more living. That sounds like a good value proposition. I want that. How do I get that?*

Ari *On a personal level it really does start ... The first 2 fundamentals are probably the key which is the 80/20 rule and creating the external brain. The 80/20 rule is really what we're looking at. How you spend your time, your resources, and the processes that you go through. It could be everything from how you pay a bill to how you make your lunch. We break those down, and we look at how we can optimize, automate, and outsource those processes. The second part is the external brain which is really about creating a system for having a brain dump that you can get all of your best ideas out of your head, automating in a lot of ways the things, those actions, and then outsourcing for things like virtual assistance or specialists. What we're really looking at is communication, so we're big proponents of the slack platform and also using Trello for project management, but then really specifically ...*



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It's not the tools themselves, it's how you integrate that makes the recipe so special and what we do with it.

If you're going to start somewhere, I would give you an example on a personal level from the 80/20 rule. Every one of us has something called peak time or prime, it depends on which research you look at, biological prime time, prime time. It's about a 90-minute period every day where you are 2 to 100 times more effective than any other time of the day. It's totally different for every person. If you think ... If you're listening to this and you think that your peak time is between 9 and 11, you're probably wrong because that's usually just coffee, but it could be. It's not likely though. Most people, I find are more in the middle of the day. Mine is 10 to noon. There are definitely people who have their peak time at 4 in the morning, which I think would be awesome rather, a lot of them find that very disruptive. There is actually a way to identify it. I created a free app for this based on a hypothesis that I had which turned out to be anecdotally true.

There's something called the central nervous system tap test. All you do with that test is you tap your finger on the table as fast as you can for 10 seconds and count the number of taps. It is an incredibly accurate corollary to the health and recovery state of your nervous system. If you're an athlete and you're training really, really hard like for a triathlon or something, and you do a long, long ride and swim in one day. The next morning your tap test should be lower than average. What this app does is it has you tap the screen to count the taps a couple times a day, and then it averages it out to figure out what is the most likely time to be your peak time.

Danny *What's the name of the app?*

Ari *Less Doing Peak Time*



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Danny *Is that on all platforms or just Apple?*

Ari *It is on Apple. It's in the android store right now for approval.*

Danny *They download the app. They do the tap test which is just fascinating, I've never heard that.*

Ari *The thing that's so interesting about that for me is that the question that I faced really in my life or with my illness was, "What would you do if you could only work an hour a day?" Now it becomes extremely relevant, and I'm telling you that in 90 minutes and the day you should be able to get 2 to 100 times more done than the rest of the day combined.*

Danny *How does that work? Tell me I can do 2 times as much. I'd buy that. I can be effective. I can be efficient, especially when other times I'm not focused, but 100 times. Is that hyperbole, or is that actually the case?*

Ari *It's not hyperbole at all because the thing is you have to keep in mind that I'm not going to tell you that you could write 2 pages before and now you're going to write 200. That's not realistic. But the way that you process information could very well be 100 times more. You could be reading and comprehending things at a micro-neurological level that you don't know. That's another thing, by the way, is you know, memories for example. Most people think ... I mean I think that a lot of people have this visualization that memories are like books on a shelf in a library. The truth is that our memories are constantly being reformulated, repacked based on all the new information that we're receiving every day. Which is 1 of the reasons why people can create very false memories in their minds that didn't actually happen, but they sort of rehashed it so many times that it feels real.*

That kind of informational processing, that kind of learning can happen at a much, much faster rate. If you can synthesize information, that's what you really have to think about.



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When I think about the times I feel like I'm 100 times more productive, it's when I'm connecting dots between different pieces of information that I've been exposed to that I would have never thought before because ...

Danny So ...

Ari Sorry.

Danny *No, I'm just ... This is not at all where I thought this interview would go, but I'm fascinated, so I'm just curious. For an entrepreneur, what should they do in that peak time.*

Ari *Right, great question. There's a couple things there. Peak time is really ... When you're in the flow state, that's when you can get into a flow state, but then as time dilates, and again your mostly productive. You really want to be using that time for whatever you are best at. You're highest and best purpose. The 5 percent of your daily life that only you can do and do better than anybody else. In my case, for me, that is as a curator and creator of content. What I mean by that is that I process 1,000 across the day. I follow actively 30 podcasts, receiving information all the time. I have a whole system set up for synthesizing it myself. The point of that is that on the spot, anytime, anywhere, if somebody asks me, "What is the best way to do this thing? Is there an app for this? Is there a service for this?" I know it, and I can recall it. I've made that my super power.*

I can read almost anything, and I can somehow tie it into a way to be more productive. I'm not bragging. This is what I've focused my efforts on. If you want to give me a poem by Kahlil Gibran or an article about Isis, I can probably figure out a way that that connects to a way that you can be more productive. That's what I would do with that time. That's how I



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create those connections, and I match the dots together. If you look at the movie Limitless ... Have you seen Limitless?

Danny *I haven't.*

Ari *Oh, okay, but you know what it is?*

Danny *No, I don't. I've never heard of it.*

Ari *Oh, okay. Limitless is about Bradley Cooper basically discovers this super nootropic that makes him super smart, and the whole story ensues from there. With nootropics ... Are you familiar with any nootropics?*

Danny *I know what they are, but for the benefit of some of our listeners ...*

Ari *A nootropic is really any brain-enhancing substance. It could be anything from coffee with caffeine to some sort of pharmaceutical like Adderall. None of those things are going to make a genius out of an idiot, but they will help you connect the dots. That is really what we're doing when we're creating new neurons and creating new connections in our mind, and when you synthesize the information to share with somebody in an interesting way. If you can take discrepant pieces of information and make it all mesh together into something that's fascinating and useful, that's very special.*

Danny *Is the highest use ... You're saying, and this is again fascinating to me. When you're saying that an entrepreneur should focus their peak time on the stuff that is their kind of highest strength, should that be ... does that fall into the bucket of learning and thinking and synthesizing?*



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Ari *I think so, yeah.*

Danny *It's not the doing.*

Ari *It can be. That could very well be a brainstorming session. Although, and this is the other side of it, which I'll tell you. I'll answer your question, but there's another side of this too. There's another kind of peak time that might be better for. That is probably the best time for you to soak up knowledge as an entrepreneur. There's another time though for brainstorming. You could brainstorm then, but there's a better time most likely because brainstorming really involves a lot of creative processes, and most people, myself included, tend to be more creative when we're tired.*

Danny *Interesting.*

Ari *Which tells you how fucked up our brains are, by the way, and that they're always trying to fight against us because essentially the reason that we tend to be more productive or more creative when we're tired is because we're less likely to shoot down "bad ideas" which is so shitty, again, if you think about because we're fighting against our own brains ability because it's like, "Oh no, that's stupid. That will never work." Those are the ideas that make people billions of dollars and change people's lives. When you're tired, you tend to be a little bit less inhibited, and those better ideas can come out. I would posture that it's better to have a brainstorming session, and this is what I do, my brainstorming sessions with my partner are usually 8 o'clock at night to 11 or midnight.*

Danny *Interesting.*

Ari *In addition to that, the other creative place is the shower because we're also sort of less inhibited, but if you don't have a mechanism for capturing ideas that could be extremely*



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frustrating, so little tip, get something called Aqua Notes for your shower. It's a waterproof post-it note pad that they use for scuba diving. Then you can write down those ideas and not be so bad about it.

Danny *Have you used them for yours and love it?*

Ari *Yeah.*

Danny *This is really, really fascinating. Peak time is for thinking and learning and synthesizing, and when you're tired is for brainstorming. When does the doing happen? Is there a great time for that, or should you just be setting it up so that you're not doing the doing?*

Ari *Yes. That's where the real beauty of this comes is that as per the brand, I want people to being doing less and accomplishing a lot more. There's 2 answers to that. The first one is that the doing can be very therapeutic. The doing should not necessarily, it should almost never, require your full faculties and your ... that 100 percent basically. The 5 percent should really be the cerebral stuff. The doing should almost be automatic or almost be enjoyable. I'll give a personal business example. I wash the dishes in our house because that is my version of mindfulness meditation. I can't be holding my phone or anything because my hands are wet. I just sort of lose myself in it. There's actually really funny research to show that washing the dishes is a really good first step to learning mindfulness meditation.*

The point is once we get to this higher level, it almost is like ... Have you seen the movie Bruce Almighty?

Danny *I have.*



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Ari *Okay. I hope most people have who are listening to this. When he walks into the building and Morgan Freeman is mopping the floor and he says no matter how dirty the world gets you can always clean it up again. It's that kind of thing. When you get to this very, very high level of stuff, then the manual stuff, the doing almost becomes an enjoyment rather than a chore because it's just become a passing, low-focus thing that you do to get things done. Most of that anyway should not be done by you anyway. You want to be able to think of these processes, then can make it so you don't have to be doing that stuff, and you can focus on what you're meant to be doing or what you want to be doing.*

Danny *I love that you brought the doing the dishes example. It's one that I've shared on different occasions a number of times. I find it very liberating, especially when everything is chaotic, doing the dishes is my first go-to thing because it's like a total mess that I know I can completely fix in like 20 minutes.*

Ari *That's right, that's right. It's finite. It's like you know how to go from A to B. Absolutely.*

Danny *It's empowering. It's like taking control of your environment.*

Ari *It's no different than making the bed in the morning, which a lot of people recommend to do. It's a little more involved.*

Danny *You mentioned the doing should be stuff that is almost therapeutic and that you should have processes and systems for the doing to be done either by these systems or by these tools or by other people. How does that work if you're not Donald Trump, if you can't afford a giant staff? How do you in practice do this automation and outsourcing if you can't spend a lot of money on tools, technology, people?*



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Ari

Oh my god. I think you're spoon-feeding this. By the way, just to transition to that. It's worth noting that with Tim's 4-hour work week, it's really not about working 4 hours because if you love what you do, you never want to stop working on it because it's not work. It's really that the 4 hours is the limit of how much you should be spending on the bullshit and the stuff that you shouldn't be doing. With that, how do you do this when you don't have a lot of money, a lot resources?

My latest company is a virtual assistant company called the Less Doing Assistance. It's the highest trained, most capable virtual project managers in the world. I built this company with my partner Nick in 36 hours using completely free tools. We were profitable and scalable from day 1. Those tools are a lot of the things that I would use and recommend. For automation, IFTTT which stands for ifthisisthenthat.com is an automation platform that is completely free. You can use that to automate all sorts of the processes that you might go through on a daily basis. Everything from somebody buys something from me on PayPal then add them to a new Mail Chimp newsletter, and if I update a contact in my Salesforce, then make a note in my Slack implementation so that everybody knows about it. Those kinds of the things that take 30 to 45 seconds, but you're doing them dozens or hundreds of times a day.

In addition, virtual assistants can be ridiculously cheap nowadays, but there are services that are free. You want to use an app called Operator. They will buy anything you want, whether it's a product or movie ticket, or a plane ticket, and it's completely free. You want to get customer service fixed because Time Warner screwed you over, use the app Service which is completely free, and they will handle customer service issues for you, and they are fantastic at it. There's any number of services like that, that you can use that are completely



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free, and then if you... Once you see the value, you start paying for things because you've freed up that money.

Danny *How much time can you actually save doing this? Yes, it would be nice to not have to do the silly things that 10 seconds there, 30 seconds over the other side, but how much can that really add up to?*

Ari *I officially work on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 1 PM to 2:30 PM. That is the only time when I have interviews or meetings or calls, and that's it. That's because my wife is very, very pregnant. She's due in about a month. I am very present in my 3 boys' life and with her. It's a decision that I made basically. I'm essentially giving myself realistically like an hour-and-a-half to 2 hours a day to get things done. It's not the easiest thing by far. It's always an interesting challenge, but it works. I've built a new company. I'm growing a company. I'm doing all sorts of ... I'm taking advantage of opportunities, and I'm saying no to the ones that I need to say no to. How much time can you save? If you told me that you wanted to work an hour a week, I could figure out how to make that happen.*

Danny *Interesting. Here's something I'm curious about. You and I met several years ago. I read your book. I've gone through it a number of times actually, I've had quite a few conversations. That was several years ago, and I'm sure you're thinking has evolved. What has changed in the world or in your thinking about the work that you do since you published *Less Doing*, which I think like what 2 years ago or so?*

Ari *I think almost 3 now. I'm just putting the finishing touches on the book actually. This is a big thing is that the process is always been optimize, automate, and outsource in that order. As much as I outsource which is literally thousands of things a month. I'm constantly trying to not outsource things. I love saving 3 seconds on a process if I can because something was*



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able to get automated. Really what changed is that the rate that technology is improving and expanding is just whirlwind speed. We can literally automate things now that 3 months ago a person had to do manually. That's the big thing, we can just automate so much more for free in most cases. Certainly you couldn't 3 years ago, but even in the last 3 months.

Danny *For example?*

Ari *Like that ... It's not quite an automation, per se, but that Service app is one example. There are like ... Transcription is a good one. Machine learning transcription has gotten much, much better, but even still, they've minimized the human element. There are transcription services that will use partial machine and then just a little bit of human aspect to sort of conform things and make sure of it. There are with IFTTT, it's expanded into working with all sorts of physical devices and new services that it couldn't work with before. Whether or not it's like a person had to do it before, it's also just now the expansion of the how many things came pulling into other things. Natural language processing has really come a long way. You can do a lot now with bots.*

A really good one is actually scheduling. There are at least a dozen companies now that use artificial intelligence to act as scheduling services between you and other people. The average number of emails it takes to schedule an appointment is 8.1 which is really absurd. Now we have all this artificial intelligence. They're real. There's a few hybrids, but there are some that are true artificial intelligence that will suggest the most appropriate time at the best place for both of you and book it into both of your calendars, that kind of thing.

Danny *Fascinating. What's the new book?*



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Ari *It's funny. I think I did this in reverse. I think most people end up writing the philosophy and then they do the tactical manual. I did the tactical version first, and now I'm working on the philosophy because I've had more time to develop it. This is ... We're still playing around with the title, but this is something along the lines of basically like The Peak of Less. It's very, very high level, like 5 percent of it is technical in that it applies to a much larger, more international audience, and doesn't require a bunch of apps or anything.*

Danny *Do you have pub date?*

Ari *No. I'm supposed to have the manuscript in about a month-and-a-half or so because I didn't write it of course. I actually just approved the cover today. I think probably sometime in the middle, I think.*

Danny *Are you publishing it yourself, or are you with a publishing house?*

Ari *I promised my publisher from my first book that I would let them look at it, but right now I'm planning on publishing it myself.*

Danny *Cool. I know we've talked about this over the course of the whole interview, but I want to wrap this up in a nice, neat, little bow for our listeners. The theme of the show is business reimagined, and the people I want to have the show are the people who are reimagining the way that business is done. You touched on a lot of things that kind of gel into that reimagination which is about being much more effective by just focusing on the things that make you effective: working at the right time, making the best use of that time, using the tools in automation. Is that a fair encapsulation of your reimagination of business?*

Ari *Yeah, absolutely. I think unfortunately there is this mentality nowadays that you have appear busy. You have to be "heads down" which is my absolute, I despise that expression,*

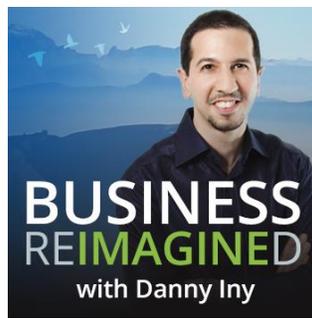


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in order to be successful at a business. I think that you can be a lot more successful by not doing that.

Danny *That was Ari Meisel reimagining what constraints of time really mean for entrepreneurs and for everybody. It's a powerful question to ponder. Instead of thinking, "What can I do with the time that I have?", change your thinking ever so slightly to, "How can I do everything I want to do in the time that I have?" If you ask the right question you can arrive at a good answer you might not have thought was waiting to be found. If you need help finding it, check out Ari's excellent book *Less Doing, More Living*, or visit his website at lessdoing.com.*

Voiceover This has been Business Reimagined with Danny Iny. Join us next time as we talk with Tom Matzen.

Tom *Most business owners are not entrepreneurs. They're practitioners. They're craftspeople, you know. Online marketers, Danny, your field of expertise. You know, most people are busy doing it, doing it, doing it. They're not working on their business. They're not creating systems. They're not creating teams. They're not creating strategy to scale. They're in their business selling their stuff or creating another program to sell or delivering on a program they sold last time. They're in their business.*

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