



Rupal Patel - Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Matt: [00:00:00] Hello, writers. Welcome to the London Writer's Salon. We are Matt and Parl. We are your hosts for today's interview. We're also the co founders of the London Writer's Salon. And our salon interviews are a chance for us to go behind the scenes of a writer's journey and dig into the stories behind the stories.

And so each week we invite to the salon, a writer that we admire to explore the craft of writing, the art of building a writing career, and the reality of navigating the creative world.

Parul: And today our guest is Rupal Patel. Rupal is a New Yorker now living near London. She's had a very unconventional career as a CIA analyst and a successful entrepreneur.

And that's taken her from dusty briefing rooms and jungles and war zones, the gilded halls of NATO and Capitol Hill. Today, she helps founders, corporate leaders, and change makers lead in powerful and meaningful ways. And she's all about building mental toughness and resilience. Her book from CIA to CEO was published by Bonnier in the UK.

Matt: And so today we'll be talking with RuPaul about her time in the CIA and how we might apply some of the principles that [00:01:00] she used both in her life and in her work and how we might as writers use it and apply it to our writing life. And also we'll talk about her experience of writing and publishing.

The book, which I know is on many of our minds and also the writing process too, because we're always curious. So we've prepared a bunch of questions for RuPaul, but about an hour or so in, we will turn it over to you. So if at any point throughout

this conversation, you have a question, pop it in the chat and we'll give you a chance to ask it at the end.

All right let's dig in without further ado. Welcome to the London writer's salon RuPaul.

Rupal: Yay. Hello, everyone. It's great to be here with you both and with all of you wonderful people from all over Switzerland. I saw France, I saw Oregon, I saw Canada Ricksm Rickman Rickmansworth here in the UK, which stood out only because I've been there and also shout out to Sheffield because I've been to Sheffield too and have loved it.

Hello, everyone.

Matt: It was so great to have you here, RuPaul, and we always like to start with origins as a writer, if there is one, and we're curious if you had a relationship with writing or maybe with books growing up as a kid, and what did that look like if you did?

Rupal: [00:02:00] Oh yes. Yes, I've always loved books.

I remember a summer in America in the summer, you get a summer reading list, and I remember going to the library to get out all the books from the library for my summer. The reading list was always such a big event. I've always loved to read. I've always really loved to write, and one of my favorite stories which might resonate with some of you, I don't really know how old folks are who are joining us today, but, When so I'm, I was born in the eighties and the original Superman films with Christopher Reeves had come out as I was a young child.

And I remember vividly sitting on my parents bed, putting in Superman two in the VCR, so for those of you extra points for knowing who what a VCR is and literally transcribing the entire movie, use it like getting out of the bed, hitting pause, hitting play, writing some things. It was so tedious, and the reason I share this is because I just loved also just the physical act of writing.

And I also as [00:03:00] a child one time came up with this, okay, again, dating myself, to the cartoon The Jetsons. I came up with the script for The Jetsons. And never sent it out, but was always just, Building on things that were happening in the real world or in Superman, which is not the real world. But incorporating writing in just also what I was watching and also what I was doing in the day to day as a young kid.

So yes, writing and books have always been a really big and a really important part of my life. And I'm so glad that I never lost that because it is such still to this day, ticks so many emotional and intellectual boxes for me.

Matt: We're going to circle back around to writing, but before we do take a whistle stop tour through your career

Rupal: before

Matt: writing this book that we're going to dig into a bit.

But so in brief, you went to Columbia for your undergraduate and then University of Chicago for your master's in international relations. And then your first job was with the CIA and you wrote in your book that your plan [00:04:00] initially was to finish your master's, take the foreign service officer test, join the U S diplomatic corps.

And start a life crafting foreign policy. But then you got a tap on the shoulder by a CIA officer and yes was the only an obvious answer. And I wonder if you can dig a little bit deeper into that. Why was yes, the yes to that tap, the only obvious answer for you at the time.

Rupal: I think it was because it was something unexpected and really interesting, and I have always been the one person in my family.

So I come from a family of four. I'm one of four siblings, and I've always been the one of us four who never really had a specific answer to that question of what do you want to be when you grow up? And so because the CIA was not on my radar,

but when they came and. Put themselves on my radar. I was curious enough to go down that rabbit hole and see where it might go.

And the more I was talking to the person who [00:05:00] initially invited me to apply, and then learning more and more about what I would be doing as an analyst, it just seemed like the perfect opportunity. And yeah, very easy. Yes. So it definitely was not the plan, but as with most things or many things in my life, I've always just been open minded about it.

Because I'd never had a set plan, like this is definitely what I want to do and definitely where I want to be. So kept my eyes open and just said yes to an interesting, really seemingly fulfilling opportunity. And thankfully it was all of the things that I was expecting it would be.

Matt: Now, we're going to talk a little bit more about your life and experience, but you seem like someone who says yes to adventure quite often and I don't know if you're familiar with that, that Joseph Campbell phrase, which is say yes to your adventure, which I read to mean it.

It's gorgeous. I can try to find the full quote for you. Basically, life beckons us to adventure and oftentimes we refuse the call. And this is the whole hero's journey. The person refuses the call. And Joseph Campbell talks about saying yes to our [00:06:00] adventure. It seems like you're someone who says yes to your adventure.

I'm not sure what my, my question is really, but yeah, is it, is that a philosophy that you've then carried beyond the CIA into? the rest of your life and how

Rupal: so 100 percent yes. And it's funny because I actually talk about in the book that is my guiding life's philosophy is to say yes to adventure, or I think I put it in a bad double negative, which is never say no to an adventure.

And it has been, and I don't know, I can't, I don't really quite remember when I crystallized that as that would be my guiding philosophy, but for me, it was I

would, if I had to try to guess it was probably in my 20s is when it seems to have become something a bit more conscious.

But it wasn't like. Adventure in the sense of, oh, let's go bungee jumping. Let's go, I don't know, quit our job on a whim and do something totally wild and unexpected. It was a much more, gosh, dare I say, meaningful definition of the word adventure, which is having an adventurous [00:07:00] approach to even mundane things.

There are many things that I consider an adventure that others might be like that's just life. Like I consider being married an adventure. I consider being a parent, an adventure. I consider. My work and adventure and not because it is daring in any obvious way, but because there is so much of that core of an adventure, which is discovery and unexpected occurrences and testing yourself in new ways and finding yourself in unexpected places that is fundamental in pretty much every aspect of our lives, but viewing it more as an adventure, Unless as a burden or a trial or something just really helps with some of the ups and downs.

So it's not just this adrenaline rush. It's just, it's a, it's almost like a philosophical approach to I guess life, but also the choices that I've made. And yeah, sometimes it does have a more traditional meaning of what people consider adventures. For example, when I was studying for my MBA, I had the summer between my first and second year and I was living in London [00:08:00] and it was London 2012 Olympics and there was a call for volunteers.

And I remember being like, Oh my God, I'm in, I've always loved the summer Olympics in particular. I'm in an Olympic city. What are the odds that I would get this email that's calling for volunteers? I'm going to just say yes to that adventure and see what happens. And I remember at the time, so many people who are a little bit maybe more traditional in their view on things were like, oh, but this is a really important summer because the internship you get this summer will determine what job you get once you graduate with your MBA.

And I was like, yeah, fine, but I can always get an internship. I can't always be in the London 2012 Olympics. And so I said yes to that adventure. Maybe if I had

gotten an internship, it could have been an adventure of a different kind. But in that moment, The bigger call, the bigger pull for me was this once in a lifetime opportunity to say yes to that adventure.

It can take on, like I said, a more obvious definition, but for me, it's also about the approach that we take to even the mundane things in our lives.

Matt: Love that. Beautifully said in approach to everyday things as well. And even reframing the challenging. [00:09:00] If if this is a mishap, no, this is just an adventure which is really great.

We'd like to dig into your adventures in the CIA before we jump back into the writing. We're curious, was there a particular project experience a role that you played within the CIA that was maybe one of the more exciting ones or one that, one of your favorite stories to tell?

Rupal: Yes very easily, or the answer to that is very easy.

And it was when I volunteered to serve in Afghanistan. While I was, when I was at the CIA, I joined relatively early on in our War effort, and I was a young analyst. I was really hungry. And I knew from the get go that even though I was hired to be an analyst, I did not want to spend a career behind a desk at headquarters.

I wanted to be out in the field as much as possible. So I volunteered to go to Afghanistan and I spent nine months there. And There's no single there are many stories of adventure, of what it was like to be in Afghanistan when there was an act of war and traveling and trying to get a sense of what was happening on the ground versus what you saw in the news.

So that whole [00:10:00] experience was really formative because I was really young. I was, 26 when I went to Afghanistan. I was a young woman, civilian in this really crazy world that we had in many ways created, right? Like when we invaded, we changed everything. And it was so much of that experience was formative from the work that I was doing.

My main role was to be the primary intelligence, civilian intelligence briefer to the four star general who is commanding the war effort there, and also to the U. S. ambassador. And so having access to that level of decision making in an active war zone was an adventure in many ways, an intellectual adventure, and also a testing your resilience kind of adventure, because briefing a general with sometimes Maybe less than good news, or maybe a slightly different take on what you thought was happening to what he may have been hearing from others was an adventure of a very different kind.

But also, being probably one of the percentages are really rough [00:11:00] here, but I was maybe one of the percentage of women out there was maybe Like three or four percent, right? So you're in this really intense environment, really alpha, macho, like just testosterone everywhere.

And how do I navigate that both as a professional and as a woman, right? Because it's very obvious when you meet me, I do not fit in many ways. And so the adventure was very much an internal one as well, like figuring out All of the things, some of which I talk about in the book, but how am I going to establish my authority in these contexts?

How am I going to use my voice? How am I going to stand out in a positive way and use that the fact that I am an outlier in many ways in this context? As a, as an asset instead of a burden. So it was a lot of those things big and small that made that experience particularly resonant and left a lot of deep imprints on me.

Parul: Gosh, it's so interesting. I can imagine the, when you say the 3%, 4%, it really puts it into perspective, the challenges and adventures that you must have had. [00:12:00] And one thing you talk about on that note being out there in the field, you talk about how the CIA trained you for physical combat.

And you say, whether it was driving tactically, shooting rifles and pistols, triaging, sucking chest wounds, tying tourniquets, as well as mental combat. And we're going to get into the mental frameworks soon. Cause some of that does enter your book, but. The physical training has any of that come in handy?

in your life after the CIA?

Rupal: Thankfully, no. Thankfully, I've never needed to use any of that physical training. I think the training that has been most, so the physical stuff, as far as like self defense and weapons training and all that stuff, thankfully I've never needed to use, but the situational awareness training, some of which I talk about in the book just being having a baseline awareness of your surroundings and just, not constantly looking over your shoulder, but just having a greater sensitivity to what's happening around you.

That is still hugely valuable. And again, especially as a woman. And, but also the thing that stayed with [00:13:00] me from the physical training side, that this of the skills that I don't use and thankfully, hopefully we'll never need to use again. Is just the confidence to know that I can do those things or I could have done that I did those things in the past, then I can do them at some point in the future.

And it's just that, because for example, like with weapons training I am not a gun person like they freak me out. I'm just, it's not my thing. I don't really think they're a good idea in general, but to know that if it ever came to it and I needed to defend myself, I could do that. Knowing that I could, even though it makes me really uncomfortable is something that I think is great, and more broadly, again, knowing that you can do something, even though it makes you uncomfortable, even though it's really tough, even though it makes your hands shake or whatever it is.

That sort of self belief that gets built as you're doing these things is something that, will never go away.

Matt: Thank goodness you haven't had to use that, but love, love the confidence. And it makes me think, what are the things I probably should be studying some of these things.

I should know how to [00:14:00] do some of the things you know how to do. And I feel I'm at a disadvantage because I don't, but So let's turn to other, doing other difficult things, and that includes writing books. Before writing this book, From

CIA to CEO, which we're going to dig into, we heard on a podcast that you had actually written a novel

Rupal: before

Matt: this book.

And I wonder if you can tell us about that novel.

Rupal: Why did

Matt: you want to write that novel? What was it about? And then. Let's get next steps beyond that. Yeah.

Rupal: Oh God. I love that book. So I wrote it when I left the agency and I had these two years, as I said, after I left the CIA, I went to business school and I use those two years as almost like a sabbatical, even though I was technically getting a degree, but I use it to just do a lot of things that I've wanted to do for a long time.

And the second year of my, of the program, I had much more flexible, a much more flexible class schedule. So I set myself a deadline or sorry, not a deadline. I set myself a target to start the book and to at least write 500 words of the book every single day, no matter how shit they were, no matter how hard it was.

[00:15:00] Every single day I would write 500 words. And if I did, if I skipped a day, I would have to make up for it. So it forced me to get into this rhythm instead of waiting for inspiration to strike or when I was in the mood because that was not a recipe for consistency. And so I wrote this book and it is a fictionalized version of my career at the CIA, but also the three women who I became incredibly close with.

And looking at our experience. from very different lens to what we get in most sort of popular culture and in novels when it comes to that world. So my my, in my query letter to agents, I described it as sex in the city meets homeland, and it's got

all of the exciting, sexy stuff that you would expect from the CIA, but also the deeper, or not deeper, but the conversations and female friendship.

and an interpersonal relationship side of things. And it was a great, it is a great book, I think. And what happened with it, why is it not in the world and not available to, to be bought? So those of you, obviously everybody here is a writer. And what happened is [00:16:00] I wrote the book and it, and I finished it exactly a year to the day from when I started it.

Not by design, but just I stuck to that schedule. And there was this huge, just sense of wow, I can now I know I can write a book, that I can go through that process and have the discipline and all of those things. And then I did all of this stuff. I I shopped it around. I had interest from two really incredible agents in New York, and they gave me a bunch of edits that they wanted me to see some more character development, blah, blah, blah.

And I started working on those changes, and then, quite literally, it was like the muse just left. There was nothing, it was like, what is that phrase wringing blood from stone, right? There, I just couldn't do it. There was nothing in me left. It was almost as if the writing was enough, and I couldn't really go back to it.

It sat there. It still is sitting there, and it's funny because I revisited it a couple of years ago and I've tinkered with it through the past 10 years now, right? Just dipped [00:17:00] in and out of it again to see if I can get the juice back. And I revisited it again last year in between sort of the publication of From CIA to CEO and me starting on the book I'm working on now.

And I was like, actually, I'm going to, I am going to publish this, right? I've got a publisher, I've got an agent, I've got, they're all, you'd have seen elements of it. It's a good book. It definitely still needs a lot of work. But at some point I will write it or publish it.

Sorry, but not yet at the timing just isn't right for me. And this is something that might again, be worth sharing for your listeners and viewers is. For me, I've never

been able to force the timing. I've not been able to force the creative process to come sooner or faster or anything than it does.

And. There's something really reassuring about that for me, is that no matter how excited I am, like the timing has to be right, and I have to feel it in order for it to come into the world in the right way. So anyway, that's that's the story of my novel.

Parul: I so love the fact that you pushed yourself to write 500 words a day, and that seems to be a theme, [00:18:00] proving that you can do things, proving to yourself and being able to hold yourself accountable to get them done is something that I feel also inspiring.

is threaded throughout your book, which we'll now talk about. And so C. I. A. to C. O., that book idea. Came to you at some point, I'd love for you to take us back to that moment or that period of time. Why that book at that time? And when was that?

Rupal: Yeah,

Parul: God.

Rupal: As you'll probably all find, my answers are a bit long because there's a lot of context in a lot of these answers.

But, I will give you the long answer because I think again it will hopefully help the your audience. I wrote the novel and it didn't pop or I didn't choose to proceed with publishing it, but I knew that I still wanted to publish a book, but I did not know what it was going to be. But I kept writing and I toyed around with like short form with blogs with newsletter, this, that, and the other thing.

And It was just always in the back of my mind like at some point I will write a book, right? And I have a couple of friends in my life [00:19:00] who are just so good at holding me accountable to my own ambitions and they keep hearing me talking about this book that I wanted to write, but what is it about? And I was like, good question.

I don't know. I have no idea. So that question of what is this book about was again, then planted in my mind and I was struck like grappling with it and all these things. Anyway, fast forward to. I would say let's just before the pandemic, 2018 2019, the pain of not writing a book and of not figuring out what it is that the book was going to be about started to become so much greater than forcing myself to go through the pain of figuring it out.

So what I did was I hired a book coach and I was like, look, I've got a universe. of ideas that I want to bring into a book, but they're all over the place, right? Like I need some help just taming this beast. And what was so great about asking for help because I'm the type of person who, my Lisa Simpson sort of complex needs [00:20:00] homework, needs very specific, discrete tasks that I can check off a list and then somebody be like, good job.

You did, you've done your homework. And so what this book coach did for me was she gave me homework. And she said, okay, this week I want you to do effectively like a market review. Like where is your book going to sit on the bookshelves? And what genre is it going to be? Who's your audience?

Like all of these very specific tasks. Yeah, I see. I see others like homework as well. And then she also gave me the external accountability, the deadlines, the, Hey, I'm going to, next week when we talk, this is what I want to see. And so it was having somebody give me both the structure and the deadlines That really helped force me to do that painful work of sitting down and mapping out the journey of the reader and the book and all of that kind of stuff.

And that process took a good six months. And over the course of that process, I wrote the first three chapters of the book and she's look, let's just get you ready for for submission, right? Like what agents want to see is. At least like 10, 000 words, so around three chapters and you know the outline.

So let's get you to that point and [00:21:00] then off you go. And that's exactly what we did. She didn't do any writing for me, she didn't do any editing for me, but she gave me homework and she gave me deadlines. And that was the key that

unlocked everything. And then literally after that so we went to, I submit, I went to submission with those three chapters in the outline.

Once we had a publishing deal then everything actually, thankfully, amazingly, I don't know what happened really quickly. So I, if I met my agent, I put my materials together around December. I met my agent in March. We went to the market over that summer, got a bunch of offers in July and August.

by September I had signed my contract, October manuscript was in, basically, end of October the manuscript was in, and then the May, the subsequent, basically there was a year between when I met my agent and when the book was out in bookstores, which is crazy, like ninja fast for publishing standards. So six months to structure this thing and write the first three chapters, and about eight weeks to do the rest of the writing, because once I had that [00:22:00] structure, The ideas were in my head for so long.

I'd been thinking about this stuff. I had been tinkering around some of these things in shorter forms and articles. And then, so once I had that structure, filling it in and putting a body to the book was ridiculously fast. And I think there was also an element of timing there because I just had a baby and most people are like, oh my god, that's the worst time to have it.

But for me, it worked out perfectly because I was waking up at all hours of the day and night anyway. And so I found that I, and I do talk about this a bit in the book, I found that I was the most creative and the most like fruitful with ideas from 4am to 7am. So if my baby woke up, And then had her feed and went back to bed around that time, I would just stay up and write.

And it just, it, it made that, the process just so much more fluid. So yeah, six months for structure, about eight weeks for the rest of the book.

Parul: I love that your book coach asked you to research the market, to find your genre. And I'd love to get a little bit [00:23:00] deeper into that process, because obviously that's something that anyone who wants to write a nonfiction book proposal needs to think about.

Rupal: Yeah.

Parul: What do you find? What did you? Find helped you, was it simply going to Amazon or your library or local bookshop and looking up comparable titles? What helped you nail that? I

Rupal: think it wasn't anything, I think what that process really helped me see was actually everything has been done before.

Literally everything. So it took the pressure off for me to be this like special unicorn that was adding something totally new, right? Yes, fine. My take, my voice, my insights, my experience are unique. But effectively every book has ever been like that. Every book has been written. Every idea has been talked through to death, but not by me, not by you, not by, your audience members.

And I think that's what that is. The market research really showed me there's so much repetition. There are so many books with similar titles, with similar audiences, with some, but they're not all reaching the same people, right? For [00:24:00] whatever reason, different people are choosing different books. And that's what keeps it interesting and terrifying at the same time.

So I think that it was again with the confidence piece with that, it's okay if other people have talked about leadership from a different perspective. It's okay if this is a combination of, mindset and personal development and smart thinking and it mixes genres.

It's okay because there's room for everyone. There's room for all of the voices. And if anything, especially in non fiction, we need more women's voices to be out there. On the bookshelves and be consumed by the mass market instead of it just being sold to women or sold to, specific demographics.

So that's what that did for me. It wasn't like, Oh, yeah, cool. Like I'm feeling this really specific niche. It was, you know what, there's room for all of us. And The process is a beast. Anything we can do to to help manage some of the, and excuse my language here, but the mind fuck of this process is so valuable.

Matt: It's all right. You're from New York. You're allowed to, you're allowed to. What I'm [00:25:00] curious you mentioned The novel you were pitching is Sex and the City Meets Homeland. Do you remember how you pitched this one in the proposal?

Rupal: Oh,

Matt: God. Did you have something pithy like that? Oh,

Rupal: I don't think I do.

I could, if you want, and maybe while we're wrapping up, I can pull up my my original submission, which I'd be happy to because it might, give you some color and insight. But off the top of my head, I cannot remember.

Parul: I may be riffing off that question. I have a broader question just around I suppose the insight that you would have gained going through that process of trying to pitch it, you obviously found Charlotte Colwell, your agent who we love but, and then you would have seen her, some of the process that she went through to pitch it to publishing houses.

Do you have a general sense on how it was pitched? Was it marketed as a leadership book? Was it marketed as? It was marketed, and this is where

Rupal: I wanted it to be marketed at. It was marketed as smart thinking because. It isn't just about leadership. I think that we put so much weight on that word Oh I have to be a CEO or I have to be a managing director.[00:26:00]

No, you can be the leader of your own life. That is how this book is a leadership book. It's about leading your own life. I think sometimes there was, and again, because the book world is such a beast, they try to niche it very specifically of this is a personal development book, or this is a leadership book, or this is a business book, or this is for entrepreneurs.

But my intention in writing the book was not for any one of those audiences, it was for all audiences, because it is a fundamentally it was written as a book that is full of tools that can be used by anyone in any context and any time in their lives, and it's full of life lessons. That's why it's in the subtitle.

It's not about just business. So I think when they marketed it. Yes, Charlotte and she was very smart because you have to play the game, right? She was good about, pitching it in the way that would resonate most with that audience. But it never sat comfortably with me to just make it a business book or just make it a leadership book or just this, because it is more than that.

And it's messy to sell that, but that is the honesty of the book. But yeah, she definitely played that game as she needed to. And [00:27:00] I think the other thing that we together worked on making sure wasn't forgotten was that point that I raised earlier is that, We don't see enough women and we sure as hell don't see enough brown women writing and publishing books that are consumed by everyone because we have smart things to say about things other than being a woman and other than being brown, right?

So I think there was an element of This is a book for everyone. And also PS, it's coming from a voice that we need to hear more of, because this applies to everyone and not just, superficial demographic groups that might identify as women or people of color.

Parul: I hear you. I absolutely hear you there.

And I'm so glad that this book is in the world. One of the questions we get from writers when they, when we talk about publishing and pitching to agents is they want to understand your experience of that. And so you found Charlotte. How did you find her? What was the process you went through to shortlist the agents?

Rupal: I'm giving you all of the like cheat sheet stuff. So this is exactly how it happened. And this is why I believe that we make our own [00:28:00] magic because when you start doing something, you're, and if you prime your brain to

start looking for opportunities and asking for help and asking questions, you'll be amazed at how much happens.

So I worked with my book coach, we got all of the submission materials ready. And I said, Hey, by the way, You work in this world is there anyone that you know who's published nonfiction and might just want, be able to talk me through the process? Because obviously my book coach can only take me so far.

And she's actually, I have a friend who's written a book. So I talked to the friend. The friend was like, oh, I am a part of this group for writers called Bite the Book, so B Y T E, Bite the Book. They do this incredible event twice a year called Agents Tables where you submit your materials in advance, two agents will read through all of the stuff, and then you'll get ten or five minutes or ten minutes or whatever with each agent, and they'll give you feedback and ideas and, critique your submission too.

I was like, cool, all right, sign me up. And she's you know what, actually You can actually have my space at the next event because [00:29:00] I'm still too far in my process of putting my materials together. I don't need it. You have my space. So she gave me her space. I went to this agent tables thing. Charlotte was one of the agents I met with and this is what's so crazy.

So I met with two, obviously two agents. Charlotte who met me and she's I love this. I love everything. I love your voice. I love the idea. I, I would love to represent you. And I was like, holy shit, this happened really cool, like quick and whatever. So that was one conversation. And then the other agent was like, love it.

Love your voice. Love the story. But I'm not sure how to sell you because you're an American and you have a very American voice, but you live in the UK. And I was like, but we speak the same language as last I checked. But it was just funny to see. So again, that's the lesson that applies to all.

Don't take rejections personally because sometimes they're just crazy, right? Or sometimes that is the person's own bias that they think Oh how am I going to market this person? Cause maybe they had a bad experience with the previous

client where it just didn't work in it. [00:30:00] And there are actually some genuine challenges to being American in the UK.

And and I wish there weren't, it sounds stupid that there are, but there are. From a publishing perspective. Having said that you can always find someone who will believe in you and who will find a way over those challenges and those hurdles, etc. So that was my experience at the agent's tables.

And then Charlotte and I set up a call separately to that, just to get to know each other a little bit better. She's these are my terms, this is how I work, this is what I do, blah, blah, blah. And I was like, cool, sign me up. She had a rent poster in the back of her, and she knows this, and in her Zoom frame and the play Rent, I don't know if anybody ever saw Rent, not the movie.

The original show which was like one of the most it was a huge part of my high school life. I went to see that show about, I don't know, at least 10 times as a junior and senior in high school. And I was like, this is a sign, right? She loves Rent. I love Rent. Like we're meant to work together. And so anyway, and I also did some more like legitimate research on who she is and how she works.

So that's how it happened. And then, so we signed our contract and then she worked with me to sharpen the submission materials and get them ready for publishers. And [00:31:00] then, yeah, and then we went out to the market.

Matt: It's amazing. It sounds like you had really great people around you.

And in particular, that, that book coach that gave you the accountability, the deadlines. And I'm curious if someone. feels like they would value, find value in someone similar in their life. Any tips on finding the person that might be a good fit for them? Anything that worked with your relationship that you might advise people look for this in that relationship or this in that connection?

Any tips or advice?

Rupal: Yeah, I think, A couple of things. I don't want to say trust your gut because sometimes our guts can be a little bit don't only trust your gut, right? So trust your gut, but verify. So having multiple conversations with that person but and also just making sure you're on the same page, like as far as your expectations of the working relationship, right?

Because yes, hopefully you'll become friendly with each other. And this will be beyond more just than a transactional relationship, but you have to like each other, but you also have to be on the same page. So it's for me, things like responsiveness like [00:32:00] constructive feedback, all of those things are hugely important.

And I'm Went in, not with a checklist of being like, this is what you need to do. And this is what I expect, but being like, look, this is how I communicate. I would rather communicate over text than over the phone. I would rather and if you send me an email, you can expect me to respond within 24 hours.

What is your response? Like those conversations about the nitty gritty details of the working relationship are I think are so important to have because. You just take for granted oh of course, they'll be doing stuff and, that's fine. It's not a big deal.

But if you care for me, responsiveness is a huge freaking thing. I hate wondering what is going on. I hate having to follow up with people be like, hey, did you get my last message? Hey, what's going on with this? So establishing some not ground rules, but just some mutual expectations doesn't mean that they're always going to do it or that they can always do it, but at least have that conversation.

So it makes for a less friction full relationship because the whole process can get really stressful at different times. So make sure [00:33:00] you do the best that you can do to take some of that friction away as, as concretely as possible for yourself. And then also what's been really helpful is for me because I have a very, I am like this is, I am a person of very high highs and very low lows.

I need an agent and thank goodness Charlotte is this kind of person who is just Like cool as a cucumber, right? Like I will rail and scream at the wind and curse at everything and how annoying this is and how stupid that is because publishing is

really annoying and stupid in so many ways. And she's always the one to bring me back down and to just keep me grounded.

Be like, yes, that is true, but this is what we can do. That is true, but here's what we need to do to work it and push the envelope in the ways that we can or whatever. So know, I guess it goes back to some of the book, know who you are, how you operate, and then make sure the person, the agent or the editor, whoever you're working with or have around you is able to help you modulate some of the excesses [00:34:00] that need to be modulated.

Parul: I you talk about this, know yourself and how you operate. And that will help you basically navigate whatever it is we need to navigate. And that brings me to the next section of this interview, which was talking about your book and going into some of the detail. Yeah. And obviously you're bringing in CIA tactics, things that you were taught on the field and behind the desk and you're applying it, you're asking people to apply it to their own lives.

And you talk about profiling in your book. And you say we should profile ourselves like we might profile a target. And my takeaway from it was that you're urging us to truly understand how we operate, to understand what brings us joy and pain, and using that to design our own lives. Yeah. And so my question to you is, and I see this in myself and other people in the community, if we're feeling overwhelmed by our day to day, maybe there's too many tasks, maybe we're trying to juggle work with our creative ambitions, how can we use this idea of profiling ourselves?

To redesign our lives. What might that first step be? Yeah,

Rupal: I would say [00:35:00] of all of the techniques that I share around this idea of profiling, probably one of the most powerful ones is the idea of the personal energy map. So what a personal energy map is, we all have a vague or maybe concrete idea of Oh, I'm a morning person or I'm a night owl or whatever it is.

But the fluctuations in our energy and in where our like headspace goes are somewhat Rhythmic as well. And we all have these patterns, when we're not just

higher energy or low energy, but when we are more naturally gravitating towards like very detailed tasks or more naturally gravitate towards more strategic tasks or creative tasks or whatever it is, but we don't ever really make that those ebbs and flows concrete because we just.

And this is not a criticism. This is just a description. We are all sort of force fitting ourselves into the world that we're in, right? Like we have to live by other standards and expectations that it's not like we can recreate the world around us in every way possible. But [00:36:00] the exercises in the book around the personal energy map are really about giving us the time to sit back and reflect on, okay Are there times in maybe a day or a week or a season or over the course of the year that I do feel a bit more creative or I do feel a bit more social or a bit more strategic or whatever it looks like, right?

And starting to pay attention. So much of what I talk about in the first 30 minutes. Third or so of the book is about paying attention to yourself and to your surroundings and the interaction between the two. And then mapping what your personal energy map looks like, and it's not going to stay consistent.

It's not going to, this is my map and this is what it is forevermore. It will change as your life changes, but once you've uncovered what it generally looks like. Like when you've paid attention, when you've asked questions like, when am I more creative? When am I more detailed, et cetera, et cetera.

Or the opposite. When do I feel a lot of frustration, right? When does it feel like things are just really tricky and I'm just constantly butting my head against a brick wall and it's just so hard to do certain types of things when you notice those pain points or [00:37:00] those flow points, make note of them and then see what the patterns are.

And I can almost guarantee there are always exceptions, but I can almost guarantee that everyone. We'll have a pattern. And when I sat down and did this exercise on myself, I realized that there was this sort of overarching pattern that I am the most creative and the words and the creativity and the ideas flow much more easily at

strange hours, 4am to 7am, which I found out totally by accident because I had a newborn.

That my more sociable outward looking energy tends to happen towards the end of the week, Thursdays, Fridays that, Tuesdays and Wednesdays are earlier in the week. I'm much more admin or like just getting stuff done type of a bit more. Yeah, it can focus a bit more on the detail.

And so there are variations within all of those things. But there were also. Not just weekly patterns are also seasonal patterns that I started to notice once I paid attention and started to try to notice these things. And the reason I share this [00:38:00] as a really powerful tool because is that it's not that okay now that you know your personal energy map so you're only going to do creative tasks at 4am.

It's not that. It's the total opposite of that. It's know what your natural rhythms are. Know where your natural fluctuations are. And then whenever possible, it's not always going to be possible, when it is possible, try to overlay what it is that you're doing with where your natural tendency is in that moment.

And it will, again, take the friction out. It'll make things a lot easier. It'll be you'll get things done a lot faster if you are doing creative tasks when you're feeling more creative versus my head is in a more strategic detail oriented type of place right now, but I'm going to force myself to be creative, right?

So when you can match the two, match them. And of course, when you can't write, like we're all grownups, that's just life, but it's, you make those deviations. Consciously, knowingly and it also takes some of the resentment out of it too, to be honest. And then when you can work in alignment with your personal energy map, you do it.

And it's never going to be perfect, of course. We have a million hats that we wear, so [00:39:00] many demands on our time and our bodies, on our energy, on our, all of these things. So do it when you can. And then deviate when you can't, but at least the times that you do it will release a lot of the pressure, the frustration, the annoyance, the whatever else it is that we feel and constantly feeling like, Oh I'm,

I'm just having to force myself to just power through and do this thing that I have to do right now.

So it's not all or nothing, but at the very least, it starts with figuring out what it looks like. So then you can leverage it whenever possible.

Matt: That's so helpful. And you also talk about this concept of protected golden hours. Yes. And is, I wonder if you can tell us a little bit more about that. And then maybe how you, what that looked like for you.

Is that the four to seven window? Was that your protected golden hours or did it look different?

Rupal: Yeah. So the golden hours are, it's a combination of ideas. So it's about knowing what your personal energy map is, but also knowing what is most important to you now? At this point in my life, especially when I'm writing books, the creative time is the most important time for me.

My [00:40:00] golden hours are my creative hours, which is, as you identified, 4 to 7 a. m. And that's, I will protect those as best as I possibly can. So that doesn't mean I'm setting my alarm for 4 o'clock in the morning. It means that, Whenever possible, if I get eight hours of sleep, then I will try to wake up earlier before my kids are up and before the world comes knocking on my door so I can do the creative things.

But golden hours can also be about protecting 15 minutes to do something that just is just for you, and I do a lot of work with with, all sorts of people in which they just, forget themselves, right? Life happens, family happens, kids happen. And you get into a routine and you get into this and it's not all bad, but you can forget about the things that you care about.

And you forget about making time for the things that you care about. And it feels like time is such a luxury, it. We are also grown up enough to be able to control at least some of our time. And so it doesn't mean that you carve out these three hour stretches every day to, I don't know, figure skate or do, painting or [00:41:00] play

the piano or whatever, but just carving out some time where you are doing something Just for you, just for your spirit, just for your soul, for whatever word you want to use, that is just for you and that it's not this constant, Oh when the kids are older or when I get their promotion or when I retire, then I will do this thing, right?

Because the reality is, and I love this quote, how we spend our days is of course how we spend our lives. So if we're constantly putting off the things that we care about, we have to find a way to build it in. It doesn't, again, I'm not about all or nothing wholesale changes. I don't think they're sustainable.

I don't think they're realistic. I also don't think they're fair to put that pressure on ourselves, but your golden hours should be the time in the day where it is literally just for you. It could be morning, whenever, right? Like you figure out where it's going to fit in your life. But you have to find a way to fit it in because there will never be this magic wand that's waved and it's yep, [00:42:00] here, now everything that you were saying has happened and now you can do the thing, right?

Like we always find ways to be like, oh, but now it's just not the right time. There's never a good time to do anything. So knowing that's the case, make the time now. And like I said, don't, it doesn't have to be hours and hours on end, but it has to be something. And then maybe you increase it over time, or maybe you prove to yourself that you can do it, a bit more than you thought you could.

It can be little things like, I don't know, going for a walk and instead of, I don't know, sitting at behind your desk for lunch, like going and visiting an art gallery or listening to, I don't know 20 minutes of a concert or whatever. I'm making this stuff up, right? Because this is a lot of what gets lost is like people's creative outlets or creative consumption, right?

If you love some of these other art forms, but it doesn't have to be Yeah, it doesn't have to be all or nothing. So protect that time, decide when you're going to have that time for yourself and then protect it with whatever you can, however you can. And make sure you're not putting everything that is important to just you off to some like [00:43:00] future

Parul: impossible day.

I love that. So first of all, in profiling, we look at our personal energy map, when we best function, when we don't function, understanding that whether that's in a day or a month or a year or a seasonally basis. And then within that, finding that golden, those golden hours, this is great advice. I have one follow on question around this.

You mentioned menstrual cycles. For those of us who have menstrual cycles, how might that affect our personal GMAP?

Rupal: Oh, man. It's going to be different for everyone, right? And this is The thing that I didn't realize until I started doing it for myself. Whether we like it or not, we have cycles, like hormonal cycles.

And men have them too, right? They're just not maybe as obvious. But we all have hormonal cycles, and if you have a menstrual cycle, the fluctuations in some of that energy and where you're ebbing and flowing changes quite dramatically. And there are, What is estrogen is a very social hormone, right?

So when your estrogen is peaking, that tends to be more when, the idea is like, Oh, I want to go out and make babies. So I'm going to be out in the world and meet [00:44:00] people and be social. And then progesterone is that nesting hormone where you come inwards and you are literally and physically nesting that nesting is a weird analogy because we're not birds, but you get it.

But that cycle is going to look like. What it looks like for each individual woman will be very different. So also track your menstrual cycle, right? Like day one is the day you start bleeding. So see, like, how are you feeling on day one? And then where, when are you feeling the most, again, like internal or external sociable, whatever, and track it, see, track it for a couple of months and see what happens.

And again, in doing this is not about. Wholesale changes to your life and being like, oh I'm feeling antisocial because my progesterone is high. So I'm not going to do anything like, for work or whatever, like that's not what it means. It just means

you can be kinder to yourself because you can anticipate the changes that might happen.

And then again, whenever possible realign your schedule or your duties or the expectations on you around that. And it can make all the difference in the world. I know for example, there are about three or four days where [00:45:00] I hate everything and everyone, and I don't want to be near anyone. So if I book a speaking event on that day, it's a really bad idea.

I can force myself to not be a total bitch on stage because that's my job, right? Like we're not being all or nothing here, but it's a lot harder. Then if I am in my more sociable, I get in when I'm students high. Again, be real about it. It's just information. What you do once you collect the information is up to you.

But I think it really helps to understand yourself. So you also don't constantly feel like you suck. And I think so much of us, we beat ourselves up so much about it. Pretty much everything. All the time. There's this constant running commentary in our minds about oh, you like let the team down on that.

And then, oh, yeah, you're like suck at this. And oh, you didn't make breakfast for your kids or like whatever the noise is in your mind. Anything you can do to shut that voice up and also Collect information so you can create whatever you need to create to be nicer to yourself and make it easier for yourself to be at your best, even when you don't [00:46:00] necessarily feel your best, is well worth doing.

So just get the information. What you do with it afterwards is your business. I'm totally up to you, right? But at least you have it. And then you can share it with those who might be affected by it or keep it to yourself. You can plan accordingly with your schedule and your your engagements or whatever else it is, but it's just information like GI Joe says, knowing is just half the battle.

Parul: I love this in Intel gathering, the CIA analyst who has spent so many years gathering Intel is now doing that for herself. I love that. And it's such a great reminder for many of us. I certainly have not tracked many of these things, so I'm going to be doing. One, one quick question around tools.

You have another tool. In your book, you call it the H L H quadrant tool to help us deal with our to do list. I wonder if you could just briefly touch upon that and how whether you use that in writing your book and prioritizing your writing the book when you have it.

Rupal: Yeah. So the idea behind the quadrant is again, like we all have this running list of things that we tend to do on any given day.

And if we're honest with [00:47:00] ourselves not everything is high value. Not everything is particularly enjoyable. Some of that is not in our control, but it's again about controlling the controllables, right? So the idea of the HLLH quadrant, it stands for high value and low value tasks, and then things that you hate doing and things that you love doing.

And just grouping, again, just passively collecting the information, what am I doing in a given week? And then grouping it into those four boxes, like what is it, what are my activities, personal, professional, everything, which of these activities is high value and things that I love, which is a high value and things that I hate, which is low value and I love, and which is low value and I hate, right?

And then again, you have this information, you can say, okay These are the high value things that I also love doing. So if and when and wherever possible, I should devote more of my time, my effort, my energy, my resources on this thing. Because it's high value and I enjoy doing it. If it's high value and you hate doing it, [00:48:00] that's not something that you can necessarily you can't always change it.

But whenever possible, layering on top of this this sort of quadrant, the idea of doing dumping and delegating, right? So if it's, So if you have something high value and you hate it, sometimes you'll just have to do it because that's life, right? Again, we're all grownups, but if you hate it, it's also a prime candidate for something that you should at least explore delegating or maybe even dumping, right?

There are, there's a lot of fluff in our lives if we're honest about it, maybe not a lot, but there's always some fluff in our lives. And then similarly, if there's, high, low

value things that you love I don't know, watching Netflix or whatever, right? Maybe devote fewer resources to it, not cut it out entirely.

Because let's face it, we're not trying to turn into machines. We also, if time is something that we're always complaining about not having enough of, then we, again, need to be grownups about how we're investing our time versus how we're spending our time. And then lastly, low value things that we hate doing.

Whenever possible, you should again, dump it or [00:49:00] delegate it because if it's low value and you hate it, then why would you keep doing it? So again, it's not about oh I don't like this. I don't want to do it and I'm not going to do it. We have to be adults about this, but if we are a bit more intentional about the things that we are holding onto the, and the things that we are doing and we are choosing to, to not delegate or not dump.

At the very least, we can release some energy from the things that we are delegating or dumping to then reinvest in the other stuff that we enjoy or get more from. And it's this, a lot of these little micro shifts, these little small, like one to, I don't know, 5 percent changes that we make, they accumulate over time, right?

And they compound over time. And so play around with all of it. Some things might work, some might not, but it's all, it's about. And I've said this so many times now, but it's not about wholesale change or overhaul of your entire way of existing. It's about being thoughtful, being intentional, and then making the tweaks where you can, which, like I said, compound over time and can make a huge difference in just releasing some of the [00:50:00] pressure and the tension from the day to day.

Matt: So helpful. I think an exercise Parul and I were talking about this beforehand, where actually I think looking at your book seeded the idea for us. I think this is an exercise we're going to be doing pretty shortly here as well. Yeah. Thank you for that. So there was another concept in your book and you mentioned it earlier in the conversation as well, situational awareness and using that in your life, just as You go about your everyday life, but I'm curious or we're curious if there's any way you applied the concept of situational awareness with your own writing or your own creative work.

And if so, how?

Rupal: Yeah. Gosh, so this again goes back to paying attention to how you feel and how you interact with the environment around you and paying attention to the points in your experiences where you're like, This feels amazing, right? I am so happy. I am so just relaxed or whatever it is.

And then also the flip side of like when you feel really tense and like you're scrunching into this like ball of knots. [00:51:00] And then everything in between, right? And then whenever possible aligning, like the kinds of things you're going to be doing with the environment you're in. So for example, I am very sensitive to, I don't know how else to put it, but to beauty, right?

And beauty, how I define it. Just like big open spaces that are like thoughtfully designed and not a lot of clutter and all of these things. So when I need to do big expansive thinking like creative work, it feels Like it's unlocking my creativity to be in a space that I would define as beautiful as, oftentimes it's being around nature, but just like big open spaces that are thoughtfully beautifully designed.

And so whenever I'm working on a book or something, a creative task, if I can like, I don't know, find a hotel or a restaurant or, somewhere to physically go. That just like flips a switch basically in my mind, right? Because already I can feel as I'm going in there, it just, it's, I'm getting into [00:52:00] a different zone versus when I'm entering a boardroom or like a conference suite in some like big high rise, I go into buttoned up, like business mode, right?

And. And look, not everybody is as sensitive to their surroundings as I might be, but I think we all are and it can make a difference. It really is such a, it can have a massive impact and I'm sure there's not I'm sure, I know there was a lot of research to back this up about how we react with, to our and interact with our surroundings.

So it's no surprise there, but it's paying attention to how you react to your surroundings and how you, what, where, like, where you feel. Yeah. How things change as you're in certain spaces. It also is things like paying attention to the

lighting, to the smells. Like one of the things I did years ago was I love spots, right?

They're designed to make you feel relaxed, like the sounds of water and like the beautiful diffusers and the, like the earth toned walls and all this stuff. So I made small tweaks every day. Even in my office, which we're [00:53:00] standing in now or I'm standing in now where, I got some nice smelling diffusers that I walk in and it already chills me out, or the lighting, not the lighting that's on right now, but I have softer lighting that I turn on when I'm going to be in here for a really long time. And just these small little things, it's not about hiring an interior decorator to do everything. It's, I know what I respond to. I know I'm sensitive to like the five senses around me.

So sometimes it's just having I don't know, like a comfortable chair to sit in. Sometimes it's maybe changing from like fluorescent to soft, yellow lighting, whatever it is for you, but pay attention because it makes a difference. And again, it's about all these small, subtle things that add up on top of each other.

So if you do, a little bit at a time. It can have some really powerful long lasting effects, but you have to start by, of course, paying attention to how you're interacting and how you're responding to the environments you're in and what it's doing to you internally.

Parul: Again, I love this theme of noticing, becoming more self aware.

Yeah. I'd love to [00:54:00] talk a little bit about comparison. I feel like as writers. As creatives, as humans, we're always worrying about how we compare to others, worry that people are doing better than us, they're faster, smarter, younger, whatever it might be. And I've read that you've suffered from this yourself.

And in those times you've, you wrote about tuning into your father's wisdom, which was to live an absolute life, not a relative one, which I love. I'm going to take that. I love that piece of advice. What have you done practically to shift your mindset in times when you're lost in this game of comparison.

Yeah.

Rupal: So it's practice, right? I, it's not something that I'm like, I've nailed it. I don't care. I'm never measuring myself up against anybody. I'm just totally living this absolute life and it's all, all as well. Cause I, it's so easy and for some good reason, sometimes we compare ourselves to the, to other people.

So for me, what Banishing comparisonitis, as I call it, looks is, first and foremost, again, noticing when I'm doing it, right? Because we never [00:55:00] compare ourselves favorably. We're always like, oh man, that person has 10 gazillion followers on Instagram, and I have six. We're always, the way I talk about it is we look at We like we look at ourselves as if we're like ourselves at like point zero or in the early stages, and then compare ourselves to someone who's 10 to 20 years down the line.

And we're like, Oh, but it's not, there's so much farther ahead than us. It's not apples for apples comparisons, right? So whenever I find myself going down that rabbit hole, it's like, Oh, there's so much this or, they have more, I don't know, they've sold more books or they're more famous or more followers or whatever.

I always I like I physically force myself to stop and I remind myself that one. We're not at the same stage like what we're not, this is not a fair comparison because it's not a like for like comparison I'm always comparing myself to someone who's, further along in their career or whatever, or even if it is a like for like comparison, or what I think it is.

We never know what's happening behind the scenes. We don't also know the price that people have [00:56:00] paid for the fame, the success, the wealth, the whatever we think that they have that we don't, right? So without that omniscience of okay, I have all the inside story. It's irrelevant. And I've gotten to a point now where I realize more and more.

And so I can short circuit this process a lot faster. It's a totally irrelevant comparison because I don't know what they had to go through. I don't know where

they started, where they're ending up, if they're even happy with what they have. And it's just not worth it. Secondly, it's this idea that.

Fine, but maybe I didn't do the work, right? We also like to think that oh man, but which, this should just fell into their laps and it's so easy for them. Maybe it was, but I doubt it. And I use social media as a great example because I have a very, awkward relationship with it.

And I appreciate it. And I acknowledge that it's a tool, especially as a creative, but I also hate doing it because it feels so fake and it feels so performative. And so when I am moaning about, Oh man, this person has 6 [00:57:00] gazillion followers and they're, it's so much easier for them to do this, and this, and the other thing, I haven't done the fucking work.

So I have, I cannot complain, right? Like I am not as on the ball. I am not like, posting consistently and doing all the tricks and doing all the things. So I can't complain about it if I'm not willing to do the work, or if I do feel like, oh man, I want to be where they're at, then I have to do the work, right?

So it's taking the emotion out of it and just being like, okay what is the difference here? What do I want that they have? And instead of just going down that thing of oh, I suck and I'm never going to get there. And what was me turning it into something a bit more proactive and productive, which is okay, fine.

What did they do to get there? Is there something I can glean from their experience or from their where they're at and that I can adapt to my own life? And if so, fine, then I have to commit to doing that work to get to that point. Or actually, maybe I don't care as much as I thought I did, right?

So at least have that grown up conversation with yourself about what is required to get to that thing that you think they have, but also acknowledge it. That you don't have the full picture. And [00:58:00] for me, it's that conversation and just getting practiced at having that conversation that has really helped.

And like I said, now I can snap out of it a lot faster. Like I get over it faster. And then I remind myself of all of the things that I do have and all of the things that I did achieve and all of the, it's not it's that thing of looking back instead of always looking to the future. So looking back on myself, even five years ago and being like, holy shit. I had done a lot that more than I ever could have imagined even five years ago instead of being like, Oh man but I still haven't done this and I haven't done this. So instead of admiring the gap, appreciating the progress.

Matt: Beautiful reminder. And ripple, this has been so great. So many gems here, wisdom from the book, but also from your life. And one of the things that's I'm reflecting on is how you're able to go beneath the surface of something. And you mentioned it at the beginning, but the, one of the mottos of the CIA was it true assume go, God, I'm going to butcher it, something assumed truth, but verify.

And it seems [00:59:00] like you do that in every aspect of your life, whether it's yourself. Trust your intuition, but verify it. So it's a really interesting mix of intuitiveness, but also analytical that you seem to have brought together. In your approach to life. So just a little reflection as we wrap here.

And so now we got one more question and then we are going to turn to your questions here. So if you have a question at about anything for RuPaul, either a concept that we touched on, you want us to go deeper into, or maybe about the writing process, the publishing process. Now's the time to put it in the chat and we'll give you a chance to ask it in a moment here.

But to wrap here, RuPaul. So there's A line that you write in the toward the end of your book it's a beautiful line and you say, but what if we let go of the pursuit of happiness and chased something deeper instead? What if we traded happiness for aliveness, and we're curious, what does aliveness or chasing aliveness look like for you right now in your life?

What's your focus? What are you chasing? What are you excited [01:00:00] about?

Rupal: Thank you for that question. It's interesting of all of the like festivals and interviews and other things I've done. No one else has picked up on that quote. And I absolutely love that quote. And I got chills as you were reading it.

For me, fundamentally, you didn't ask this question, but I'll answer it and then answer your actual question. Pursuing aliveness is really about Not forcing things to be other than what they are and trying to be more present, even when the present sucks. And, as Americans, we have this like in the Constitution, right?

It's enshrined this like right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. But why happiness, right? Like, why is that a predetermined birthright when It's so subjective and it's also so external, right? It's more often, at least the way, most of us think about it is I will be happy when this happens, or I will be happy if that happens, or I will be happy when I get this thing.

And that, as we all know, sadly [01:01:00] through our experience, that's not how it works. It's actually the reverse, right? Like you have to be happy first, and then you can actually appreciate the things that you get. And so for me, that pursuit of aliveness is not about chasing happiness, not about chasing anything.

It's about Trying and practicing for me. It's still a practice because again, I've not nailed any of it. Just trying to actually live the experience I'm having live the frustrations live the Sadness and the grief and the despair and the anger and the joy that whatever it is but to like to really just to feel the feels right to not try to rush through an experience or not try to push away the negative things that are may you might be feeling but to just Not give up in any way and not to stop fighting or whatever it is, but to just be and to, instead of trying to constantly do things and force things and make things happen and to, it's like this weird combination or not weird, but a, this more [01:02:00] of a, like a, an acceptance and a surrender to all of the things that we cannot control.

And to just focus on the controllables on focus on what we can do it, but instead of trying to be like, no, but I'm not happy. So I have to change something. I have to fix something. That's just life, right? No one's gonna be happy all the time. And I

genuinely don't think happiness is in on its own, a valuable pursuit, because it can feel really shallow.

And I think we've lost the meaning of happiness. And I don't know. This is like a really ephemeral idea, but I think for me, aliveness is fundamentally about just experiencing what you're experiencing, not dwelling on it necessarily, not wallowing in it, but just to let it be what it is as you work towards, moving through it.

Matt: Love that. And Rupaul, so what, and then I will go back to the question it what's making you feel alive or what are you chasing right now? No, it's all good. I, that was beautiful. I'm curious, you're, you've got this book out now you're, you have your business, your work curious.

Any, [01:03:00] do we have any other books that we can look forward to from you or where's your creative energy? Yeah. Going right now. Yes.

Rupal: So my creative energy is now on my second book. So I'm not going to give any spoilers. You'll have to wait for that one. But I'm working on my second book. And really just trying to so in addition to that, I'm trying to just, Be a bit more of the things that I just shared.

Be a bit more present, because for any of you in the audience who has who has kids, I have two young kids, and I find myself trying to like rush through these really annoying, exhausting early years, and so trying to be more alive to The time of life and the season of life that I'm in right now where everything feels like a constant tornado.

So that's what I'm actually trying to do. Like it's, and I'm trying to actually cut out some of , like the performance pressure, like the high performance pressure Oh, but you have to do this and you're going to be this. And you have, like all of that stuff, which is still important to me.

But I think for me right now is trying to balance [01:04:00] and an awareness of. Where I am and a contentment with where I am while still striving for the things

that I care about And want to still pursue so what that looks like in the long term, I've got the book I'm working on right now I've got two more non fiction books and then of course the novel at some point will hopefully be published and then I just want to I do a lot of speaking so I do, keynotes And speeches and things and I want to do more of that and to bigger audiences around the world But Everything in between is just, it's a sort of a constant practice of, yeah, just trying to be more in the moment instead of constantly living in my head and living in the future.

Matt: And that's a beautiful part about many of the principles you introduce in the book is that it's not something you do once. It's something you return back to. Depending on where you're at in your life and everything, all the great stuff we touched on. Yeah. Thank you so much, Rupal. And we'd love to turn to audience questions now.

And there's a couple that have started to see through. So if you do have a question for Rupal, now's the time to put in the chat and We'll also invite you all if you would like to turn your camera on so you can press that [01:05:00] stop video and then RuPaul we all can see all the wonderful people who have been here listening to your words so it's totally optional but we'd love to see your face if you're up for it and how this will work if you ask the question in the chat and the reason we asked you to put in the chat just helps us choose and consolidate and all that good stuff if you ask the question in the chat and your camera's on we'll give you a chance to ask it if your camera is off we'll ask it on your behalf.

And we'll try to get through as many as we can in the next 10, 15 minutes or so.

Rupal: Just a quick one before you go to, I saw somebody, I saw it pop up. Someone said about doing a Ted talk. I have done a Ted talk. So if any of you watch Ted talks, you can Google me. There are two Rupal Patels who have done Ted talks.

So mine is the one about the CIA.

Matt: We'll find the correct one and send it out in the, with the video and in all the notes following this. Wonderful. All right. And Paola and I will take turns picking on you to ask your questions. Carl, who's first up?

Parul: So we're going to start with Grace, and Grace, I'll ask this on your behalf.

Grace asks, can you talk more about finding your voice as a woman in your work in [01:06:00] that high testosterone? Oh,

Rupal: gosh. So again, practice. Definitely. It gets easier the more you do it. I didn't, to be honest, I didn't struggle so much with finding my voice in a work context. The irony for me is that, or maybe not irony, but I find personal, like interpersonal in my personal life conversations a little bit harder to be a bit more finding my voice with.

What it looked like at work though which was, I guess your question was, I, even being an outlier in many of the contexts, I always knew that I knew my stuff. And I think for me, That was what really helped me be confident in some of these rooms is to just be as well prepared as I possibly could, because for me, fundamentally, that for me personally, my confidence has always come from competence at being as good as I can possibly be at something to, to [01:07:00] know my stuff, to anticipate some of the questions, to do the work behind the scenes before I go into a briefing or into, a boardroom or whatever it looks like.

So it depends, of course on, on who you are and where you are, et cetera. But for me, I think fundamentally it starts with just knowing your stuff. And I think there's a great quote from Oprah. Where she says no one can dismiss you if you're the best at what you do. It's along those lines.

So the competence piece I think is key. And then the other thing that I have to remind myself from time to time, even now, because there'll be some conversations where I'm like, Oh man, but this person really knows their stuff is not to distract yourself with. At what everybody else knows and to only own to like own in only own and lean into what you know, so it's not about like you trying to be somebody else you trying to live up to this sort of image or anything like that.

You go and you know what your expertise is you deliver on that expertise or on that message or whatever else it is. And then don't worry [01:08:00] about anything else. I think so much of the struggle around like finding our voices is like that head game of like who's in the room and what are they going to say and what are they going to think and all of this stuff.

And so much of that can be quieted by that preparation but also not trying to be someone you're not because Or not trying to pretend you know more than and I think one of the best things that the CIA gave me on this or trained us in on this point was, if you didn't know the answer to a question, you told the person, whether it was the president, senator, a general, an ambassador, you said, I don't know.

And that was the only right answer. It wasn't, I don't know, and tough luck, you'll figure it out yourself. It was, I don't know, I will find out for you and come back to you. That was it. And to be able to say, I don't know with confidence and not apologize for it is again, something that takes practice, but it's also one of the things that can take so much of that pressure away from feeling like, Oh my God, but what if I say something and it sounds stupid or they want to know something and I don't know the answer, et cetera, et cetera.

So prepare as best as you possibly can practice. Literally [01:09:00] say practicing that's out loud sometimes that you don't know. And then also. Don't fall into that trap of veering into areas that you might not feel so confident in because it is going to be where you start to trip up or where you start to feel like, Oh my God, am I totally, are they going to call me out on this, that or the other thing?

So for me, finding my voice was really about making sure I had something worth saying and that I knew what I was talking about.

Matt: Amazing. Thank you so much for the question and the answer. Jody has a question around dealing with rejection, self doubt, imposter, all that great stuff. Jody, if you'd like to ask it.

Rupal: You, I've already talked a lot about this and thanks Rupal. This has been amazing. You're quite the inspiration. What have you found is the most effective way? I've just been going through a rough patch lately. And my question is, what is the most effective way that you've found to battle self doubt, sadness, imposter syndrome after a period of persistent rejection?

That's where I'm at. And, it's funny [01:10:00] because, you have to be brave to put yourself out there, but at a certain point, it wears down on you, okay. Yeah. And Jodi, thank you for asking that. I'm getting chills as as you were speaking. Reality is that Rejection is just part of the game.

And really you, it feels personal because, it's your work or whatever it is that you've put out there that is being rejected or turned away or whatever, but it's not personal. And it's hard to internalize that truth, but it is a truth. Most things in life are pretty subjective, right?

So there will be, we all are readers or writers, and we will all probably have some writers who are like, that person sucks, but I'll be like, Oh, that person's amazing and vice versa. So knowing that there's this huge amount of subjectivity in, in decision making almost makes it inevitable that there will be a lot of rejection, but in every aspect of life, whether it's your creative work, your professional work, your personal life.

For me, at least rejection has been. always [01:11:00] a part of that process. And most things in life are a numbers game. It doesn't matter what it is that you're talking about, whether it's, books or, or art, or again, even applying for jobs or finding a, a partner. It really is a numbers game and you have to, it's so cliché, but it is so true, the difference between those who come out the other side and those who give up is, or sorry, those who succeed eventually and those who don't, is that most of them just stay in the game longer, right?

And there's nothing. It really, there is a lot to say for persistence and you might, you might have to kiss a lot of frogs along the way as it were, but. Just knowing that it's statistics, it's actually not you. It is how, there are literal statistics to it, right? There's this whole funnel thing.

And it's if you've got a thousand, applications or, proposals in here, then like the number of people who will respond is maybe 10 percent of that. And then the number of people who will even read it is going to be 1%. And then, like the numbers, depending on what you're talking about are, really big [01:12:00] on the, at the top and what comes out the bottom seems holy shit.

Is it even worth that effort? But, you get to decide if it's worth that effort, right? So I don't know in what capacity it is, and you don't need to share it. So don't, if you don't want to, that you've been rejected, but if it's about creative work, like who hasn't been rejected, right? All of us will probably have horrible stories about both in creative and non creative fields being rejected.

And you just got to keep going. There were people who rejected my book and thought it sucked. And that's their choice. That's their prerogative, right? Everybody is allowed their own opinion. So if it's important to you, you just have to keep going. There really is nothing else because in the absence of getting the thing that you want, what are you going to do?

Give up? And I know it sucks and it's sad and it hurts and it really hurts, but if the thing that you're pursuing is something that's important enough to you to that's really important to you, then you have to just be willing to put up with the heartbreak of being rejected because otherwise you do have that choice right there, you do have the choice to just stop and to take the pain [01:13:00] away and to just protect yourself a little bit more and that is not that is not something to be ashamed of either, right?

If it is too much, it's too much. And you can choose to just not put yourself out there to be rejected anymore. But if you want that thing, whatever it is. Then, sadly, you are just going to have to keep going regardless of the rejection. And maybe, and again, if this is in a creative capacity, maybe you find a way to do it that doesn't require, other people so much.

Maybe, and again, I'm just assuming if it's a, if it's a written work, maybe you consider self publishing, right? That is always an option to all of us. And many authors have gotten picked up by traditional publishers after having self published.

There's no shame in that, right? There are always workarounds to get to the outcome that you are looking for, but you have to be willing to you have to decide.

Is it important enough to you to keep going or are you going to give up? And both are equally valid choices. Yeah, it's just part of the process. Yeah, no and I get that. I [01:14:00] think the thing that you said that struck me the most was the frog kissing. And I'm not willing to Chris, I have to, I am persistent.

Anybody who's known me for any period of time and that's a lot of people in this room know that there's nothing if not persistent and tenacious. But it comes a time where you just feel like you've lost your resilience and I think sometimes you have to shoot a little lower.

Then, then that's kissing the frogs and I think that is really, that was really poignant to me. So I guess I'm going to have to kiss some frogs. It is going to be nothing but frogs for a while, right? But hopefully the next one will turn into a prince or the next, who knows, right? But you will never know if you stop kissing them.

So you decide. It's better than crickets.

Parul: Thank you for the question, Judy. Thank you, Nicole. Next up we have Vittorio, if you'd like to ask your question. Yeah.

Rupal: Hi. Hi. Yeah, I was I love the idea of saying yes to a venture. So I was wondering if you have any venture, big or small on your radar that you're going to say yes to? [01:15:00] Oh God, this is getting ridiculously personal, but I think we're probably going to have another child.

I'm really old. I'm 43 right now and my husband's a bit older than that. It's. Everyone thinks we're crazy, but I think we've decided to say yes to that adventure. So you've heard it here first. He knows that, but ha! Heather Stone! Ha! Congratulations! Yeah again, way too much information.

We haven't even started trying, but we've made the decision that we will try because why not, right? You only live once and we make good kids. So that's our next big adventure.

Matt: I'm excited what happens if we keep this call even longer, the things that we'll be able to go into. I'll bare my soul.

I really appreciate your openness though Rupal. So thank you. I think maybe one more question and then we'll call it wraps. So Tanya has a question what's been the hardest part of choosing yourself? I guess take that in whatever direction feels right.

Rupal: Oh, yeah. God, I wish we had an hour for this one.

God, so much has been the [01:16:00] hardest part. I spent a lot of my life wishing, not that I was somebody else, but not really appreciating who I was or who I am. And in many ways, not thinking I was. I'm not sure if I've said this enough in various different capacities and the sources of this are manifold right from horrible uncles who were just said horrible shit to like where I grew up and in New York and blah, blah, blah.

So for a really long time, I genuinely didn't. really think that like I was good enough in a lot of ways and I always felt like I didn't fit in and actually my my TED talk talks a lot about just not fitting in and feeling like I was always not only an outsider but like an outlier in all the wrong ways like I was never pretty enough.

I was never cool enough. I was never many things smart enough in different ways. And that was really hard to let go of that [01:17:00] baggage of self doubt. And And also I had this weird, any New Yorkers on the call will, and maybe others will know Staten Island, that's where I grew up.

And and I remember for so long carrying this baggage around Oh my God, but I'm from Staten Island. Nobody from Staten Island does anything right. Nobody impressive aside from the Wu Tang clan has come out of Staten Island. So like I had all of this shit, like from so many random places about just not being good

enough in whatever way to be certain things, to be successful, to be an author, to be whatever.

And so that was what I had to do to work through. Pete Davidson's from Staten Island. I have no idea who that is, but thank you Twinkle, for sharing that. I had all this like weird shit that I was carrying around about just not being good enough, not being up to snuff in so many ways.

That was the hardest thing to process. And I will say it was probably a decades long process of just like really unpacking where did I pick up? Oh, Saturday Night Live. That would make sense. Okay. Of unpacking where some of these hangups that I had about [01:18:00] myself or about was possible for me or someone like me where they came from.

And again, I joke about a joke about it in the book about going TSA on my ass. And and then. I'm not expecting my baggage for all like for dangerous material, because we all come to life with baggage that's either inherited or given to us, etc. But many times we don't stop to, to really understand where it comes from.

So in choosing myself I first had to do that work of really going deep into that. idea. Yeah, I like the TSA analogy too, Jodi. Into figuring out like, why do I think this, right? The objective data says one thing or what is maybe more seemingly objective data. And then the noise and the conversations in my head are saying something very different.

Why is there that disconnect? And so it was, yeah, I would say a many year long process of like understanding, Why I thought certain things that I did, then trying doing the opposite of what we often do, instead of finding all of the information that proves how shit we are at certain things, forcing myself to, [01:19:00] to cherry pick the data in the other direction.

Actually, how can I disconfirm this weird hangup that I have? How can I disconfirm the thought that like, I could never do this thing? Or how can I, when have I done things that I never thought were possible? So like challenge again, going very analytical and challenging. Those biases that I held about myself, and

then I realized damn it, I'm pretty cool and it's one of the, and it was not an overnight transformation, and I will say, age has definitely helped, experience has definitely helped, because I've met so many people high powered, impressive people on paper and, famous people and all these things, and they are just people again, it's a bit cliché, but they all have their own hang ups, they all, like, all of these people that we admire, but Our, I just spent this last weekend with someone who I really admire and she was a very successful author.

And she was so transparent about all the shit that she's been carrying her whole life, right? So we've all got it. I think for me, what I've realized that everybody carries this baggage. Everybody carries the self doubt. Some of us hide it better than others. And some of us, maybe who are like narcissists, don't have any at [01:20:00] all.

But for the most part, most people have it. And at the end of the day, I was just so sick of beating up on myself. Like I was done, like being the first one to point out how I sucked or how I didn't do something. Or I was so done of minimizing when people were like, wow, that was amazing. Oh, it was nothing.

Or oh, wow, that was really helpful or really whatever. And me downplaying it. Like it's a stupid game to play with yourself. And so I did the work, right? Like I did a lot of the, again, the reflection the questioning the analysis the counter looking for counterfactual examples.

And then, like I said, I realized you know what? Fuck it. I'm awesome. I've done interesting things. I'm proud of who I've become. I'm proud of the life that I've created. I, yes, it's not been perfect or I'm not perfect, but I like myself. I really do like myself now. And I genuinely think some of it just comes from age.

I think being like from my late thirties to my early forties, I was like, Oh man, this is awesome. I wish I could have aged sooner. [01:21:00] Like there is something we all just sometimes have to go. There is a chronological element to when we reach certain aspects of just self acceptance. I think that's really what it is.

It was doing the work, it was waiting until I got old enough to care, to give less fucks, right? And then not, and then the other conscious thing I do is not put myself in environments that I know I just can't handle, right? People who trigger me or contexts that are just not healthy for me, we're grown ups, right?

We can make those choices. We can stop hanging out with people. We can stop going to places. We can stop doing a lot of the things that we do because we need to do it. And so it's that, yeah, like I said, a combination of the inner work, the external, like curation. And then also just acknowledging, instead of looking for all of the millions of faults that I could point to trying to do the opposite and being like, you know what, here are this gazillions of ways in which I'm pretty damn awesome.

And we can all do those things. And all of our [01:22:00] lists would be. Really incredible. So that was the process. And then one last sort of takeaway that I will give you, I know, sorry, I've gone on for a while on this, but it's important is I've started to put together, because I am a person who's one of my love languages.

Anyone who's read the love languages book is great. And one of my love languages is words of affirmation. Probably my first love languages. And so words mean everything to me as a writer, as a reader, as a human, they mean everything. They have far more power on me than most things. And so what I've started doing, and I started doing.

Gosh, it's been almost 20 years since I've started doing this. I've started compiling what I used to refer to and still jokingly call my brag sheet. So anytime someone gives me a really nice compliment or some nice feedback or like a, a review of something I've done or work or the book or whatever, you I will save it.

I will save it in a screenshot and then put it in a folder. And whenever I feel like shit, whenever I'm like, oh my god, I suck at life, and that still happens, right? Again, most of these things are our practice. I will go back to that folder and remind myself wow, [01:23:00] for every person or every time I have been that person who said something negative, there are so many more people and so much more data that proves that I don't suck at life, right?

So it's about having the concrete evidence and going back to it to remind yourself of how good you are at what you do, at being a person, at being a friend, a parent, a partner, a brother, sister, whatever, a writer, an artist. We've all got that information and we can choose to remember that and choose to collect it instead of letting the one negative thing throw us off for forever and ever.

So those are my secrets.

Parul: I love that you end on data. I love that data will make us happier, collecting intel on ourselves on the positive things that people say about us. Yeah, because otherwise

Rupal: in our heads, we will cherry pick the wrong data, right? We have a bias to the negative. So yeah, we need to counterbalance it.

Matt: RuPaul, you are amazing. And there's so many words of affirmation for you in the chat. So we're so grateful that you spent this time [01:24:00] with us. And we're grateful that you've done the work on yourself and help share your wisdom with us. So we can do the work on ourselves as humans, but also as writers.

So thank you so much. RuPaul. And we actually, we're going to give away, I think we've got about five copies to give away to our UK writers here. So if you're in the UK and you'd like a chance to win one of the five copies we're going to give away. And I think you is the paper book, the paperback recently came out RuPaul or when you,

Rupal: can you

Matt: show it, flash it up for us?

I

Rupal: will. Cause I think it's so pretty. So this is the new cover. Of the paperback. It's available now in the UK and basically the rest of the world. And then in June,

it'll be available in North America. But the old, like the older blue copy is available everywhere now. It's just the newer, fancier copy.

I think we

Matt: got some newer, fancier copies. So if you're in the UK, you'd like a chance to win RuPaul's book, raise your hand, your digital hand. If you can find it quickly and we'll pick five of you to send this book off to this week. All right, [01:25:00] I'm you another couple of seconds

Parul: to put your hand up.

All right, so I am choosing Jitu, Ange, Leesh, Vittorio, and Chrissy.

Rupal: A copy. And Baro, if you want to send me your mailing address, I can send you book plates and then you can put them in the books before you send them off to those five folks. I can sign it. That's great. Thanks so much.

Matt: All right. So each of you, the five of you email us hello at London writer salon with your best mailing address and we'll get those off to you.

This is incredible. RuPaul. Thank you so much for your time, your wisdom for everything.

Rupal: It's been my pleasure. It's been a real joy and all of you I can't wait to see the beautiful, amazing things that you put out into the world. So just keep going.

Parul: And so London writer salon. Members, I invite you to unmute yourselves and let's give Rupal a big round of applause.

Isn't she wonderful? Thank you so much. Thank you so much. Yay.

Matt: Yay. [01:26:00] Thanks everyone. So everyone, we're going to process this recording. We'll send it out. We'll also post it on our member portal. And if you

didn't win a copy of Rupal's book, of course you can go and grab it. We really recommend lots of lessons in there.

Many that we didn't even touch on. So thank you again, Rupaul, and thank you everyone for being here. So grateful for all of you.

Parul: My pleasure. Lovely, lovely rest of your day. Thank you everyone. Bye everyone. All

Matt: And some of you, we've got a writer's hour in 20 minutes, so maybe we'll see you there.

Cheers friends. Until next time.

Parul: Bye. See you later. Bye.