



Cool Tools Show Podcast Episode 077: Tim Ferriss

Transcript

June 2017

Visit Cool-tools.org for shownotes

Our guest this week is Tim Ferriss, the noted experimenter, knowledge seeking expert and author of a bunch of books you've probably heard of like The Four-Hour Work Week and The Four-Hour Body and Tools of Titans.

Mark Frauenfeld: Hey Cool Tools listeners, it's Mark Frauenfelder. I'm the Editor-In-Chief of Cool Tools. You can find us at cool-tools.org and this is a special episode of the Cool Tools podcast for a couple of reasons. For one reason, I'm not actually on the podcast this time around. Kevin Kelly, my co-host and the founder of Cool Tools, was in Uzbekistan with Tim Ferriss, the noted experimenter, knowledge seeking expert and author of a bunch of books you've probably heard of like The Four-Hour Work Week and The Four-Hour Body and Tools of Titans. They were traveling together and while they were in the back of a car on the way from one place to another, they recorded a podcast where Tim talked about four of his favorite travel tools.

It's really interesting. There was a little bit of rumble in the recording. I did my best to filter that out, but otherwise I think that the sound quality is pretty excellent. The microphone that Tim used in the podcast he talks about as one of his favorite travel tools. He goes everywhere with this combination microphone-recorder.

The other thing that I wanted to talk about is we have a Patreon page now for the Cool Tools podcast. You can go to patreon.com/cooltools and the reason that we are on Patreon seeking funding is because we're going to hire an editor to edit these podcasts.

You probably know that it takes a while for a new episode to appear, sometimes two weeks, sometimes three weeks and what we really want to do

is get a new episode up every week. But it takes quite a bit of time to edit podcasts and I'm the one who usually does all of the editing, so if we can get \$300 a month, we'll be able to afford an editor to edit every single episode of the podcast.

And if you support the Cool Tools podcast, you will also get some cool things. We're giving away copies of books that Kevin and I have written. You'll get shout outs on the episode. You can even be a guest on the Cool Tools podcast. So check it out on patreon.com/cooltools.

Thanks a lot for all of your support that we've already received. There's been a number of people who have contributed money and I wanted to give them a quick shout out. Here are the patrons and please forgive me if I get the pronunciation wrong on some of your names here. Tim Youssef, Scott Reed, Glen Mercer, Patrick Kennedy, Steve Levine, Bill Kempthorn, Thomas Thesor, Synaptic Spam, Ken Altman, Dan O'Brien, Greg Litchidle, Donald Cunningham, Steve Avery, Les Howard, Helen Hegidus, Sean Hartley, Jerry Kernst. Thank you so much for supporting the Cool Tools show podcast. It really is going to make it possible for us to get these out on a more frequent basis.

Okay, so without any further ado, here is our special episode of the Cool Tools podcast with Tim Ferriss and Kevin Kelly.

Kevin Kelly:

Hi, this is Kevin Kelly. I'm sitting in the back of a car, crossing a mountain pass about 2,000 meters in the Tian Shan mountains in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is a central Asian country that's generally south of Russia, north of Afghanistan and next to all the other Stans like Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan. Sitting next to me as we cross the mountains is Tim Ferriss, legendary exploiter and explainer of world-class performances and we're going to do a joint recording. Tim is going to tell us about his favorite four, cool tools and he has a couple of things to add to that. We'll find out what he is up to lately.

So Tim, why don't you tell us about your first cool tool.

Tim Ferriss:

Okay. The first cool tool, we're sitting in the back here. We have bags around us, bottles of water, a bunch of different gadgets and objects piled in my lap. The first that I can talk about is actually in my other piece of luggage. I don't have any checked luggage. It is a jacket that I roll up to travel with constantly. It's from a brand called Nau, N-A-U. I believe it's based in Portland. You can think of it as a blazer or a riding jacket. What makes it unique is a number of different factors. A, you can roll it up and throw it on let's say a black t-shirt and you look like you're ready for a business dinner or a formal or semi-formal occasion, so it saves me the trouble of packing a lot of collared shirts, for instance. There are collared shirts that don't wrinkle, but they do take up more space than say a black t-shirt, so this now and it could be ... I've several different models at home, weather resistant.

Of course, it was designed in the Pacific Northwest, you would expect that, which comes in handy, so that would be my first cool tool. Plenty of pockets, but there are lapels so you can get away with murder. You can wear it in a light rain or you could wear it at a nice dinner. It is an incredibly flexible piece of clothing.

Kevin Kelly: So, one of the hazards for me anyway, if I try to roll up a jacket, I never quite get the wrinkles out. So your shirts kind of hanging in your hot shower and they'll dissipate, how does this work in terms of unwrinkling it or does it just magically unwrinkle?

Tim Ferriss: So this particular jacket has a number of features, I think that disguise wrinkles. There's also just the material science aspect. The fabric blends that are used tend not to wrinkle, number one. Two, it has folds and pockets and lapels that for whatever reason, make any wrinkles less noticeable. And then there's the collar. So if you want to avoid problems with wrinkles, generally, at least in my experience, you want darker clothing, so that under light, you're not casting ... you're not having shadows cast across or beneath the wrinkles. So this is a charcoal color jacket.

Kevin Kelly: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And it's kind of like your typical suit jacket length or is it more like an outdoor jacket at the waist length?

Tim Ferriss: It is, I would say, typical dinner jacket length. So it's not getting cut off. It doesn't show off any midriff if you were looking for that. You're out of luck. Yeah. So you would be able to see your belt if it were unbuttoned in the front.

Kevin Kelly: Right. Okay. And it's very lightweight and about tell the readers about how big it compresses into.

Tim Ferriss: If you're to roll it up well and if you want to know how to roll up a jacket like that well, you could actually go online and look at how say a Judo uniform is folded and if you roll it up well, you are looking at, let's just say, the bottom 3/4, meaning it'll cover the very bottom fabric of a standard-sized school backpack. So we're not talking about a hiker's backpack. So I estimate, I would say we're looking at, I get it down to about a roll that is 10 inches in length and about three to four inches in diameter.

Kevin Kelly: That's very impressive. I carried a lightweight down jacket that compresses into something very small, but it certainly is not as fancy or suitable for a dinner jacket like yours is.

Tim Ferriss: A couple of other tips for folks and I'm by no means a hyper minimalist, say Appalachian trail hiker or anything like that, but I also have for instance a synthetic, because I don't want to lose the insulating ability if it gets wet. I

have a synthetic down vest that is also stuffed into this backpack, which I can put on top of that sort of fancy looking jacket in the case that I need more warmth.

Kevin Kelly: That's brilliant. That's a brilliant hack. So that's called the Nau jacket?

Tim Ferriss: N-A-U, Nau.

Kevin Kelly: Okay. And approximately what's it cost? Just give me a range.

Tim Ferriss: That's a really good question. I bought it a long time ago. It's not cheap, but then again, if you're comparing it to any type of dinner jacket or outdoor jacket, it's not horribly expensive. I'd say it's in the \$150 to \$350 range if I had to guess.

Kevin Kelly: Good. That's fantastic. So what else do you have in your backpack stuffed here in the back of our car right now?

Tim Ferriss: In my bag of tricks. I have a Logitech blue-tooth keyboard and just to put this in perspective, it is slightly larger than say a paperback book, like a 5 x 8 inch trim paperback book. It is narrow enough that I will very often stick it into a journal to protect it and it's probably the width of eight to ten paperback pages. And it holds a charge very, very well so I use this often times if I have any issue with my laptop. I can pair it to my iPhone, which is a larger-sized iPhone and balance the iPhone or lean it against a glass of iced tea and I can get any writing done that I need to get done.

Also, if I feel like taking a day trip, but not taking this backpack, which is one of my main pieces of luggage and stuffed full of stuff, it's kind of heavy, I can take the keyboard and my iPhone and head off to some coffee shop say ten to 15 minutes away without carrying all of my gear with me.

Kevin Kelly: So I'm going to try to describe this a little bit further. It's very, very thin and very lightweight. It feels like it's made out of aluminum and has kind of a matte texture finish on it. It feels very velvety and it's mostly charcoal color with white letters, so this serves as a keyboard with a phone and then the keyboard itself is pretty large in terms of your finger spaces and cramping. That is really cool.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it's a great device. I've had this now for I would say two years and I have never had a technical fail. So as a form of backup, I find it to be very cheap insurance because as you can see in person, this is lightweight enough that I'm not making any ... I'm not going to get scoliosis for having this as an additional piece of gear. I stick it into a large, format journal or even a magazine and I can travel with it.

Kevin Kelly: Yeah, that's really cool. And so it pairs up through Bluetooth I would imagine, right?

Tim Ferriss: That's right.

Kevin Kelly: Great. So you pair it up to an iPad if you wanted to as well as a phone if you happen to carry.

Tim Ferriss: Definitely.

Kevin Kelly: Yeah. So what's that called again?

Tim Ferriss: This is a Logitech bluetooth keyboard and we'll put the exact model in the show notes for everybody. Next up we have ... these all travel together. I very rarely take these out of my backpack, in this case. This is Max earplugs silicone earplugs, which unlike foam earplugs are not inserted into the ear canal and then left to expand. These are effectively smeared over the ear opening and you have in all caps- DO NOT INSERT, JUST COVER EAR OPENING. These I found through swimmers in fact and they are very waxy and almost look like candies ... some type of caramel, but they're white colored and I find them to block sound much more effectively than any type of foam ear plug, although there are some good ones on the market to be sure.

Kevin Kelly: Do you use it just once or can they be reused or recycled or they last a little bit or after they get grungy? What's their use?

Tim Ferriss: I definitely reuse these. I would say if I had to guesstimate, I would say four to five nights and then they start to lose their adherence, because they get less tacky over time. The most important feature or benefit that I don't want to overlook is that as someone who tends to rotate from back to side, so I sleep on my back and on my side, foam earplugs will very often hurt. They'll get pushed into your ear when you roll onto your side. That is not the case with these.

Kevin Kelly: So, for side sleepers, these are a real cool tool because it allows you to sleep on your side while you have these ear plugs in.

Tim Ferriss: Definitely and even someone who kind of tosses and turns in my case, I don't tend to wake up on my side, but I am constantly going onto my side and foam earplugs often wake me up.

Kevin Kelly: Okay, cool. Is this mostly just used for sleeping or do you use these for other sorts of sound abatement?

Tim Ferriss: You know what? I'm going to talk about that in a second. First, Johnny, what was that huge procession of ambulances that just came up on the opposite

side?

Johnny: [inaudible 00:14:34] Valley Hospitals. So they're driving them all-

Tim Ferriss: They're loaner ambulances.

Johnny: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Okay.

Kevin Kelly: We just passed a parade of ambulances in this high mountain pass, so it looks kind of ... where are they going?

Tim Ferriss: With all of their lights on. All right, so these ear plugs live in each of my bags that I tend to travel with, so I have redundant caches of earplugs, one in this bag, one in my other bag and sometimes I'll even have them in jackets.

Kevin Kelly: But mostly for sleeping?

Tim Ferriss: Mostly for sleeping.

Kevin Kelly: Or if you're sitting on an airplane and trying to read and just want to drown out the sounds-

Tim Ferriss: Then you could use them as well, for sure. Or you're swimming and you want to avoid swimmer's ear.

Kevin Kelly: Swimmer's ear. Okay. So what's your fourth cool tool?

Tim Ferriss: My fourth cool tool and I might go over slightly, but my fourth cool tool is a neck pillow and-

Kevin Kelly: I want one of those.

Tim Ferriss: I've tried many different neck pillows.

Kevin Kelly: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Most of them are very uninspiring and even less effective for helping me sleep. This and I'll do my best here, Cabeau, C-A-B-E-A-U and it has Evolution Pillow written on the side. You can see that it compresses down very nicely.

Kevin Kelly: To the size of a cantaloupe.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, like a small cantaloupe or a large grapefruit. You can certainly compress it more and the actual bag that it comes in allows you to wrap it up and then

compress it down to a smaller size. It is just a very nice in essence memory foam neck pillow that also clips in the front. What I found is not only does it help me sleep if I'm sitting upright, but it's also very, very helpful for getting to sleep when I'm laying prone, whether it's on an airplane or even a hotel room if the pillows are of dubious quality.

Kevin Kelly: Do you have to inflate this? Like pumping air, blowing air into it or is it self expanding?

Tim Ferriss: It's self expanding, so you can think of it almost like a sponge-like material that you can compress down and then when you release it, it inflates or I should say rather expands automatically.

Kevin Kelly: And is it one of those horseshoe-shaped items or is it just a little kind of wedge that sits behind your neck?

Tim Ferriss: It is a horseshoe-shaped, if you imagine a horseshoe being hung around the back of your neck, that is the shape. It can clip in the front and the design is such that there's a ridge that supports basically the occipital area at the base of the skull.

Kevin Kelly: So it's very ergonomic in that sense?

Tim Ferriss: It is. It's the most comfortable neck pillow that I have found and so I am-

Kevin Kelly: It's pretty light. It's a little bulky, but it's pretty light.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it's light and as far as neck pillows go, not very bulky at all.

Kevin Kelly: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: But if you're going to have a neck pillow generally speaking, in my experience at least, it's going to be inflatable and quite uncomfortable or you're going to end up with this type of compromise and this is the best I've found.

Kevin Kelly: Right. So it does, I mean it could pretty easily disappear into a day pack.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I think it absolutely could and certainly if you wanted, you could latch this to the outside of a pack. I happen to have enough space in my bag, so I include it, but you could latch it or hang it on the outside.

Kevin Kelly: Okay. I think I'd like to ... sometimes you have the privilege of flying first class and you can lie down, but other times, if you're stuck in economy, then you really need one of these things to sleep in a seat.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, I do. I do at least and the last thing I'll mention and then I want to ask

you about an app that you have, which is very, very different. So another app that I use a lot when I'm traveling and I use it at home as well. It's called Apnea Trainer and I don't use it for its intended use. I have an off-label use. Apnea Trainer is used by people who are training for free diving and want to improve their breath hold times. There are different types of tempos that you can use for different types of training, so there is Pranayama breathing. There is the apnea breathing which would say be a ratio of inhale, hold, exhale or inhale, hold, exhale, hold.

So you might have something like five seconds in, ten seconds ... or twenty second hold, ten second exhale, so it's a one, four, two ratio, and what I found is that if I only have, say five to ten minutes and I don't have time for my usual morning meditation, which I like to do, which is generally something like transcendental meditation 20 minutes, that five to ten minutes, five, let's just say, of breathing training with a voice that will countdown for you is very much grounding for the rest of the day.

Kevin Kelly: So it's kind of like a substitute to meditation because you're focused on your breath, but you're focused on kind of holding your breath, not just sort of breathing regularly.

Tim Ferriss: That's right. Yeah and I would say it is meditation, but it's a guided breathing meditation that has the side effect of performance enhancement if that's what you're going for and obviously I am not a doctor, I don't play one on the internet, so people who are listening, especially you crazy haphazard males, do not use this right before you go into the water and don't try to break any personal records holding your breath without very, very qualified supervision because you can die with shallow water blackouts and other issues.

I use this just as a kickstart to my day.

Kevin Kelly: Right, so if you're sitting it may be a position or something. The worst that could happen is you'd fall over.

Tim Ferriss: That's right. I'm just sitting on a hotel bed or a hotel couch generally.

Kevin Kelly: And that's called again?

Tim Ferriss: Apnea Trainer. What is the app that you have on your phone that you were showing me earlier today?

Kevin Kelly: Yeah, so I have a little tiny app on my iPhone, I think it's Android as well, actually I know it is. It's called My Tracks and what it does is it makes a GPS log for our travel, wherever you're going and the important thing is it does it without having to have cellular service somewhere because in these foreign countries, I don't normally turn my cell phone service off, but it's still getting

GPS signals and just with that information, is enough to create a GPS log of a journey. The advantage to that is one, you have a record of your journey and you can import into Google Earth just with a KML format, but more importantly, if you have a camera that has a clock as they all do these days, you can synchronize your clock to the local time and you'll have a way to time stamp and geo tag your photographs.

So the software will look at the time stamp for a particular photograph and then it'll show you the exact coordinates where that photograph was taken. So I don't have to remember where was I when I took that photograph? I could just import that into Lightroom or something and it's going to show me the geographical locations for every one of my photographs.

Tim Ferriss: I found this fascinating and it also begged the question for me, let's just say you're going on an excursion through the Grand Canyon or going on an extended trip overseas, is there a potential safety element where that data could then be pinged back to some type of service that can monitor your last known whereabouts if you go MIA, which if you are a developer of this app or know the developer, I would like to know the answer or if there's something similar that's available, but I thought that was a very, very cool app.

Kevin Kelly: That would be very, very cool if you could livestream basically your location to permitted, interested parties. And I would just have to imagine that there would be an app that did that somewhere.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, you would think there must be one available somewhere and one other cool tool that you have which is more common here than I would've expected, but in retrospect I shouldn't be surprised. It is very, very hot here. It can get very, very hot and the sun is extremely powerful to the extent that we visited a solar furnace not long ago that could be used to melt various objects at absurdly high temperatures.

Kevin Kelly: 8,000 degrees Centigrade.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, exactly, and you have, well, our guide, has ... our astute guide, has an umbrella ... smart move, to create shade wherever he wants it and you have an umbrella, but you made a modification to your umbrella.

Kevin Kelly: Yeah, so I just had an ordinary cheap, Chinese black, really compact umbrella that I carry in my little camera bag all the time and I spray painted the top of it silver so that it reflects the light and it makes it a little bit cooler on the inside because just with a black umbrella, it tends to absorb that infrared and reradiate it back down on your head. By having a silver reflective layer, it bounces at least 60% of that back into the sky and it's a lot cooler. There are versions of the silver umbrella that are extremely lightweight. They're not as collapsible as the ones I have, but they're made for hiking. I think there's called

the Silver Dome if I'm not mistaken and they weigh only a few ounces and people out west if you're climbing even into high altitudes, a lot of the long-distance hikers now carry an umbrella, portable shade and they walk along under the shade. Shade follows them and it really makes a huge difference when you're backpacking because you can really work up a sweat in a hat. It doesn't allow your head to cool off, but the umbrella does.

So you have another cool tool to talk about. In fact, it's kind of life just about in my mouth. It's up against my face. Tell me what is this thing.

Tim Ferriss: I get that response a lot. This is the Yellowtec IXM Microphone. I travel with this almost always. It is ... let's see, what would you compare this to? I would say if you took six D batteries and laid them end to end perhaps-

Kevin Kelly: Like an old-fashioned flashlight.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, an old-fashioned flashlight. This is a microphone that can capture just tremendous quality of audio. It automatically equalizes and it has playback buttons on the side. It all records to an SD card that's inserted in the bottom and it's battery powered so that you can take it on the road. Everything is contained and housed in this one unit, that then goes in a tiny zip-up bag, so this just lives really inside my backpack, so if I don't have a chance to bring more gear or don't want to bring more gear, I can use this anytime, anywhere and shizam.

Kevin Kelly: So you might record an introduction to one of your podcasts on the back of a car going over the mountain pass into Uzbekistan, right? So you'd be able to just pull it out and record it and it would have as good of quality as any real digital studio.

Tim Ferriss: It very often does. I've recorded podcast intros in airplane bathrooms before, which is certainly not ideal, but you can really get away with murder with this device and it makes up for a lot of environmental factors that could otherwise really screw things up and also if you're on the move and you happen to say bump into someone who is fascinating in my case and I say, would you mind if I ask you just a few questions and they're up for it, you can really on the drop of a dime, capture these moments that would otherwise be lost.

Kevin Kelly: Right and so just to emphasize, this is a microphone that has a built-in recording device into the handle of it so it's all in one. It's more than a microphone. It's a digital recording device built into a microphone.

Tim Ferriss: That's right, and then when I'm done recording, I would pop out this SD card. I would slap it into a laptop when I have access to one and drop a file then into a Dropbox folder, which would sink at the first opportunity to connect to wifi and then that is available to my team. So I can send the link to that Dropbox

through Slack, to my team and off to the races. They have the interview files. They have the intro files, whatever it might be and then it can all be polished for publication.

Kevin Kelly: So in some kind of ways except for the ambient sound, it's a portable recording studio.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, it absolutely is a portable recording studio and I think that some of my best audio that has appeared, say on the podcast, has come from this mic and people find it hard to believe because they'll ask what studio I used in San Francisco and I'll say, my bedroom and a handheld mic, that's my studio.

Kevin Kelly: That's really great. That's a really cool tool. Can you give me kind of a range of the prices if you have some idea? We'll have show notes about the actual particular model, but just give a little bit of a reach.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, if I had to guess on this, it's been a long time since I looked at the pricing, but I would say it's somewhere between \$400 and \$700. It's not cheap, but when I consider the alternatives, let's just say the H6 Zoom, which is the general recorder that I use with the XLR cables and the stage mic and everything else involved, you're getting into a similar price range or above. This just offers a lot more convenience in terms of its form factor.

Kevin Kelly: I have to tell you Tim travels light. He's not an ultra light traveler, but a very lightweight traveler with very minimal bags and this is one of the things he packs, so it's very impressive that it's light enough, small enough that even when you're not packing much else, you can fit this in even if you are a very weight conscious traveler.

Tim Ferriss: Definitely and I mean, there are other alternatives. I had enough space to pack also a Road IXY microphone, which is intended to be connected via lightening port to say an iPhone, so I am testing different alternatives to compare sound quality, but thus far, the Yellowtec IXM has not let me down, so I'll continue using it until I find a superior solution.

Kevin Kelly: That's definitely a cool tool.

Tim Ferriss: Kevin, I've had so much fun. I've wanted to travel with you for ages overseas and here we are. So I'm really glad that it came together.

Kevin Kelly: Yeah. Tim, thanks for your great Cool Tool reviews and where can people who've never heard of Tim Ferris find out what you're up to? And by the way, what are you up to next?

Tim Ferriss: Up to next, well, I have a new Ted Talk that should be coming out shortly, very personal and talks about fighting off the dark moments, overcoming self doubt

and so on. It's a very personal journey through how to overcome some of those darker and even dangerous moments and I will-

Kevin Kelly: So search Tim Ferriss and TedX or Ted?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, if people search Tim Ferriss Ted Talk, they'll be able to find at least one.

Kevin Kelly: Sure.

Tim Ferriss: Potentially two if including the new one and I'll be giving away several hundred pages of my favorite stoic writing along with modern essays that I've added in and new artwork and original commissions, illustrations and calligraphy, all sorts of fun stuff. I'll be giving all of that away for free in three volumes called The Tao of Seneca, so people can just search The Tao of Seneca free book. They should be able to also find it on Amazon and that should be available I would see in early to mid June.

Kevin Kelly: That's going to be orderable on Amazon and on your website?

Tim Ferriss: It should be available on Amazon. It should be available on PDF. I'm just going to unleash it into the wild and they can certainly go to tim.blog to find everything related to the project as well as those E-books and PDFs and everything else.

Kevin Kelly: Dot log?

Tim Ferriss: Tim.blog.

Kevin Kelly: Okay, tim.blog.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, tim.blog. It's a lot easier to spell than previous URLs and Kevin, for people who don't know how to find you and want to learn more, where can they find you?

Kevin Kelly: I'm kk.org. Kk.org, O-R-G.

Tim Ferriss: Did you say kk.pork? Just kidding.

Kevin Kelly: It's the air pressure. Our ears are not working.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. And anything that you're working on that you'd like people to check out?

Kevin Kelly: Well, I have the paperback version of my book, The Inevitable, which is being launched in June, so it's pre order for 12 bucks. It's cheaper than printing it out yourself. So go there at Amazon and in June, I'll be talking a little bit more about the updated version, which is not updated, so I haven't changed my

mind about anything in the last 12 months about the coming 20 years, so I stand by everything I said. Now it's a paperback.

Tim Ferriss: Well, thank you Kevin and many adventures ahead.