



The Innovation Initiative

**Fail at *almost*  
Everything and Win**

**Cat Volz**

Founder & Executive Producer

ii.media

**Scott Adams**

Creator of Dilbert

***Cat Volz:***

This is Cat Volz for the Innovation Initiative Entrepreneur TV. My guest today is Scott Adams. He is most famous for being the creator of Dilbert. Since it started in 1989, Dilbert has run in over 2,000 newspapers in 65 countries. He is also a best-selling author and serial entrepreneur. Thank you so much for being on the show today.

***Scott Adams:***

Thanks for having me.

***Cat Volz:***

I'd like to start by asking a few questions about Dilbert.

***Scott Adams:***

Okay.

***Cat Volz:***

You've had many different careers. How did you know you're a cartoonist?

***Scott Adams:***

Well cartooning is just one of the things I tried. I failed at dozens of things over the course of my career and my approach had always been to just keep trying things and try them long enough to find out if they'd work and if I found that they weren't working to bail out quickly and try another thing. So cartooning was just the next thing on the list that I tried and I was probably as surprised as anybody that it worked out as well as it did but it turns out I coincidentally had amassed the exact combination of skills that made it work.

**Cat Volz:**

In the early days what did you do to gain traction and feedback?

**Scott Adams:**

Well Dilbert was sort of a failure at launch. So it launched in maybe 35 newspapers somewhere in that area. But even those newspapers that bought it didn't run it on the first day. A lot of them buy it just to have the rights in case it becomes big later so they're sort of waiting for somebody to run it first. So it took a while first of all to even be in the newspaper and then for to get any traction it took several years because it wasn't at first a workplace comic. It was sort of a general comic with Dilbert had a job but it wasn't really about that. And it was in 1993 when I started running my email address between the panels of the comic that people started emailing me and they'd say something I didn't know which is we love it when he's in the office, we like it when he's at home but you know it doesn't really excite us. And so I just changed the script and moved him into the office and kept it there. And that was probably the biggest change, then there were a few big breaks along the way and it was exactly the right time in history, the people want to see a character who is working in technology and the big corporation that was undergoing downsizing, it sort of tied to the headlines really well that helped a lot too.

**Cat Volz:**

I think that's brilliant as far as entrepreneurship is getting product iteration by having your email there and you said it was the tip of the hateberg. You didn't need everyone, you just needed about what present to be onboard?

***Scott Adams:***

Well you're, given the number of people in the world, if you can get, you know, 10% of the people who were looking at your product really like it a lot. That's you know... that's enough to get rich. If you pick almost any musical, band that's really big, most people don't like them. You know, the majority of people are not fans... But there's still you know a solid minority who care a lot. One of the things I learned when I was trying to do the Dilbert TV show was that it didn't matter so much if people like what you made. It turns out that's not very predictive at all. What matters is if just a few people are just wild about it, that's very predictive. Because they are the ones who do things look for people to actually move their body in some way and that's very predictive. I worked my day job at the same time I did the comic for several years. Partly because I hadn't grown big enough, partly because I was getting so much material from my day job that is was very symbiotic you know the two worked together. And it was part of my story in the beginning that I work for a company and I was also mocking the company until they fired me which eventually happened as you might imagine would happen. So it was okay when it lasted. The other thing I learned is that work doesn't hurt when you don't have to be there. All these huge frustrations that make you crazy if you sort of have to go to work none of it really bothers you if you go home and think well the worst day I had today just gave me material for my comic, I didn't really have such a bad day because it doesn't really matter if this project works or not. I mean it was just this wonderful freedom.

***Cat Volz:***

Is there any topic off limits for Dilbert?

***Scott Adams:***

Yeah because it runs under a newspaper and the paying customers get to set the rules. And newspapers have you know, fairly well understood boundaries about what's okay and what's not. So some of the worst things you can say are anything about a medical problem because real people have those medical problems.

***Cat Volz:***

Exactly...

***Scott Adams:***

And you might think it's hilarious because you don't know anybody who has that special condition but trust me there are people who are not gonna think that's funny and it took me long time to kind of internalized that because my first reaction was Aaah, you know, get a sense of humor. But eventually somebody's gonna make a joke about your problem and then you get to see it from the other side. And then forevermore you get real sensitive on behalf of other people to not just be a jerk for no reason.

***Cat Volz:***

I think also your blog is fascinating. It seems like if anything were you cannot say it until where you could say it in your blog. I love how outspoken you are.

***Scott Adams:***

The blog is amazing because it's one of the few things where

you don't have an editor. I mean if you're a professional writer you're almost always going through some kind of gate keeper. And technically my blog is you know maintained by my publisher who has my books and my syndication for the comic. So if they had a problem with it they could express it and I would care but they choose to, air on the side of the artist let the artist do his thing.

***Cat Volz:***

With the decline of old media with newspapers is Dilbert still a primary source of income for you?

***Scott Adams:***

Believe it or not the newspapers are my primary source of income and they're higher than they've ever been.

***Cat Volz:***

That's awesome.

***Scott Adams:***

So although the number of newspapers has shrunk there's still almost always one in every town. And Dilbert could only run in one newspaper per town by contract because of competition. So even if I wasn't in the newspaper that went out of the business, the remaining one would snap it up because I have an audience to bring with it. So I've done nothing but grow.

***Cat Volz:***

How perfect...

**Scott Adams:**

Which is weird, I mean nobody would believe that but that's true.

**Cat Volz:**

In your lifetime you imagine a Dilbert movie, what might it have in store for your fans?

**Scott Adams:**

My fans would have tough time digesting this at first. But I would only do a live action Dilbert with real characters and real living humans playing them. And I'd probably do some kind of origin story, the beginning of Dilbert... he's getting his job in the beginning or at least very early on. And probably I've got most of it drawn out and I just have to finish dialogue and a fluff it out a bit. But probably you would see Dogbert, the beginning of his origin but not a complete origin. So you wouldn't necessarily see him talking in the first movie.

**Cat Volz:**

I thought we'd try a fun segment called Scott Adams fan facts. You are a certified genius, a member of MENSA, why does you get your IQ tested?

**Scott Adams:**

I actually thought I might be stupid and I needed to test it. I grew up in a really small town and I was valedictorian in my class but there were only forty people in my class. So I thought well maybe that's not very indicative of anything and then I got a job at a bank as a bank teller and I was not rising up the rank as quickly as I thought maybe I should.

And I thought well maybe I'm wrong, maybe I'm not very smart. So I actually took a test to find out. I was trying to figure out what my potential was. And I thought well if I don't know what my IQ is maybe I don't know what how high I could go... how successful I could be.

***Cat Volz:***

Why did you become a hypnotist?

***Scott Adams:***

When I was a kid my mother told me this story, she said that when she gave birth to my younger sister she was under hypnosis, my family doctor happened to be hypnotist. And he hypnotized her and she gave birth while being awake and having no pain killers but feeling no pain.

***Cat Volz:***

Amazing...

***Scott Adams:***

So the entire experience was pleasant to her and she was on no pain killers. Now that's an unusual situation. Most people could not have that kind of a strong effect but had such an impact on me. Then I thought well what is this super power that you can do, this sort of thing

***Cat Volz:***

Sure...

***Scott Adams:***

What else can it do and how else can this improve my life? So I as a young man in my twenties I sought down a class



and I became a certified hypnotist and I would say by far its most useful thing I've done with the exception of the Dale Carnegie course which was very good. Those two things probably would make almost anybody successful on top of whatever else they are good at.

***Cat Volz:***

When was the last time you ate a piece of meat?

***Scott Adams:***

Believe it or not I tried sushi recently. And it was the first... well it was the first raw fish I've eaten. I haven't had anything like beef or chicken in twenty or thirty years. I'm not exactly sure. But I'll do a fish now and then just because people say I should.

***Cat Volz:***

When you posted a picture of your abs on Twitter how many likes and shares did you get?

***Scott Adams:***

You know, I actually don't know. Because I published it in the context of another a larger point and I don't remember that one exactly...

***Cat Volz:***

What about your health is it about diet and nutrition and your systems...

***Scott Adams:***

both in that same context, right... and I'm really just trying to make a point that I'm planning for my 60th birthday. I'll

be 59 in a few weeks and I'm unusually fit for my age.

**Cat Volz:**

You are...

**Scott Adams:**

But I also don't do anything unusual I mean I don't have a trainer, I don't have a personal chef and I don't do anything exotic. I do things that I talk about in my book which is I replaced my need for will power with knowledge. So I just figure out how to do it easily and with diet as well irreplaceable power with knowledge so it just becomes easy. All the things I do, all the things I enjoy. So I only work out in the ways I enjoy and but I do it every day because I enjoy it. So if you do that and you learn how to eat food that's healthy and how to prepare it in ways that taste good which is a learning process, you have to actually work at that.

**Cat Volz:**

Yeah.

**Scott Adams:**

Figuring out how all these healthy food can possibly taste good because usually it doesn't and you got to really work at that. But when you get to a point where you can easily find things to eat that are perfectly healthy for you and you can exercise everyday because you're not over exercising. You're not doing something that is gonna hurt which would eventually talk you out of it that can get good results and I thought was a story worth telling...

**Cat Volz:**  
Absolutely.

**Scott Adams:**  
You almost can't tell the story unless you wouldn't take your shirt off because no one is gonna say why would I believe you, until you show them... show them your work. So it's embarrassing but I lost my sense of shame long time ago.

**Cat Volz:**  
Well happy birthday coming up on June 8th. Tell us about the time you wore a disguise to a meeting to get material for Dilbert.

**Scott Adams:**  
First of all I'm impressed that you knew my birthday. Because that's not even in your notes so it must be a Gemini thing. So what's the question?

**Cat Volz:**  
You wore a disguise.

**Scott Adams:**  
Oh yeah.

**Cat Volz:**  
to sneak into a meeting so you could get material for your content.

**Scott Adams:**  
Yeah so this is years ago when the San Jose Mercury News, they contacted me and asked me if I wanted to do something

with them that was fun and we came up with this idea. I would wear an actual professional disguise with a big crazy mustache that didn't look so crazy in the times I was doing it and a big fake brown wig and I went into Logitech with the approval of the CEO. So the CEO was the only one who was in on the joke.

***Cat Volz:***

Okay.

***Scott Adams:***

He thought it would be fun. So he bought his executive group in and I pretended to be a world famous consultant called Ray Maybare. And I pretended that I was leading through an exercise to create a mission statement and I convinced them that I was a famous consultant and this would really change the quality of their operations in some way which of course it doesn't. But my hidden agenda was to see if I could come up with... make them come up with, collectively, while I was in the room the most ridiculous, long, useless mission statement you could ever come up with and then at the end I was gonna see if I could get them to agree to try to put it to music. And just because it was ridiculous.

***Cat Volz:***

Wow.

***Scott Adams:***

And so by the end of the meeting I'd accomplished all those things and took off my disguise. A good laugh was had by all sixth sense moment you know, if you see in the movie the

Sixth Sense at the moment when I took off the disguise and told people who I was everybody in the room was familiar with Dilbert by then. You could see their eyes kinda rolling back in their head you know like replaying the last hour of their life... replay... okay that makes sense now. So it was just a wonderful moment.

***Cat Volz:***

I have a few word association prompts say whatever comes to mind or you may pass. Charles Schulz.

***Scott Adams:***

Hero... I won't say more I guess I'll just do one word.

***Cat Volz:***

Oh it doesn't have to be one word but...

***Scott Adams:***

Okay, yeah he was a reason I got into cartooning. He literally, Charles Schulz he's the reason I learned to read. Now I'm sure I would have learn to read for other reasons but I learned early because I would see his Peanuts books and I just wanted to know what they said. So he was transformational in my life over the arch of my entire life.

***Cat Volz:***

Hillary...

***Scott Adams:***

Hillary... well of course you know I... I write about Trump so Trump is the first word that comes to mind because I think of the match up.

**Cat Volz:**  
Golf...

**Scott Adams:**  
Wow... its funny the first word that comes to mind is lazy I'm not sure I can defend that but I tried golf and it's so many hours of doing something that doesn't seem productive that I come away with it feeling lazy.

**Cat Volz:**  
The Office...

**Scott Adams:**  
You mean the TV show... The Office?

**Cat Volz:**  
Yes.

**Scott Adams:**  
Hilarious. I was a big fan of The Office both the original as well as the American version.

**Cat Volz:**  
South Park...

**Scott Adams:**  
Jealous. Jealous because they were allowed to say anything because they started that way.

**Cat Volz:**  
And they bring the characters.  
They said we can be racists as long as it's not us saying it's

the characters and then the whole town is upset with them. And that's how... that was their work around.

**Scott Adams:**

Yeah that is a clever work around but beyond that they were on cable TV and they simply were hilarious that's at what they did which gives them a little more leeway.

**Cat Volz:**

That's true.

**Scott Adams:**

The funnier you are, the more you can get away with, that's just some rule with comedy. So I've always been jealous of how much content they can do that's off limits for me.

**Cat Volz:**

Donald Trump...

**Scott Adams:**

Persuader... master persuader. This is whatever I've been writing about for a while now in my blog he's the best master persuader I've ever seen.

**Cat Volz:**

The Simpsons...

**Scott Adams:**

The Simpsons... its funny just using the word association I think of twenty. Because you know, when you pass twenty years of something you've answered all questions. I mean there's a debate whether The Simpsons is the best television

show of all time. And I don't know what the answer to that is but it's certainly in the conversation it's got to be in the top 5.

**Cat Volz:**

Tennis...

**Scott Adams:**

I recently quit tennis because of the repetitive nature of it. And your body has all these little aches that keep you from doing other things such as weight training. So it was my lifelong primary hobby and I just quit cold turkey in favor of weight lifting and general exercise as a better strategy for my older years because tennis will break down your body in these places that you're using it all the time. Weight training will keep you, younger longer.

**Cat Volz:**

Traditional Marriage...

**Scott Adams:**

Failure. As the word that comes to mind I've written that if we are objective about it, marriage probably is a root cause of most of society's problems. It's everything from climate change is worst because the family unit needs too many cars and too many square foot of real estate-- it's very wasteful, kids' educations probably would be a lot better if the parents were less involved. I don't know about your parents but my parents weren't teaching me anything. So, professionals could of definitely done better than my parents. I know some parents can do better than in school but there's probably an exception. And then you look at how



many parents get broken up by divorce and how many kids have to go through that and then the financial upheaval of all that and the hatred that goes on with ex's...

***Cat Volz:***

And the diet and exercise schedule that you have to give up, just like your time...

***Scott Adams:***

Yeah marriage... I found that when I was married I would eat whenever I was hungry and then I would eat again when other people are eating...

***Cat Volz:***

Yes.

***Scott Adams:***

And I would plan to exercise and I'd have it on my schedule but something would come up with the family and that's always a higher priority because that's what you've agreed. So as far your health, it's terrible, there's probably a better system.

***Cat Volz:***

Yeah. So read the blog that he wrote on Valentine's Day-- it's fascinating. You've written a book called:

***Scott Adams:***

How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big, kind of the story of my life. I think that's it.

***Cat Volz:***

Okay the link is below, it is a must-read for entrepreneurs or anyone hacking success. In the book you say that goals are for losers. What's your alternative and why?

***Scott Adams:***

So the problem with goals is that if you have this one goal the entire time you're working toward that goal you're in the state of non-success, which is not very motivating and probably 200 years ago it made a lot of sense to have a goal because things didn't change much. So by the time you could reach your goal let's say you were successful it's probably still a good goal, it made sense. Take a farmer for example let's say he has a goal of clearing 28 years before winter. If he succeeds, this is 200 years ago, that was probably a really good idea. And he's happy he did it. Now imagine the complexity today. There's more complexity in your smart phone than the farmer had in his entire operation. Today everything is changing, the industry is changing, your life is changing, your career is changing, your relationships are changing. If you set a goal let's say five years from now, in this completely, dynamic changing environment, even if you achieve it, probably it wasn't the best thing to do. Because by then, something better has come along so the situations changed, some competitor has already made a better product. So a better approach is what I called the systems. Which is you're developing your capabilities, mostly your skills to a point where your odds are good that you can be successful in a variety of different ways. So you don't say this is the one way I'm gonna be successful. You say, if I have this skill and I add on top of it, this is just an example, the Dale Carnegie course. Now I'm

a person with this skill who also can give the speech in front of the group with great comfort. So that's two skills and now, you could be the best of what you're doing but you also have a better chance of being the boss of what you're doing or the spokesperson for what you're doing. So it's all about layering skills intelligently so your odds are great. I'm the perfect example of that, because I'm a famous cartoonist who doesn't have very much skill at art. I don't draw very well. I never have. But I'm pretty good, I'm better than most people... right?

***Cat Volz:***

Better than me.

***Scott Adams:***

You know the average person can't draw anything. And I've never taken a course at writing but I write well enough. I know enough about business that I can make this enterprise work and I have something to write about. And I'm not even the funniest person in the room usually. If I throw a party, I might be third funniest person in my own house. But I'm pretty funny, top twenty percent maybe. So although none of those individual skills I would put it in the top one percent of people who have that kind of skill, they're very few people who have that kind of combination. So it's the combination and gave me market value and that's sort of the approach I suggest. Find a system where you can layer skills intelligently until you have not just one goal that you can achieve, there may be lots of them. And some of them might be a surprise.

***Cat Volz:***

So you just said that increasing your skillset increases your odds for success. And that you only have to be good or above average to combine these skills to be successful. So why don't more people do it?

***Scott Adams:***

I think it's not obvious. And I think that the standard advice that I got as a kid and my mother said it doesn't matter what you try to be in life just try to be the best one. You know at a time that was kind of a standard advice.

***Cat Volz:***

Yeah.

***Scott Adams:***

Like you, you can do anything. Be the best you can at that one thing. So we've all been trained in that. And I think there was an earlier time when that made a lot of sense. So for example if you're gonna be a lawyer or a doctor you just want to be the best lawyer or the best doctor, that makes complete sense. But we're in the world where people are gonna have maybe six different careers over their life. And they're all unpredictable. So being the best at one thing is limiting now. It's not your key to success.

***Cat Volz:***

We know that some people follow their passion and die penniless. What's more important to you than passion?

***Scott Adams:***

Well I think passion is deeply overrated and I think that the

reason it's overrated is that whenever there's an interview with famous rich people and somebody says, hey billionaire, what was the secret of your success? And indeed Warren Buffett has said passion... Mark Zuckerberg has said passion, Virgin Airlines, Richard Branson has said passion.

***Cat Volz:***

Yeah absolutely.

***Scott Adams:***

So three billionaires with three different careers in different industries they all say the one same word as a secret to success that's pretty compelling. But you have to think about what else could they have said in that situation. Like how else could they have answered that question? Did they have a choice... Could those billionaires have said I think the reason I'm rich is that I'm smarter than poor people. That might even be the truth. But you can't say it. Suppose they said I think it's because I work harder than poor people. But they have gardeners. They've seen gardeners work.

***Cat Volz:***

They're not sweating.

***Scott Adams:***

Everybody's working hard; we're not all Warren Buffett. You know, they can't say they're lucky because that ruins their whole mystique, their whole claim to fame is that they have some kind of skill. So really they say the only thing that sounds democratic, the thing that everybody thinks that they can get on their own. It's free. It doesn't cost anything. Hey, go get some passion. I'll tell you I have a

friend who heard me talking about passion being overrated. And he said, you know, I think you're wrong because look at that show American Idol. If you look at the winners clearly they have a lot of passion because you would have to have that passion to, put up with all the rejections and practice as hard as they do and do all the things that they do. And I said, have you watched the entire season, because in the beginning their stadium is full of passionate people. And the one thing all those passionate people have in common is that they're total losers. They didn't get to the first round of American Idol.

***Cat Volz:***

That's a good point, yeah.

***Scott Adams:***

So if you look for correlation just based on raw numbers, passion is really highly correlated with failure to the point where, in one of my early jobs, at the bank I had a boss who was a lending officer with thirty plus years of experience and one of his lessons was if somebody comes in for a loan for a business and the business they want to start is their passion, don't give them a loan. He said that's a terrible bet because the people who are in it for passion are kind of in it for fun. They're not in it to make money no matter what, they're not in it to pay back the bank, they're in it for fun and when it stops being fun they may just walk away.

***Cat Volz:***

Yeah.

***Scott Adams:***

And that's his experience. So the guy you want is the guy who comes in with his spreadsheet that says I got this boring business, I've done all the research, numbers look good, I've done this kind of thing before, I'm putting my own money into it, completely boring, no passion whatsoever, that person gets the loan because, history shows they'll pay it back.

***Cat Volz:***

Tell us about personal energy, why is that important?

***Scott Adams:***

So my analogy, if you were to look at capitalism, one of the great things about capitalism is that you can give one major that everybody's working toward which is profitability. That's really handy even though it's sort of artificial. And I suggested that in your personal life there is one major that is very reliable, which is your energy, in other words if you do these things which energize you for whatever reason, you end up doing the right things. So there's something about that, if you start looking at it in your life, what are the things that give you energy? So for example if you're eating right and exercising on a daily basis those things will give you energy and indeed those are the right things to do, experts will say that's good. Now it would be great to follow your passion and also have a job that you were good at it was logical and it made sense. But I discovered that I can get excited about anything that works. So in my experience, lots of things that have failed, but I was always excited about them at first because I'm a healthy guy with good energy. And a good idea just excites me. But as the

idea maybe starts to look not so good and doesn't work and doesn't pencil out my enthusiasm wanes. So then I move to somewhere where there's more energy and I just go from there. But I don't look for some kind of magical passion that's in the universe drawing me toward it. Rather I just keep my energy high which is what I recommend for anybody. And then I'm able to take on bigger challenges. Because you know yourself, if you're tired, you don't feel good, everything seems too big. But if your energy is high and you're optimistic and everything is good and you've taken care of your body, you know, and you've learn how to deal with stress and you've done all the things that keep your energy high, then you can get pretty excited about anything that looks like it's gonna work, make money, make the world better, there are lots of things that will get you excited, without this weird, magical passion thing getting involved.

***Cat Volz:***

You said that it's a moral necessity to take care of our own needs first. Tell us about enlightened selfishness.

***Scott Adams:***

Yeah, socially it's very difficult to be selfish because nobody likes a selfish person. But on a practical level you have to take care of yourself before you're very useful to other people. And if you look at the arch of life, I would suggest that a perfect life looks like this, you're born perfectly selfish. Because you need other people to keep you alive, there's nothing you can do for other people except be cute I guess. But as you get older you start doing few things for yourself but you're a kid, you're still mostly selfish and



that's okay. Everybody says take care of yourself, learn what you can, you'll be useful later. You start having kids and you're mostly giving back. Now you're trying to take care of yourself but you're trying to take care of the kids and the family and the job, now it's a half, half situation. You're half giving, half taking. But by the time you die, if you've done everything right and the last you know, breath you take you will have given everything away. Maybe that's in your estate, that's your final gift, but by then you should have expired all of your personal needs. And I feel I'm somewhat well along that path in the sense that I've made money that I need for my life and I wouldn't have a reason to get up for myself because I kind of have what I need. But it's very motivating for me to know that if I do a day's work, because of my unique situation, I can feed a village, you know, not directly, but by my economic impact on a number of people. And I think that most people follow that same path. You look at Bill Gates, early Bill Gates is just grab, grab, grab, you know, get what I can. But he always said later he was gonna give away and now he puts all of his energy into giving it away. That's not unusual. I think even Donald Trump, for whatever you think about him as a president, probably, and this is my guess I'm not inside his head, my guess is he's just at a point in his life he would rather do something for other people because that's internally what he needs to do. He already has what he needs.

***Cat Volz:***

As entrepreneur you've had restaurants, video games, pre YouTube ideas but you always seem to know when to fold them. And this is one of the most important things for entrepreneurs. You said things that will someday work out

well, start out well. Tell us about this observation.

***Scott Adams:***

Yeah so I mentioned earlier that, you know I learned making the Dilbert TV show, that it was the excited people that matter. And that seems to be the one thing that you look for that's very predictive. So I'll give you an example: when fax machines were real new they almost never worked. The paper would get jammed, the signal didn't work, but still fax machines at that time were huge in the industry because it really didn't have much choice, alright. So you could predict by the fact that it was a terrible product and people still wanted it. Cell phones were terrible for years dropping calls and everything but it grew like crazy. So whenever you see that quality which is, it's a terrible product and people still want it, that's a real good sign. But a close cousin to that is when you have these people who are passionate about it and they're seeing some kind of X-factor that maybe not everybody sees but there are some number of people who are real excited. So I knew Dilbert would work when I heard the following story. I got an email from someone, this is years ago, before there was ever a Dilbert book or the Dilbert Principle, which was a number one best seller. A guy wrote and said I take all your comics and I sort them by content you know, the ones that are about sales people, and the ones about marketing and I've assembled my own book. It was like a binder, that has chapters based on content, you should write that book. And I thought well this guy has way too much on his hands, you know, that's my first reaction. And then you get another one. And I realized people are making my product because I haven't made it. Like by the time I wrote the book the question of will a lot of people

buy this book had been answered, that, I remember my publisher trying to damp down my anticipation that it would be good, because he doesn't wanna build up my hopes, and me thinking I already know where this is going, because customers have already told me. Now you don't see that kind of situation very often. That was very unusual but every once in a while you see that X-factor pop through. Somebody smart said you don't tell your customers what your product is, they tell you what the product is.

***Cat Volz:***

Absolutely.

***Scott Adams:***

You can take the first shot but after that they're the designers. They're gonna tell you this worked, this didn't... and you better rebuild.

***Cat Volz:***

On separate occasions and you experienced a medical condition: two different types of dystonias, what happened right as the Dilbert cartoon was taking off?

***Scott Adams:***

Well my first dystonia, which is just a muscle spasm happened with this pinky, and it was a very specific problem which is when I put pen to paper the pinky would spasm. And it turns out it's a mind problem not... it was a brain problem it's not a physical problem. There's nothing wrong with the hand, it's something to do with overuse. It's called focal dystonia. You know it's a brain problem and I confirmed this because I could take the affected hand away.

I could take my left hand and touch it to paper and my hand would twitch. So it really was just a brain perceptual thing. So I went to the doctors and said hey what's this?... by weird luck I got Kaiser near me, my health service, they had one of the world experts on this specific problem working in my town. So I got the best advice you could get just by pure luck and unfortunately the advice was: it never goes away. So I said well what would I do to continue my career and the solutions were not really solutions. Draw left-handed.

***Cat Volz:***

Left-handed you did that for a while.

***Scott Adams:***

Actually it was quit your career that was the advice. Because that's what people do, musicians, piano players, they get that problem and they just have to quit. But I wasn't really willing to quit so I tried drawing left-handed, I tried a number of things that he suggested and none of that worked. And then I just sort of intuitively decided to try the following thing, which was to take my pen, and I was still working at my day job at that time. And during meetings, just under the table, I would just tap my pen on a drawing surface, a piece of paper or something and then just lift it off before the pinky spasm. And I would do this for the entire meeting and then I found that I could keep it there for a quarter of a second and then half a second. I think it got to about two seconds and my brain just remapped, it just shut off. And for fairly long periods now I can draw and use my hand without getting a spasm. If I overuse it for a long period of time, I can feel it coming back a little bit but it's not a problem in my life. So I think I'm in the

literature, I was told, not under my own name, but as the first documented case, where this was reversed.

***Cat Volz:***

Nobody's ever done that before... wow.

***Scott Adams:***

Well, that I know of and I was working with the doctor who was the expert of this. Now the next thing I did was shift from drawing on paper to drawing on a Wacom Cintiq, which is a computer monitor that you can draw directly on with a stylist. And the reason is because it flared up again after I overused it a few years later, I overused my hand again and it flared up a little bit. And I reasoned that because it was that weird mental problem and not a physical problem that if I started drawing on a computer, my brain just wouldn't recognize it as drawing. It just wouldn't trigger it. And that's actually what happened. When I draw on the computer it doesn't trigger.

***Cat Volz:***

You were so destined to be a cartoonist.

***Scott Adams:***

Well maybe destined but if you knew more about my history, you'd know that philosophically there are only two conditions. There are things I don't want, and then there are things I'm gonna get if I have to chew through a fucking concrete wall. You can edit that out. And I would see the world in those two conditions. If I want it I'm not gonna stop until I get it one way or another. I would have learned to draw left-handed I would have hired somebody to draw...

**Cat Volz:**

And you did...

**Scott Adams:**

I would've figured out something. I did learn to draw left handed but it's slower.

**Cat Volz:**

Years later you lost the ability to talk for almost four years, What happened?

**Scott Adams:**

So I came down with a condition called spasmodic dysphonia. And it took me I think it was over a year to figure out even what it was, but it starts as a normal respiratory problem that feels like a cold or laryngitis and I think it actually is in the beginning. But you strain your voice and somehow this triggers these spasms in your vocal cords that become permanent. So when I tried to talk, if I said at a restaurant I'd like a diet coke, it would come out with a lot of the syllables missing. So it would come out like a bad cell phone so it would come out like "iet oke" or something close to that. So although I could make noise, I couldn't converse because people couldn't understand it well enough to have an actual conversation. And on the phone people didn't understand you at all and so for three years you couldn't really make a phone call or answer the phone, and telephone are just very scary for people who have this condition. Now this too turned out to be what was seen as an incurable condition. But as I mentioned I'm not really good on giving up on stuff and when I want badly enough I will do whatever it takes. So I committed to trying everything. You know

everything I saw, everything anybody mentioned, any good idea, anything on the internet I tried. And it was no holds barred. And finally I figured out what it was, you know, kind of getting my story out of order but before I tried things I had to figure out what it was. And that I learned from the internet. I just did a lucky search and my luck which is weird how luck works, my luck was that I had that hand problem. If I'd never had the hand problem I wouldn't have known what to search for...

***Cat Volz:***

Where to start... yeah

***Scott Adams:***

On the internet... what I searched for was voice dystonia. Because I thought well maybe they're related, they're both sort of spasm-y and maybe they are, and when I searched for voice dystonia, spasmodic dysphonia came up because it's in the family and that's the first time I saw a video of somebody with the same problem. I said there's no way that's not me because it's exactly the same sound and I had something to take to doctors which they could then track down and confirm. But there was no cure. There wasn't even a really good treatment except Botox injections, with this giant needle they stick through the front of your throat every few weeks to get to the back of your throat. So that actually goes through the front to get to the back, while you're awake, it's the most unpleasant thing you can imagine. And you have to do it every few weeks and then you talk like you've just took helium out of a balloon for a while and it's never the right level. For some people it works kind of okay, for me it didn't. So I set... so I gave up

on Botox and I set my Google alerts for spasmodic dysphonia and I just checked everything that came in every time there was a new study or mentioned. And one day there was a mention of a doctor in Japan who had the surgery that he thought could help us. I took it to my ear, nose, throat guys he said well I don't know about this doctor in Japan but go talk to the top guy at Stanford. So I talked to him and he said well I don't know about that surgery either, but maybe talk to a guy I know at UCLA, Doctor... Dr. Gerald Berke who is developing some kind of surgery, but I don't know everything about it. So I called Dr. Berke went down he confirmed I had spasmodic dysphonia, he had a surgery that he'd been developing and he thought I was a candidate. I signed up and there was a risk. 85% chance it would make my voice better, not necessarily perfect, but better, with a 15% chance it would make it worse and possibly in a way that would eliminate any chance of getting it better in the future. So those were my odds... easy odds. I took that in a heartbeat and the surgery worked. So I've been part of the outreach effort for the folks who have this strange voice condition, to just let them know that now there's a surgery. Because the biggest problem is that people don't know how to diagnose it and then find the surgery which now exists.

***Cat Volz:***

When you were isolated in your prison and you couldn't speak for all that time, did you do anything differently to stay on track as far as your content and being funny and staying positive?

***Scott Adams:***

Well it's really hard to stay positive when you can't speak.



I'm not too much about giving pity parties for myself, but just objectively speaking, when you can't talk and you can only listen, you're not really there, alright. Because feeling connected to other people is a lot about being heard and when you take that half away you're just sort of a ghost in the room.

**Cat Volz:**

Just like a coma patient.

**Scott Adams:**

Yeah it's not... maybe not as bad as being paralyzed and still being able to see the world but it's not far off in terms of emotionally how it feels. You're just not connected to anything in the world. So it's a horrible existence. People who have it are largely suicidal. I was totally suicidal in a sense that I thought about it every day. I never thought of actually executing because you know I had a family and such... but in terms of how happy I was, you were fighting suicidal thoughts every day. But I'm an optimist and I always think things are gonna work out for me so I figured that it'd work out. I just have to keep hammering at it.

**Cat Volz:**

You said, "I wouldn't be satisfied simply escaping from my prison of silence. I was planning to escape, free the other inmates, shoot the warden and burn down the prison." Do you know if your book has helped free other prisoners?

**Scott Adams:**

I do. So a number of people who have read my book or heard me in interviews talking about it, have contacted me

and gotten the name of my surgeon and set up surgeries. Now probably 15% of them didn't work, but everybody knew the odds going in, and a lot of people are on their way to recovery at this point.

***Cat Volz:***

So that was a major importance writing this book?

***Scott Adams:***

It was very important. I mean I... there's a lot in the book for a lot of people. It's meant for anybody who is trying to figure out a system for their life. But I thought as the vehicle to get that story out, it would be a good one and it has worked that way.

***Cat Volz:***

Absolutely. Before we wrap up I'll show you some of my favorite takeaways-- How to Fail at Almost Everything and Still Win Big. You said by becoming a person with good energy you lift the people around you. Bad luck doesn't have the option of being consistent forever. An internal optimist, when plotting your success, each day you would wake up and say, "Today is the day." When you lost your ability to talk you thought, I didn't know how to give up. Happiness has more to do with where you're headed than where you are, and invite it in, because failure is the raw material for success.

***Scott Adams:***

Sounds all very wise when you put it together like that, thank you.

***Cat Volz:***

Very powerful stuff. Regarding relationships and love do you think relationships are helpful or hurtful to entrepreneurs or start up founders?

***Scott Adams:***

That's a loaded question. I will answer by saying for a human being to enjoy life you have to have good relationships. It's just a rock bottom requirement unless you're some kind of hermit, you know, type person. But it's terrible for work. I mean you can't have two priorities that are your top priority.

***Cat Volz:***

I agree.

***Scott Adams:***

Something's got to be your top priority. And if you need your relationships to be your top priority, most of us do to be happy, you're not gonna get the same performance in your work life. So that's just the trade off. You just gotta figure out which one you like more.

***Cat Volz:***

What's the most common motivation you see for creating wealth?

***Scott Adams:***

I think everybody's a little different. I would say that my motivation is probably baked in. I was born ambitious, there's never been a time in my life I have no memory of being any different way. I always wanted to make a big

impact on the world. I wanted to, you know, get my stuff and then help, you know, that was always the thing. You know, get in the position where you can do something useful. So that was my motivation. I think other people have the entire tapestry of all, raw greed, trying to prove something, low self-esteem and a mix of positive reasons as well. So I don't think there's any one reason.

***Cat Volz:***

With outsourcing, regulation, automation, artificial intelligence, how do you see the future of entrepreneurship?

***Scott Adams:***

Better... just continually better because most of what entrepreneurs need is information. If you think about it, all entrepreneurship is an information problem because we're really good at moving stuff around. I mean there's no limit to finding stuff and moving it to where it needs to be. We've solved that. We just don't know what stuff to move where, we don't know who wants what and when, you know, we don't know how to do it we don't know how to hire the person who can work with you so it's an entire information problem. And the internet is solves a huge amount of information problems but it continues to do it. So there's almost no limit to how well we can move information around and that's gonna be the big thing. So if you look at just that one thing, the ability to find the right information and move it to the right place, we have a lot of growth in that. And that's just gonna happen there's almost nothing can stop that from happening. So for entrepreneurs I would say it's nothing but upside.

***Cat Volz:***

Yeah. So do you worry about all the people that might become obsolete, is it your advice just to up their skillsets so they can stay relevant?

***Scott Adams:***

Well people are gonna have to do what they can do in the short run because we've got an economy with people who are not earning enough certainly to retire in any kind of comfort. So one of my biggest goals for my coming years is, I don't know how much I'll get directly involved in this, but this has sort of always been my big dream-- is to figure out how to engineer, how to create a quality life that costs the least amount of money. And nobody is really working on that problem because everybody is trying to sell something that has a big profit margin, that's how you get rich. Nobody is trying to engineer the city that you can buy the house for a little bit and it's energy efficient and it's close to everything and you're sharing transportation and all that. So the future requires somebody to figure out how to live cheaply and well. Because there's gonna be a lot of people who don't have money, there are a lot of people who won't have the skills to do much of anything.

***Cat Volz:***

Yes. See it happen now.

***Scott Adams:***

And I think we'll go from the world, where X number of people have to work to keep the world running, to a place where maybe only 20% in the world is ever working, but they're the only ones who know how to do the hard stuff.

And they're okay with it because they get better, bigger rewards perhaps, and everybody else is living hopefully a quality life, that just didn't cost that much. And probably the rich people are gonna be paying for that as part of a bargain for living in this world, alright. If you're in the 20% that's creating all the wealth you don't get the option of living on the planet that has no poverty so you're gonna have to fix that.

***Cat Volz:***

I hope you blog about that whenever you have some ideas. That's super important. What's the most important thing, in your experience, that humans can do during this life?

***Scott Adams:***

Wow. My philosophy is just two words-- be useful. If you can be useful first of all to yourself and then to other people that's the ultimate simplification of a philosophy, alright. Nobody went wrong being useful, alright. Everything that you don't like about somebody it's about them not being useful. It kinda comes down to that. We're all in this big world together and you know, first take care of yourself, but next, you know, be useful.

***Cat Volz:***

Thank you for joining the show today, Scott Adams, it was wonderful to talk with you.