

EPISODE 217

'The Power of No' with James Altucher

Shawn Stevenson: Welcome to The Model Health Show. This is fitness and nutrition expert, Shawn Stevenson here flying solo today, but I do have a very, very special guest which I'll introduce in just a moment.

As you know, a big part of health and fitness is your inner gain, your mental fitness, your emotional fitness, and the person that I have on today is somebody who is going to really highlight a lot of aspects of what's going on in your inner world, and just also provide some really powerful insights to guide you to really taking more control over your life, and enjoying your life a little bit more. That's something I've really been picking up from him in reading his books.

But really quickly I want to give a quick shout-out to our show sponsor Organifi. Head over to www.Organifi.com/model and you're going to get 20% off of their incredible green juice supplement.

And I'm on the road and I always, always bring along Organifi with me when I'm on the road, and it's because it's all of the good stuff concentrated into bioavailable form.

Not like you're going to get with the Centrums out there in the world, and I liken Centrum to Milli Vanilli. Right? Milli Vanilli, the group who put on this whole song and dance, the front that they were talented- which they looked good on the surface. "Girl, you know it's true."

But it wasn't true. It wasn't true. Inside they were full of you know what. They were not honest about what was actually in there.

And plus the bioavailability of these things, because they're from synthetic nutrients, is one of the big issues when we're buying these multivitamins and spending all of our hard-earned money on things that our body isn't even assimilating.

So cut out that whole process and get yourself on a whole food based superconcentrate of these superfoods which is what you're going to find in Organifi highlighting with spirulina, chlorella, moringa, ashwagandha, and it tastes good. That's really the key.

I drink, my kids drink it, you can add it to your smoothies. It's one of the things that I do to make sure that we fill in those nutritional gaps and I'm just a huge fan.

So head over, check them out, it's www.Organifi.com/model. And on that note, let's get to our special guest.

Our guest today is the one and only James Altucher, and he is the author of several bestselling books, and books that I'm absolutely in love with. I've devoured two of his books in just the last two weeks.

And one of them is 'The Power of No,' and I've been a big fan of 'no' lately in kind of reorganizing my life and the track that I want to take, and he's going to tell you more about that. And he's also the host of one of the most popular podcasts in the world, The James Altucher Show.'

So make sure to check him out, and I'd like to welcome to The Model Health Show, James Altucher. How are you doing today, man?

James Altucher: Shawn, thanks so much for having me on the show, I'm a big fan of your show and an avid listener, so I was really happy to come on here.

Shawn Stevenson: Oh man, the pleasure is mine. I'm happy you could be here.

James Altucher: By the way, that sponsorship you did was really good. Like I usually get a sponsorship, I get a sponsor, I don't really know the product, I read the ad, and I try to tell a story with it.

But you really like integrated that sponsorship ad into what you believe in. So I'm impressed.

Shawn Stevenson: Thank you. Coming from you, any compliment on what I'm doing with my structure is a big compliment. But it just goes back to I'm just loving the product, and loving these guys, so it kind of makes it easy.

But I've got a bunch of questions for you, and I'm really excited to talk with you. But first I'd love if you shared your origin story with us.

Your story is so interesting. You kind of had like a rags to riches story like five times already.

James Altucher: Yeah, too many.

Shawn Stevenson: So yeah, tell us a little bit about that.

James Altucher: At some point it gets too much. At some point you kind of want to get off the roller coaster and stop with- it feels like chronic wear and tear when you have too much stress in your life.

So if you have like decades of stress, it's going to just destroy your body. And we all grow up with that.

We all figure we're going to work, and it's going to be painful like in a job for thirty or forty years, and then finally we'll retire and enjoy life when we could have been enjoying life all along.

So I figured I would take a shortcut. I would get super rich really fast, and then enjoy the rest of my life. But that didn't happen.

So I started a company when I was younger, this was in the late nineties, and I built it up, it was a good company. I built websites for entertainment companies, built it up, sold it, made a lot of money, made millions of dollars.

Shawn Stevenson: Which entertainer companies?

James Altucher: So I was building websites for all- and you can tell by looking at me obviously, but all the gangster rap record labels.

So Loud Records, Bad Boy Records, we did the websites for the Wu-Tang Clan, all the Interscope artists, Death Row Records, all those guys.

Shawn Stevenson: Crazy.

James Altucher: So Bad Boy- and Con Edison and American Express. So we used the entertainment stuff to- everybody wanted to have a like a hip website so we said, "Oh we did the Matrix, so now you want to use us for Con Edison."

So built it up, sold it for millions and millions of dollars, and I thought, 'This is great.' But then I got what I call the disease and I figured, 'Oh everyone is selling their company for millions of dollars,' which is the first step in the disease because everyone wasn't.

And I could have really done good with this money but I figured no, I needed to make more, and more, and more.

And that of course led to me doing things just for the money, and then I just very quickly made so many bad decisions in a row that I lost all of it. And I lost my home, I eventually lost my family, I lost- I just got so depressed for years.

And then I built up again, built up a company, sold it, made money, bought a house, had the family, and again lost everything. I mean and I was thinking to myself, 'How could I do this again?'

Like I got that disease again where I felt like I needed to make more, or I felt like my job as a human being was all finished, I'm done.

And so I gave up trying to be a good person, and just so quickly when you do that, you just lose all of it.

And then I just got back to basics, and took a long time building up, also kind of like you were saying earlier, improving my inner game instead of just- I had that skill of like how to make money, but I didn't have the skill of how to keep it and how to grow it.

And a lot of that comes from the inside as opposed to just intelligence.

And so I had to really kind of change my life completely to focus on myself first, and then choose the ways I'm going to be happy instead of just having money, or just achieving some goals, or whatever.

So I really had to kind of start from scratch and rebuild.

And it's a constant thing, it's not like- and that was the thing I learned, is that it's never over. It's a constant practice.

Shawn Stevenson: That's one of the things that I think is some kind of subconscious ideal that we have, is that at some point you make it, right? Like, 'I made it.'

James Altucher: Yeah made it and done.

Shawn Stevenson: And it doesn't really work like that, you know? You're always in a process of becoming in a way.

James Altucher: Well think about it like in health. It's not like- let's say you're in great health, like right now you're in great health. What if all of a sudden you said, "Oh well I'm in great health now, I'm done."

Shawn Stevenson: Exactly.

James Altucher: Then how fast would it take for your health to just go down the tubes?

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah, exactly. Such a great analogy.

James Altucher: Probably take like six months.

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah exactly. Probably shorter than that if you go full force.

James Altucher: That's what it took with- money is just never a goal, it's a side effect of how you're living your life.

And so if you're not living your life to its potential, and that has a variety of meanings ranging from physical health, to mental, to creative, to spiritual health; if you're not

living your life in a good positive way, money is just a side effect of that. You'll lose your money much faster than you made it.

Shawn Stevenson: People don't want to hear that though. You know? We generally- like you said in the beginning, like 'I'll get rich really quickly up front, and then I'll just live the rest of my life.' That's what oftentimes people think happens.

But you're talking about- and this is something you've seen firsthand, is that actually doing things that you enjoy, and how crazy that is, and setting up things in your life so that you can be wealthy along the way while you're doing something that you actually enjoy and that you care about.

James Altucher: It's true and I'll just tell you the story of my first company real quickly. I didn't want to do it. I wasn't a business guy, I wasn't a sales guy.

I was working for HBO, the television company. I wanted to write a novel, I wanted to pitch TV shows, I was working on TV related ideas, I was doing a web show for HBO.

And my brother-in-law at the time had a CD-ROM company, which they don't even exist anymore, and I'm like- you know I had a computer science background.

I said to him, "You know here's this new thing, the World Wide Web, let me show you about it, and I'll even help you work on your first set of clients."

And so I didn't want- they wanted me to join their business, and I didn't want to. I'm like, "No I'm busy. I want to be creative, I want to work at HBO, I love HBO, I love television and writing."

But eventually I was really good at sales, and bringing on other customers, and I loved the Internet and I figured, 'Well you know I'll bring my creative abilities into the Internet and make this a creative medium.'

And so I just had this vision- not a vision like in a prophetic sense, but I had this idea that eventually everybody should have a website, every corporation should have a website, and it was true.

And so it was very easy for me to pitch something I loved. I loved this idea of, 'Let's do something unique for your website, you need a website, here's why,' and so I was great at sales because I loved what I was doing.

And that- again what was the side effect of this love, was people would pay money for me to do something for them. It was just a side effect. I loved something, I expressed that love to potential clients, and then money was a side effect.

And then eventually the Internet became this sort of bubble, companies wanted to buy my company, and I realized, 'You know, it's eventually going to get much easier to build a website, so I'll sell the company and then get back to my creative stuff.'

Unfortunately I didn't get back to the creative stuff, I got obsessed with the money. I got obsessed with the side effect.

Shawn Stevenson: And then you found creative ways of getting rid of that money.

James Altucher: Yeah I became very creative at destroying that money completely.

Shawn Stevenson: When I hear your stories about you just kind of losing this insane amount of money, I picture you like buying a house to live in, and then you buy the house next door just so you can go borrow sugar from yourself.

James Altucher: Oh I was doing stuff like that. I mean I probably bought the biggest apartment in New York City, I was taking helicopters to Atlantic City every weekend and gambling.

James Altucher: I was investing in lots of start-ups because I so believed in the Internet, but I was just investing in the craziest start-ups just because I thought money tends to magnify what you already have inside of you, and at the time I thought I was- when you make money in one area you think you're kind of smart in every area.

So I just thought I was smart in every area of my life, and I wasn't, and I just started burning it in every way possible.

Shawn Stevenson: Wow I'm so glad that you said that because it magnifies what you already are. I think a lot of us think that money will solve our problems, and definitely money does solve some problems temporarily, like if you're hungry money can get you food.

But when you come into a significant amount of money, and you're not the type of person that can actually handle the responsibility of carrying around that much wealth, you're going to definitely cause some pain.

It's just the kinds of stories when people win the lottery and that kind of thing, and ending up broke again.

James Altucher: Yeah I mean a year before- I mean months before I started the company I was living in a one-room apartment on a foam mattress, I had no money, I had student loan debt, my salary was not enough really to pay my bills, and I was just dead broke and I never really had money.

I'd always lived paycheck to paycheck when I had a job, and suddenly I had this money, I felt like, 'I must be incredible. I did it. I lived the dream,' not realizing that that had never been my dream before.

My dream had been to be creative, to write, to do interesting things and have interesting experiences.

My dream had never been to make a huge amount of money, but suddenly I thought like I lived the dream because that is society's dream.

American society's dream is to have a lot of money. And so I achieved that and so I thought- and it's like the Frank Sinatra song, if I can make it here I can make it anywhere.

So I thought, 'Oh I must be some kind of like super genius.' So just every decision I made after that was incorrect.

Shawn Stevenson: Wow, it just brings to mind this idea of- and I say the same thing for fitness and in health, is you become it in consciousness first.

You become the type of person that can be healthy. You become the type of person that can be wealthy and have a lot of income. But what are the steps to do that?

And I think just hearing from you now, it's like it's really first and foremost is about being honest with yourself about what you want and about what you want to do as far as your career endeavors, things like that. So talk about that.

How important is it for us to be honest with ourselves?

James Altucher: I don't want to say it's the most important thing, because it also- honesty with yourself is also a side effect because we don't initially know what honesty with ourselves- what it means.

We think we know what it means, and you have to really drill down. You have to ask questions a lot.

Like, 'What do I want?' 'Am I happy?' 'Am I happy with these people around me?' And you have to really start analyzing when are you rationalizing the decisions you're making in your life?

Because often you think, 'Oh well I have a lot of money, I'm happy. I have a wife, I'm happy. I have this big house, I'm happy,' because those are the things society tells us make us happy. So we just run through this checklist that society gave us.

But you have to really start to understand, 'Well what deep down inside really makes me happy?' And that takes a while I think to come up with.

James Altucher: And so I think honesty is incredibly important, but I think you get there by first realizing, 'You know what? I'm tired of always stressing about money. I'm not really happy arguing with my friends or significant other or my boss every day. Even though I have like the dream job, my boss is really bothering me and so I'm not really happy with that.'

So you start to like second guess, and people then rationalize, well you can't be happy all the time, which is true, but you know what? You should have wellbeing all the time. You should have a sense of contentment all the time.

And you get that in various ways from am I growing in some area of life? Am I contributing in some area of life? Am I feeling emotional bonds- strong emotional bonds with people in my life? Am I having a sense of freedom in my life?

And so I think you get that in many ways, a lot of which you've talked about on other episodes in your show, but certainly step number one is physical health.

Like if you're sick in bed, and obviously sometimes you can't help it, but if you're sick in bed you can't free the chains- you can't free yourself from the chains of society. You're not going to be as creative as possible if you're sick in bed all the time.

If you're emotionally unhealthy meaning if you're surrounding yourself with people who are bad for you, you're not going to be as creative as you possibly can be.

I'll give you a great example. I had on my podcast once Mike Massimino. So he's an astronaut, he helped fix the Hubble Space Telescope, he's walked out there in space, and one of the things he said to me really struck me. He was in a classroom, he took a robotics class- when he couldn't become an astronaut right away, he decided to get a PhD in Robotics.

And he was in this class and he said, "I was looking around at the ten people in class, and much later, four of those people made it into outer space as astronauts."

So if he had just been at that moment sitting in his random neighborhood bar, there's no way he could have said, "Four of the people in this bar would have made it into outer space."

So it really does make a difference who you surround yourself with. That makes an enormous difference on where you will end up.

Again, if he had spent all his time in a bar, he would not have ended up in outer space. Spend his time with a bunch of people who are working on robot arms for Mars, you might make it into outer space. So it makes a big difference.

Creative health; exercising your idea muscle every day is just as important as exercising your physical muscles every day.

Ideas are a muscle like any other. People say ideas are a dime a dozen, but I will tell you good ideas are not a dime a dozen.

And people say execution is everything; execution ideas are just a subset of ideas. You have to get really good at coming up with ideas. So I practicing exercising that idea muscle every day.

And then finally, spiritual health. Having a sense that you know we're only here for a short time, and stress, and regret, and anxiety are not part of the things I want to spend a good chunk of my life doing.

So focusing on spiritual health and fill in the blank. Whatever your faith is, or if it's meditation, or if it's some other way of getting spiritual health, just fill in the blank but focus on spiritual health in part of every day.

Those four things are the most important things for then getting closer and closer to having that honesty in your life, and having money as a side effect, and all these other great benefits as well like going into outer space, or writing a novel, or achieving whatever your dreams are.

Shawn Stevenson: Wow this is profound right now, because I didn't think that you were going to mention this in that spot, of being able to even be honest with yourself, we first need to get ourselves healthy through those different things; physically, mentally, spiritually.

But it makes complete sense, but so many times we want to jump and bypass certain parts of the process.

James Altucher: Well think about it. Like if you're in bed with pain you'll think to yourself, 'I'll do anything to get rid of this pain.' That might not be the most honest thing you can tell yourself, because then maybe you'll start taking- I don't know, painkillers to get rid of the pain when the reality is you might maybe need to eat better foods, or you need to do certain exercises, or go through physical therapy where there's some suffering along the way, but that might be the way to really uncover what's causing these root pains that are keeping you in bed.

I mean I'm taking an extreme example, but developing the honest ways of uncovering that pain as opposed to taking the shortcuts is ultimately exercising that honesty muscle.

We can't just automatically be honest because there's so many layers we're taught to be dishonest with ourselves.

For instance, obviously a big issue in our country in the US is student loan debt, but people think going to college might be the right thing to do.

Now it might be the right thing, it might not be the right thing, I won't argue it either way here. But at least it's a discussion, it should be a discussion as opposed to just automatically assuming, 'Oh well you have to go to college because society says so. You have to have a certain type of job because society says so.'

We often have to fight with what our parents taught us, what our teachers taught us, what our bosses teach us, what the government teaches us, what marketing teaches us. There are so many things flooding the brain where we get confused as to what's honest and what's not. And so it's a hard process to overcome that.

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah I totally agree. You know it's very difficult to be positive when we feel like crap, you know? And whether it's physically or emotionally.

So for everybody listening who's ever felt like, 'I want to be honest with myself about what I want to do with my life,' or 'I'm trying to really figure out what my purpose is, but I'm having a hard time,' all you need to do to move in that direction is to focus on these foundational principles of working on your physical health, your spiritual health, and also this idea muscle as well, and I want to come back to that.

But the bottom line is once you start to work on yourself, all of those other things become so much more easy to grasp. They become a lot closer to you. But the thing is it's already there, it's just difficult because it might be covered up by like Twinkie filling or something.

So as we work on getting ourselves healthier in all those different places, those are things that start to manifest. I know that happened for me.

James Altucher: It's true. Like if you're not- and you mentioned Twinkies, let's say you eat Twinkies all day. I'm again taking an extreme, but what's going to happen to you the next day?

Your brain is going to feel a little foggy, you're going to feel a little more tired, and so what if someone presents to you, "Oh hey can you help me out with this project I'm working on?" You might be like, "I'm taking a nap right now, I can't really-" or you might not be able to put your whole 100% into it.

What if that would have been the thing that really set your heart on fire doing that project and then you realize, "Oh my gosh I really want to do this for maybe not the rest of my life, but I want to explore this. This might be something I'm really interested in." You never would have had the chance because you just ate Twinkies the whole day the day before.

It's also connected. Why would Twinkies be connected with finding your purpose? And yet they're connected. It's all a spiderweb.

Shawn Stevenson: It's called a Twinkie Spiderweb.

James Altucher: The Twinkie Spiderweb.

Shawn Stevenson: Or the Twinkie Hangover.

James Altucher: Right.

Shawn Stevenson: So one of the things that was so fascinating in your book, and so this one was in 'The Power of No,' I love the statement that you said. And so also I want to preface this; being able to access the power of no is a part of all those different areas of physical health, of mental health.

James Altucher: Sure.

Shawn Stevenson: Of spiritual health. And so you say this, "When you start saying no to the bad things, the yeses compound every day. Yeses compound automatically the way interest does at a bank." So can you talk about what you mean by that?

James Altucher: Yeah. I mean for so long I was saying yes to so many things that I didn't want to do. So, 'Can you do this coffee meeting?' 'Yes.' 'Can you do this TV spot about what's going on in the financial world?' 'Yes.' 'Can you go to this party, or this dinner, or this networking thing, or speak at this conference?' 'Yes, yes, yes, yes.' And I didn't really want to do any of these things.

Some of them maybe were good, some of them were not so good, but I felt like I had to say yes or I would miss out. It's fear of missing out, I would miss some opportunity.

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah, FOMO.

James Altucher: Yeah, and what I found was is that when I took time for myself- I started saying no to more things and I just started saying no to the things that I really wanted to do.

Like I really wanted to meet a certain person so I'll say yes to that. Or I really just want to stay home and read a book instead of traveling to a conference. Or I really want to write this morning instead of going to some meeting in the city that probably won't work out. Most meetings don't work out.

Like we all go to business meetings all the time, they don't really generate money. A meeting works out if it generates money. So most meetings don't generate anything. Maybe it's a little networking, maybe not, who knows?

But I found that once I cleared the plate, and this is an ongoing process, and it gets more and more extreme. But once I really cleared the plate, I found that as I said yes to the things I really wanted to do- I'll take a step back.

Let's say every day we make 10,000 choices; small choices and big choices. I started to realize a larger percentage of my choices were coming from me as opposed to what other people were choosing for me.

So I started to realize, 'Oh I want to do this, so I'm going to do this.' Or 'I'm choosing to do X, Y, and Z instead of someone saying, 'Hey you should really be doing X, Y, and Z.'"

And as I- so I consider myself a choicest. Like I focus on every day making more and more choices that are coming internally from me as opposed to from external forces. And that just makes my life a lot happier, and it makes it a lot more creative, and suddenly I realized I started having a lot more opportunities.

So the only times I've ever made money is when I was choosing to do my own things that were making me happy.

Those are the only businesses that ever made me any money at all was when it came from my own choices as opposed to doing things that other people said, 'Oh this will make you money.' Or 'You need to really do these TV appearances, or speak at these conferences,' or whatever.

Shawn Stevenson: Oh man there are so many things that are coming up for me like in a relationship context. You know everybody wants to be happy in that arena. Nobody's like, 'My goal is to have the worst relationship ever. Like that would just make my lifetime.' Nobody has that principle, we all want to be happy in our relationship.

And I believe, and this is something I repeat over and over again, that our relationships are the most influential factor on our health and our success in life. And but so many people don't have the audacity to say no to the terrible relationship, and so they're blocking out the possibility of a great one.

This could be just of course in the context of dating, and you're wasting your time hitting your head up against the wall trying to get this guy to change. Like he's got potential and he's still doing the same crappy things to you, still staying out too late, doing this stuff, whatever you don't know where he's at, he's coming home, he's got glitter on him and you're like, "Whose glitter is this?"

And so- but you don't say no. And I know that there is of course an emotional attachment, there's a mental addiction that can take place, but the bottom line is you're blocking your blessing.

You're blocking the opportunity of having this great relationship come because the space is filled and you won't even see it.

That is the problem and that's really why I'm so excited to talk to you. 'The Power of No,' which the title sounds very familiar to another book.

James Altucher: Oh you know, I did that- so there's 'The Power of Now,' by Eckhart Tolle.

Shawn Stevenson: Right.

James Altucher: An excellent book. And a publisher called me, Hay House, and they're like- they called me literally the day after another book of mine came out called 'Choose Yourself,' which I had self-published. And so Hay House called and said, "Well do you have any other books?"

And so I said just as a joke, because I was just reading 'The Power of Now' right then, I'm like, "How about we just take the W off of 'The Power of Now' and call it 'The Power of No'? And they're like, "We love it."

And so we signed up right away, and I turned in a book, and that was that.

Shawn Stevenson: Oh that's fantastic. I love it, I love it. Another part on the other side though of the 'no' can be 'us,' you know? So let's talk about rejection. This is something that I saw kind of highlighted in your book as well.

Rejection- so for a lot of us we want to accomplish things, we want to have the person that we want, we want to have the business partners that we want, our kids can reject us. There's a lot of different spots in our life that we can get rejection.

So take us through- talk about rejection from your experience. Like is this something that's positive? Can it be turned positive?

James Altucher: Yeah I mean rejection happens in every area of life. So you get rejected from colleges when you apply, some will accept you, some will reject you.

You get rejected from jobs, and people take it very personally. They don't say, "Oh okay there might be some other reasons, other factors." Everybody takes things personally.

You ask a girl out, you get rejected, you have no reason why but you might just get rejected. If I ask someone to come on my podcast, nineteen out of twenty times I get rejected.

I was once talking to the producer of a major like top three late night TV show- if I say the name, everyone will know the show, it's one of the most famous shows of all time.

He told me nineteen out of twenty times they get rejected, and sometimes they track down guests for two years before the guest comes on.

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah.

James Altucher: I'm just trying to think of other situations. I'll get rejected for books, for talks, people just won't like something I've written. You get rejected certainly in the dating world. You reject and you get rejected, and it's just a normal part of life.

Or I just did- I like to try different things. I feel like life- you should always try things that you are curious and interested in trying.

So like I've been trying stand-up comedy lately, and so I went out a couple times, and a few times it was very successful, and then the third time I go out, I do the same jokes, not a single laugh. Like it was dead, and it was brutal. And afterwards it's just like, okay so finally that happened. Like I got rejected there. And you just have to roll with it.

Like everything is a part of life, and in dealing with rejection, it's such a wonderful test. So a couple years ago I had a situation where I was having a great day, like a fantastic day, and in the middle of the day- it was a great day because a friend of mine was shooting the pilot of his TV show. So I was really proud of him, and I was on the set of this wonderful TV show, I was learning so much.

In the middle of the day I get a phone call, emergency board meeting of a company I was on. And I'm like, 'Oh this is going to be great. Maybe the company is getting sold or something.' I found out just horrible news, the company was basically going bankrupt within days.

And so once again I was losing an enormous amount of money, and I figured, 'You know what? I've been writing about this for years. Now I get a chance to put- I haven't had a chance in a few years to really have something like horrible like this happen to me, so I get a chance to put to work what I've been writing about.'

So A) it ended up being a great day because I decided, 'Look I'm at this wonderful experience on this TV set, I'm going to enjoy the day, and then I'm going to just put to work what I always write about,' and essentially I just never got disturbed by losing this money.

It became this fascinating thing that, 'Wow what I've been writing about, and had always worked for me before is working for me even faster now because I'm aware of it.' And so that made it a great experience.

So you can actually take rejection and say, 'I'm going to make this a great experience that I'm going to learn from, and so that I'm going to get better and better at it so that I can learn from it and bounce back faster.' The faster you bounce back, the faster you can try again, and the more wonderful experiences you can have in life.

Shawn Stevenson: Oh man, that's so good. I wanted to talk about this because so often people aren't doing things out of fear of rejection. And I think if we look at our hard wire- we're kind of hard wired to do that and to not do things because of this fear, because we evolved and grew as a species in a tribal context.

So if you're rejected from the tribe, that means death.

James Altucher: Right.

Shawn Stevenson: So there's this weird fear of death attached to rejection.

James Altucher: Yeah your oxytocin will plummet, right? That's the neurochemical that signifies how much you're bonding with the tribe. So either your oxytocin, or your serotonin, essentially you'll get afraid that you're going to be on the outskirts of the tribe and you'll be eaten faster when the wolves attack.

As opposed to the alpha male is in the center and he's protected, or she's protected.

Shawn Stevenson: Yes the alpha female, which I just saw Fast and the Furious Part 17, whatever it is.

James Altucher: Is it good? Should I see it?

Shawn Stevenson: It's pretty good, yeah. I mean it's crazy, it's just like what else can we do? Right? So now you've got the big submarine. Last time they jumped off of a building to another building in Dubai. Now he's taking on a submarine with a car. Alright man, I'm in.

But anyways, he has the alpha woman, Vin Diesel is kind of the alpha male, and then he's got the alpha partner. But I digress.

So I wanted to just point people's attention to this because in the context of rejection we have to be smarter than our old programming, right? This kind of hard wiring.

James Altucher: That's such an important point because the great thing about humans is we became not just tribal animals but global animals.

Shawn Stevenson: Right.

James Altucher: So let's say I'm playing basketball and I lose. Okay, no problem. Now I'll go to chess club and maybe I'll win there.

Like we can now choose, we can diversify the tribes that we're in. So I can try this and be okay with losing because I'm now going to do this, and that's part of what play is all about.

Play kind of developed initially as a way to almost prepare ourselves for hunting. So when we're not hunting we can play, and that kind of keeps our muscles going so that later we're ready to hunt.

But now part of play is I can switch the tribes that I'm in and figure out the tribes that I enjoy being in, and also it's okay if I enjoy basketball but I lose, I'm okay with that because maybe I'll do better over here where I can have fun, and enjoy, and be better.

So we can diversify where we can get our serotonin or oxytocin spikes.

Shawn Stevenson: I love that diversification in that.

James Altucher: Tribal diversification.

Shawn Stevenson: Hashtag on a tee-shirt.

James Altucher: I like that.

Shawn Stevenson: So you know what? For everybody listening who has been worried about taking action out of fear of rejection, again this is old programming and we can be smarter than this, we can trump that programming and realize that there's probably a lot of reward outside of this rejection.

He mentioned a lot of different things that a lot of people wouldn't even be willing to share of being rejected on, but that's led to his level of success as well. He's not- I mean the fear might still be there, but he does it anyways. It's just taking action.

So I want to go back and actually talk about the idea muscle, but I want to do that right after this quick break. We'll be right back.

Alright we are back and we are talking with James Altucher, bestselling author and the host of The James Altucher Show, and one of my favorite podcasts. And we are here, and right before the break I mentioned the idea muscle, right? I think you said something about we can become an idea machine?

James Altucher: Yeah.

Shawn Stevenson: So what is that all about?

James Altucher: So when I first- the first time I went totally broke I was about to lose my house, the IRS was after me, and I wrote letters to all of my heroes, like let's say thirty or forty people, and I said, "Hey I'd love to sit down and pick your brain, I'll buy you a cup of coffee." And so I wrote to forty people, nobody- zero people returned my emails.

James Altucher: Because it's not like Warren Buffett is going to say to his secretary, "Gladys, hold everything. James Altucher- I have \$60 billion, but James Altucher is going to buy me a cup of coffee, so I'm going to go meet him."

So nobody's going to respond- zero people responded to that. So I started to think to myself, 'Well I have to give something, and I have to have no expectations back,' because that's why they're my heroes, is that they didn't spend their whole lives responding to people like me.'

And so what I would do is I'd research heavily each person and I'd write down ten ideas of how their business could be better. And I would send these ideas to them and- you know I would send ten ideas how this person could run his business better, ten ideas for articles this writer can write, and so on.

And I sent all these out, no expectations- I didn't ask for anything. I didn't say, "Give me five minutes of your time, let's have a coffee." I just said, "You can have these for free, I don't want them." I even sent software that I had written to one hedge fund manager. I said, "These work, I use them, you can have the software, no expectations."

And three out of the forty people wrote back to me and said, "Let's meet." And one person gave me a job writing articles which then led to books, and TV spots, and everything else. Another person allocated money to me to manage in a hedge fund, so that led to a hedge fund business and everything. And another person eventually twelve years later came on my podcast.

So what I started doing after that was I realized, 'Oh this writing ideas thing is pretty good.' So I started writing ten ideas a day, and I still do this every day, ten ideas for books I can write, ten ideas for businesses I can start, ten ideas for Google to improve their business, ten ideas for LinkedIn to improve their business.

And I just- most of the time I'll write bad ideas, you can't write good ideas every day. But the whole idea is to just exercise that muscle, and that muscle gets stronger and stronger. And I always say within three to six months you will literally be an idea machine.

Like your car could break down in the desert with no car for miles around, and your idea machine will kick in and you'll figure out how to get out of there. And so that's how strong it is.

So this idea muscle has just saved me now countless times. Any time I get nervous about my financial situation, or a romantic situation, or creative situation, the idea muscle kicks in, helps save my life.

Shawn Stevenson: Oh man.

James Altucher: Literally saves my life.

Shawn Stevenson: Man this is- for whatever reason it's bringing up Walt Disney in my mind.

James Altucher: Well Walt Disney is a fascinating situation. Like here's a company that started in the middle of the Great Depression, okay? People weren't necessarily going out there to watch Snow White.

So if you ask what business was Walt Disney in in 1937, you would say, 'Oh well he put out Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, one of the most beautiful movies ever.' But that's not how Walt Disney made money.

Walt Disney, his idea machine kicked in and no one would guess- here's how Walt Disney made money. Here's what business the Walt Disney company was actually in. They were in the watch business.

So if you think about it, the Mickey Mouse watches, that's when they started and they sold two million of those watches in 1937 and that's how they made a profit. If they never had that idea, they would've probably gone out of business the year Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs came out.

Shawn Stevenson: You know what? He has the terminology, the Imagineering, right? And just so many incredible ideas, and also I'm thinking about Stan Lee now. But some of these things don't happen for people until later in life because they've spent so much time pining around trying to figure this stuff out. But you can figure it out. It's figure outable I guess you could say.

James Altucher: Yeah.

Shawn Stevenson: You know and I think that the premise, it goes back to the foundational pieces you talked about; the spiritual health, the mental health, physical health.

But you threw in, this is why I wanted to talk about this, this idea portion. And I was wondering- like I was going through my own mind, like why is this so important?

Well in the context of our health and wellness, things happen. Somebody might be hit with an injury, right? They've been working so hard, and they've been on track, and

they're really changing their body, and then something comes up that sabotages- seemingly sabotages their progress.

If you're not somebody who's worked this muscle, you might throw in the towel right there, I've seen it done countless times.

James Altucher: Sure. I mean bad things always happen. It doesn't matter how successful you are, it doesn't matter how much you've been working on all of these different aspects of your life, bad things happen.

You might have a family member get sick, you might get hit by a car, you might get hit by a tax audit, or somebody might break up with you, or friends might get hurt, whatever. You might lose your job, the economy might change.

So you have to- the idea muscle being built allows you to handle all these possible bad things, or rejections, or whatever and come up with ideas around them. How you can survive and flourish even with these bad things happening in your life.

Shawn Stevenson: Right, yes. And we can all develop that muscle to be better equipped to do it, and it's a practice, and it's something that I'm definitely like now going to start employing. And I love that there's multiple- there are so many different categories that you could put down.

So you recommend picking a specific topic to pick ideas for?

Yeah, and so for instance the other day I told you I totally bombed in stand-up comedy, and again that was just something experimental that I wanted to try. I like to do little experiments in my life, I like to challenge myself to things that I'm afraid of.

So I love stand-up comedy, but I'm always afraid of the thought of it. So someone asked me to do it, and someone asking me to do it I just immediately said, "That's a challenge, I'm doing it." Because I've always wanted to do it, and they didn't think I would show up. The owner of the stand-up comedy club- I showed up there and he said, "I didn't think you'd show up."

I did it, again first night was good, second time horrible. So today I wrote down- I was going to start with ten but I wrote twenty jokes, just totally new jokes. I probably spent like about an hour, hour and a half, and again they were probably all bad.

So I had the benefit, I sent them to a friend of mine who writes jokes for a living, and he kind of commented on- he gave notes on each one. So I had that extra benefit, but that's through- again, decades of knowing who to build relationships with, and networking with people I enjoyed, and so on.

So I knew for a fact the jokes were bad because then he commented, "Here's how you can improve this one. Here's how you can improve this one," and so on. But at

least it exercised that muscle, and now I'll do it again tomorrow maybe, and the muscle will be stronger.

Shawn Stevenson: There was something else in the book that was really fascinating to me, it kind of struck me, and it's a quote- or this is actually a title of a friend of yours' book, and it said, "Love yourself like your life depends on it."

James Altucher: Yeah.

Shawn Stevenson: Alright so what do you mean by that?

James Altucher: So that's my friend and occasional business partner Kamal Ravikant, and he was going through a hard time in his life, and he was also going through a health issue that seemed to be really debilitating.

Like there would go months at a time I wouldn't hear from him and I'd have to like really check in, "Are you okay?"

And then one time he seemed all better and I'm like, "What happened?" And he said, "Well I just literally dragged myself to the mirror and I just started repeating to myself, 'I love myself, I love myself, I love myself.'"

Because often for whatever reason, as a kid- we don't even know why. It could be as a kid we didn't get that love. Maybe our mother, or our caretaker, or whoever was not there for us, and so didn't love us in the way that we needed to. So we felt the need to replace that in some way.

Maybe we ate too much so we get those feelings of happiness. Or maybe we became a people pleaser. Or maybe we got sick.

And so when I later- much later now that I'm thinking about it, I interviewed Kamal about his most recent book, and it turned out he had suffered some abuse as a child.

And so maybe that's related, maybe it's not. But in any case, through this process of every day reminding himself that he loved himself, he did get physically better.

He got recovered somehow from this illness that he never really understood what- this chronic illness, he never really understood what it was, but he got better.

And I thought this story was so great. I said to him, "You've got to let me write about it. I'm going to write about this." And he's like, "No, no, no. I think I'm going to write about it."

And so he wrote the book and it became a massive bestseller. I mean he's got like 2,300 reviews now on Amazon and it's always doing well.

For me also it changed the definition of what a book was. It's only a 60-page book, he self-published it, and it pays his rent every month. It's just the checks from his book. Like the book came out like four years ago.

Shawn Stevenson: That's awesome.

James Altucher: Yeah he's very successful, and that was that book and it's still doing well.

Shawn Stevenson: That's amazing. You know for me it struck me because I really feel that we don't think about it. Just something that's not in our awareness to love ourselves.

You know we're so external, we're so worried about this thing, that thing, loving this person, loving this duty.

James Altucher: Or getting this person- or doing things to get this person to love us. How often do we sacrifice what we really want because we want someone else to love us because someone didn't love us earlier so we think we have to do something special, or to get a boss to love us, or to get the government to love us, or society, or our peers, or whoever.

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah and sadly to say our culture also inundates us with this- there's an underlying concept I feel that we shouldn't love ourselves in some weird way. Saying that, that would be something that's self-righteous, self-centered to love ourselves.

James Altucher: Right. Well you know when I first came out with my book 'Choose Yourself,' which was really all about what we're talking about here, a lot of people without reading the book said instantly, "Oh that's selfish."

Well why is it selfish for me to do what makes me happy? Unless what makes me happy is like shooting people, or like robbing people, why should it be the case that that's selfish for me to- the best way for me to have impact on the world is for me to be as healthy and as creative as possible.

Then I'm going to have the greatest impact on the world.

It's not about making a vote once every four years, it's not about sacrificing my needs for someone else's needs, it about me being healthy so I'm as strong as I possibly could be, it's about me being as creative as I could possibly be, it's about me having a strong network of friends that I'm emotionally- that I love and who love me and support me.

And then I'm going to have the best possible chance to have a positive impact on the world.

And yet people hear that title, and you're right, people say, "Oh that's selfish." It's actually the exact opposite of selfish.

Shawn Stevenson: Yeah, I'm so glad that you said that and kind of dissected that. I think one of the most unselfish things you can do, ironically is to be selfish in taking care of yourself.

James Altucher: Exactly.

Shawn Stevenson: So you can show up better for everybody else.

James Altucher: Right like what if you decided- and I know you do this. What if you decided, 'Oh I'm not going to do a half hour of exercise in the morning because I really need to go out and get to my job early and please my boss.'

Well you're going to get more and more tired during the day, you're going to perform worse and worse at the job, and eventually you're going to get depressed, and which means you're going to be- your wife's going to be less happy, your kids are going to be less happy, you're going to be less happy and you're going to be more tired at the end of the day.

So and that's all because you didn't choose yourself to exercise for that half hour in the morning. That simple thing of not choosing yourself will ruin or make worse the lives of everybody around you, particularly your own.

Shawn Stevenson: And you're going to somehow end up with glitter on you. So James, this is so awesome. I've got a final question for you, and I'm interested to hear your answer. Your life is very different than the norm in a good way, and I'm curious what is the model that you're here to set with the way that you're living your life personally?

James Altucher: You know that's an interesting question. I think everybody is different, but I think at the same time, everybody can- and I don't- advice is autobiography, so I don't give any advice, I just say this is what I've done. But everyone can fill in the blanks as to what is physically healthy for them, what is emotionally healthy for them, what is creatively healthy or mentally healthy for them, and what is spiritually healthy. And that means something different for each person.

And you've talked about this before, like everybody could have a different diet but we can all still be healthy. I mean if you have- within a range. We can't all eat Twinkies, we can't have the Twinkie Diet, but some people will do Paleo, some people are vegetarians, we can all figure out ways to be nutritious. And it's the same thing.

Fill in the blanks just on those things, and I can guarantee that'll give you the opportunity to be an idea machine, to be honest with yourself, to find out what things

you love and set your heart on fire, whether they're people, or activities or whatever, and ultimately to choose yourself, and to choose yourself for however you define success because there's no one definition for that either.

Shawn Stevenson: Oh man, I love it. I love it. James, can you let everybody know where they can connect with you online, where they can find your books, and all that good stuff?

James Altucher: Yeah, www.JamesAltucher.com and I would recommend the book 'Choose Yourself' or my most recent book 'Reinvent Yourself,' or my podcast, The James Altucher Show. Hand in hand I think it goes with The Model Health Show, so I hope you enjoy both shows. And Shawn was just on my show, we'll probably figure out- we'll air these at the same time, and I hope to connect with all of you.

Shawn Stevenson: Awesome man, thank you so much for your gift.

James Altucher: Thank you for having me on.

Shawn Stevenson: And man-

James Altucher: I never thought I would be on your show when I first started listening to it.

Shawn Stevenson: Oh my goodness, that's like the ultimate compliment. I mean funny enough, and I shared a story with him that something that he said changed the course of even where I live right now. And this was probably- I don't know, maybe two years ago, a year and a half ago. Just something you said. Because- and that's the energy that James carries. If you really pay attention to what he's saying, he's dropping like life-changing insights if you're willing to listen. And so I just want to thank you for that, man.

James Altucher: You're very welcome.

Shawn Stevenson: Everybody, thank you so much for tuning into the show today. Big take-away for me and that I hope you got as well, is to choose yourself. And that's something that it really comes with the territory in this whole process of building that spiritual health, your physical health, your mental health, your emotional health, and also becoming an idea machine.

For all of those things to take place you have to say yes to choosing you, and so often we are pining away, struggling in our lives trying to fill everybody else's tank and ours is empty. And choosing ourselves, I think it is really the greatest thing that you can do for your family, for your community.

Because I know for certain that in my own experience every single morning when I wake up, and I did it this morning, I'm here with James in New York City right now,

but in my hotel room I woke up and the first thing that I said was, "How can I serve today?" And I sit with that for just a moment, and I take a breath, and I let that play in my subconscious.

So I'm all about service, and I'm all about helping to bring value and life to the lives of others. But I do know that every single day, if I'm not taking care of me first, I can't fulfill on that promise and that question when it shows up, because every single day it does show up in a way for me to step up and to be of service in the life of somebody or many people.

So please take heed to that and really say yes. Say yes to you, and you deserve it, you really do deserve it. And I appreciate you tuning into the show, and we've got so many amazing episodes coming up.

By the way, I think that you noticed this episode came out on a special date. Every single first Monday of the month / Sunday night depending on where you are in the world, we're going to drop a bonus hot episode for you, so make sure to stay tuned for that, alright? Every first Monday of the month we're going to drop a bonus episode.

Alright I appreciate you so much. Take care, have an amazing day, and I'll talk with you soon.

And make sure for more after the show, you head over to www.TheModelHealthShow.com, that's where you can find the show notes, and if you've got any questions or comments, make sure to let me know. And please head over to iTunes and give us a five star rating, and let everybody know that our show is awesome.

Jade Harrell: Yeah.

Shawn Stevenson: And you're loving it.

Jade Harrell: Yeah.

Shawn Stevenson: And I read all the comments, so please leave me a comment there, and take care everybody. I promise to keep giving you more powerful, empowering, great content to help transform your life. Thanks for tuning in.