

Episode 22: Kick Game Cray w/ Shoe Designer Mountain Chang

[00:00:00] **Drew Stegmaier:** Hey everybody. This is The Steg Drew and I'm your host, Drew Stegmaier. This show is new, evolving and finding itself. We don't yet know what it will turn out to be. And that's exciting. I believe the world has a current civility deficit. And with this endeavor, I'll be exploring tough and taboo topics with compassion and incivility so you can do the same with your friends, family, and coworkers.

[00:00:25] This episode was a first for a number of reasons. It is with a startup founder in the fashion industry, which also is the luxury goods and fitness industry. Mountain Chang has a company called C a R E T S and they sell barefoot dress.

[00:00:47] Yes, that's right. Barefoot dress shoes. We talk about how his company came about, how he got into it, how he lives his life. He is quite the inspirational person. He's into a lot of different things. For example, in addition to running Koretz he held a state weightlifting record for California. He also does professional singing lessons and in a prior life, he was an accountant.

[00:01:15] In addition to that, he ran the LA marathon completely. He completed it completely barefoot. That is absolutely nuts. And all these things exist inside a single person and apologies for the meowing in the background. That is my dear beast and cat buttercup. This episode shows you what a single person can do.

[00:01:38] You can do many things, and I encourage you to go out and embrace your own curiosity and just try stuff because Mountain is the lived example of just that. Are you tired of reacting to imaginary bullets? Join us for an interactive workshop, developing skills to begin your journey to freedom, own your triggers.

[00:01:56] **AD:** Claim your shift, free yourself from reactivity and transform trigger bullets into bouquets. This compassionate connecting workshop can be found online@compassionateconnecting.com slash hashtag workshops. Since that might sound a little confusing. [Compassionate connecting.com/hashtag workshops](https://compassionateconnecting.com/hashtag-workshops). Check the episode description as well for a link again, free yourself from reactivity. Check it out.

[00:02:28] Mountain! Welcome!

[00:02:30] **Mountain Chang:** Hey, thanks, Drew. Glad to be here.

[00:02:32] **Drew Stegmaier:** So I want to start it off with, usually we do a little bio and introduction, but a particular thing from your bio stood out like a lot. And for my listeners who maybe don't know I've been wearing barefoot shoes for eight years now.

[00:02:47] And you ran the LA marathon barefoot, is that right?

[00:02:52] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah. Yeah. Well, to be technically accurate, I didn't run the whole thing. By mile 20 I hit the wall pretty hard and I had to walk those last six months. I did complete the LA marathon without any footwear. Okay.

[00:03:05] **Drew Stegmaier:** You ran 20 miles without shoes, like.

[00:03:10] Yeah. Yeah. And as far as I understand this is on asphalt, right. And, or concrete?

[00:03:16] **Mountain Chang:** It was unfortunately on asphalt. I was preparing for concrete sidewalks and by race day, you know, I started off on the sidewalks, but one not racing officials or organizers said, Hey, you can't run the sidewalk. Cause I was like, oh, it's going to be on rough asphalt for the rest of this marathon.

[00:03:34] Yeah. Yeah. Wow.

[00:03:37] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. So still, you know, even if you didn't quite make it running, you completed 26.2 miles without shoes. And let's say you ran 6.2 miles after doing 20, right. Without any shoes on at all. And. I don't know about you, but I think that's fucking amazing. Like that's a lie.

[00:03:59] **Mountain Chang:** It was pretty crazy.

[00:04:00] I didn't train enough to be honest about what had happened with that race. I was born to run. I was looking for even five fingers on Amazon, a very intelligent person suggested this book. And so I read this book and I was so hyped up about running. And I thought of it as reclaiming my evolutionary birthright as a human, as like the hunter of the savannas, you know?

[00:04:26] And I told my friend about this and the way I imagined it was, you know, we would go 5k 10 K half and the full marathon, but he just sends me like, Hey, let's do this one. And it was the LA marathon six months from that moment on. And I was like, what? Okay, let's do it. And at that point I was, I hadn't been running.

[00:04:48] So we just went from being, I wouldn't say we're couch potatoes, you know, we exercise and other ways, but we went from not running to doing a full marathon in six months. And I would say that, you know, in the end it wasn't the barefoot part that was challenging. My feet were fine.

[00:05:06] I could actually send you some pictures of my feet from the end of the race. I mean, obviously they're very dirty, but they're intact and they're totally for you. Yep. Fine. Yeah. But it was everything else about it's a frickin marathon, you know, so I think I lost like 10 pounds of water weight throughout that race.

[00:05:23] And then you know, it was hard to walk afterwards. Yeah, it is. Yeah. It's just very intense.

[00:05:30] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. I mean, regardless of what you're wearing. Yeah. That's a long distance. And as far as I understand the event the first guy who did it, killed him. Right. Like the story of the grief.

[00:05:41] So, yeah. So, I mean, yeah, like if you just think that's pretty intense. Like the first person who did it died as a result right now people do these things for fun and to raise money for cancer. It's like this killed the first person, the first one died. So yeah, the most I've done is a half marathon.

[00:06:03] So, I mean, I commend you for wearing shoes, not barefoot shoes either. And I think I would say for myself, like before I got into the whole barefoot shoe movement, if you told me you did a marathon barrier, I would not believe you. I would honestly like to tell you're full of shit or say I, I wouldn't.

[00:06:23] Right. So yeah, I wanted to kind of start with that as they like, Hey, let's just get this out of the way, this is a huge outlier. And I guess as far as the barefoot shoe movement goes, but just based on my understanding if your form is not good, you get a lot of feedback, maybe not. So gentle feedback about that quickly, would you say that's right?

[00:06:47] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah for sure. For sure. So I typically talk about the benefits of barefoot from two buckets and that is structure. And sensory. And what you were talking about just right there is the sensory part. So running barefoot, a huge advantage of it is that it's like having a really strict running coach constantly with you.

[00:07:10] So when you run without shoes, you get so much feedback on your form that you can't really push yourself to the point where you hurt yourself, because it's like, your body will tell you, Hey, you got to fix this. You're not doing it. Right. And you just got to go or else at all, it'll be too painful.

[00:07:29] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. So for those who hear the story and think, oh, I'm going to do that too. Like what were you doing before starting marathon training in terms of barefoot activities?

[00:07:38] **Mountain Chang:** I, you know, I do think that being barefoot in the house gave me a big head start, like throughout my whole life, because I didn't, it wasn't quite as much of a change.

[00:07:52] The amount of time that I spent barefoot. So that was advantageous. And I ramped up the mileage in my training over time. So yeah. Start slow pay attention. Yeah. Was that your question, like how to get started? Yeah.

[00:08:10] **Drew Stegmaier:** Well, and also, like, were you w whatever your other activity was? I know you mentioned couch potato, but where are you working out barefoot or would you go on one mile runs barefoot, and then this marathon was a huge jump.

[00:08:25] Like I'm just trying to maybe yeah. Get that understanding for people who might start.

[00:08:30] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah. Yeah. Okay. I had like a brief, like eighth grade. I ran cross country, and then throughout college, Oh there, there was I went to university of California, San Diego, and there was a campus loop, I think, four miles, which takes you around all of the campus.

[00:08:46] So I would run that for maybe a week while I was there. After college, I was mostly doing martial arts. I would stop by the open gym and spar with people. So yeah, that was right before running. I was doing martial arts, which doesn't really carry over too much running, I would say.

[00:09:07] **Drew Stegmaier:** But martial arts is a shoeless sport.

[00:09:10] Yes. Yes. Okay. Through that. Okay. Okay, cool. So yeah, I mean, I guess what I'm getting at is like, Hey, it's possible to go from maybe not running, but maybe having a baseline level of fitness to doing a barefoot marathon in half of the year. Right. You know, we have a case study. I find that incredibly empowering to hear and I thought that was a very cool part of your story.

[00:09:37] So aside from the marathon and folks, I'm sure we'll hear this in the intro, but why don't you just tell us about how you got into what you're doing now, or kind of background in bio, and that can be as vague or as shorter, as long as you like. Cause I have plenty of other questions.

[00:09:54] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah, sure.

[00:09:55] So, I was always a amateur athlete since I would say those middle school cross country days I felt like I always had to be training for something and not out of like obligation or like I'm worth if I'm not, but it was just, I always had a physical pursue as part of feeling whole as a person.

[00:10:14] And when I graduated from college, what I'd got most into was the pursuits. And for a while it was martial arts and doing running was largely inspired by getting LASIK couldn't get punched anymore after getting lazy. So I had to do something. Okay, perfect. Okay. Yeah. And when I got into the barefoot running you know, it was actually I got into a couple of different things separately, so it was airman fast thing.

[00:10:43] Barbell training, doing compound lifts barefoot running and organic whole food. And these four disparate ideas were suddenly tied together. When I found out about paleo, which is looking at human health through this lens of evolution and, you know, the type of environment that we evolved in not as like a historical reenactment, but more so as like a starting point, we can test hypotheses.

[00:11:10] And so just all of a sudden, like these four very different things made sense. You put it into ancestral evolution context. And I was just like, whoa. Yeah, that is so cool. It all ties together. And of course knowing all these things and looking at the way that I was living as a staff accountant at that time was like, oh, this is not a healthy lifestyle.

[00:11:35] And a big part of that. Was the shoes, you know, like I could be barefoot the rest of the time, but for those 40 hours, when I have to be in professional attire, I was not in healthy. And it was after doing this marathon that I was just like, you know, I know that these things are bad for me, and I really want us to live in for it.

[00:11:58] These things as dress shoes I had to wear. So one of the things that I did was I took a saw, and I try to shave off the heel of those dress shoes in order to make it look B flat. And it didn't really work because it kind of just made like a rocker kind of shoe. And I just ruined them and, you know, I looked online and the only thing that was available at the time was the vivo barefoot rock.

[00:12:22] **Drew Stegmaier:** And what was the time when you say at?

[00:12:24] **Mountain Chang:** Okay. And I just found so many things lacking about it. So that's when I decided, or I just thought to myself like, huh, I wonder if I could make a better shoe than this. So I just started writing down some ideas and I was like, yeah, I think I could design a better shoe than this.

[00:12:40] And I went for it. Okay.

[00:12:42] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. So, I mean, I'd love to, I'd love to go deeper. Like specifically, what was the, let's say the first one in terms of I assume we made a prototype or maybe many prototypes for years. And then there's the stuff that gets sold to the public via your company. So like, what was the first one?

[00:13:03] Like, like, did you need to go to Home Depot or like, how did you

[00:13:06] **Mountain Chang:** make the first one? Oh, okay. So I didn't know how to make and okay. Okay. So, so let me tell you about how I went about finding the factory then how's that? Okay. Sure. Cool. Cool. So, I, I was really inspired by the four hour workweek by Tim Ferriss.

[00:13:24] And one of the big things that I got from the book is like, Hey, you don't need just cause you want to make something doesn't mean build a factory. There's already existing factories you can contract with to help you with it. And I was like, oh wow, that's really cool. But how do I find a factory? And then he's like, oh, Hey, you know, you can actually hire these firms to find a factory.

[00:13:44] And I was like, oh cool. Everything's taken care of. So I reached out to one of them. They're based in, yeah. It's like a VA and professional services firm and I tell them, okay I'm looking for a shoe factory preferably somebody that has some environmental certifications preferably in the United States.

[00:14:01] So he has a similar culture and timing and it's like that. And you know, I gave him a list and yeah, said, go for it. And they said, okay, we will spend, what was it? We'll spend 40 hours on this 20 hours. We'll spend 20 hours on this and get back to you and we'll get back to you in a week.

[00:14:22] And so when we turn into two, two weeks ago, a month, when my turn into two months, I was just like, what's going on? And so I said, Hey, just stop what you're doing and send me what you have. So I looked at their list and I started dialing and it was a mess. Like, one of them said, Hey, sorry we only make like the back path of the shoe.

[00:14:40] We don't make the whole shoe. And another one was like, oh we do like customized shoes where people scan their feet and we make it exactly to that. And I was like, okay, that's not what I'm looking for. And somebody else said like, Hey, I'll try to tell your agent or whoever it is that called that we're a shoe repair shop.

[00:14:56] We're not like your factory. Oh man. Yeah. Yep. So, so what ended up happening was I did some Googling myself. I think I searched for the USA. Contract manufacturing, footwear. And I dialed

a couple of places. The factor that I ended up working with I was able to reach somebody, an executive and he said, Hey, you know, we're going to be in Vegas.

[00:15:24] Sorry about that.

[00:15:26] **Drew Stegmaier:** Sorry. Yeah, no worries. No worries. Life is imperfect. Yeah.

[00:15:32] **Mountain Chang:** So, where did we leave off?

[00:15:34] **Drew Stegmaier:** So the guy says he's going to be in Vegas.

[00:15:36] **Mountain Chang:** Oh yeah. He said, Hey, we're going to be in Vegas in like a week. You want to meet us there? And I was like, yeah, sure. So I took some time off from work. You know, I was let's staff accounts and at that time, and I went to meet them had them sign an NDA form.

[00:15:48] First of course, before telling them all the ideas that I had. And and yeah, it was just started coming together from there. So it started off. Trying to hire a firm to find the factory and then Googling myself and then finding somebody who was, who believed in the dream.

[00:16:06] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. So I want to go deeper into almost all of that for a number of reasons.

[00:16:11] And I'm trying to use you first, as inspiration for myself, right? This is straight up selfish, but also for other people who think, oh, I could never do that. Or they see you. Right. And they're like, okay, they're scrolling through the bio. And it's like, oh, mountain founder of keiretsu.com.

[00:16:29] Oh, they make dress shoes that are barefoot. Oh, this guy's probably a shoe designer. And it's like, well, yes you are a shoe designer, but you were an accountant. Right. And as far as I know from the story so far, it's not like, oh, drew, I was losing sleep for years over the lack of good shoes. It was such a tragedy.

[00:16:49] So first, what made you go with this VA like virtual assistant firm as you're at the outset. Right. Cause I probably would have gone to like Google first and then been like, oh, this is confusing. Let me hire someone. You went with them first, right? Like how do you work with a virtual assistant or how did you know about virtual assistants?

[00:17:09] Was it the four hour workweek?

[00:17:10] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah, because of the four-hour workweek and I had not worked with the virtual assistant before. I saw it as a learning opportunity and I figured, you know, I've never done any internationals before, so I figured let's work with an expert on this.

[00:17:22] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. And then I guess there was one week that turned into two months.

[00:17:27] Did they bill you only for 20 hours or was it like, Hey, we've done 20 hours and still nothing. And they just keep ratcheting up the money?

[00:17:35] **Mountain Chang:** No, you know, they never went over the allocation and the, yeah, I think in the end they refunded some hours. But after that I was just like, I.

[00:17:45] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. Okay.

[00:17:46] And so then you go on your own search and that was what a week from starting to Vegas? Roughly?

[00:17:55] **Mountain Chang:** Probably a week. Yeah, it didn't take too long.

[00:17:58] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. And then the people you met there, are they your current manufacturing partner?

[00:18:04] **Mountain Chang:** No. No. That was us yes. From before or based in Wisconsin. And we stopped working with them in 22.

[00:18:13] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. But they made the first edition. Right. Or the first run, if you will.

[00:18:17] **Mountain Chang:** They made the first three versions.

[00:18:20] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. And after you met them, like what what transpired or like how much time was it before you, you know, you got your hands on the first one.

[00:18:32] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah. Good question. So I met them in the summer of 2010 and I got.

[00:18:39] Something in my hand, by the end of the and yeah it was like a very early first draft. I didn't, so w one of the things that's Terri about our shoes is that we have this this hollow heel outsole.

[00:18:53] **Drew Stegmaier:** So for folks who are not on video, just have audio, how would you describe that? Or I could describe it to,

[00:19:00] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah.

[00:19:00] Go for it.

[00:19:01] **Drew Stegmaier:** So, yeah, since you guys, aren't looking at a picture hollow heel, if you wear a dress shoe, For men, it is a heeled shoe, right? An extreme version would be a cowboy boot that goes into a stirrup. But if you're not familiar with the whole barefoot movement, a raised heel strengthens your Achilles tendon.

[00:19:21] And so the hollow heel on the outside looks like a raised heel, but it is hollowed out. So your heel is not actually raised up and that's the secret sauce or part of the secret sauce. So it looks dressy on the outside. And if you're seeing the video, like guys, it looks like a dress shoe. It functions like a barefoot shoe.

[00:19:43] So yeah, there's a hollow heel, which I guess as far as I understand is different. Everything else. Right? Every other shoe that you would buy doesn't have a hollow heel, right. Or 99% of them. Yeah, I don't know of a single other section that has it on.

[00:19:59] **Mountain Chang:** We have a design patent on the combination of the hollow yield.

[00:20:02] Mixi cutouts to simulate the on the arch as well as like kind of the tapering shape of it.

[00:20:09] **Drew Stegmaier:** So you get the, I'll call it you know, first version early 2011.

[00:20:17] **Mountain Chang:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah. So, I started talking about the outsole with the hollow heel because the first time I saw that was summer of 2011. So about a year later from when I first started working with them and that's yeah.

[00:20:32] Getting the outsole is one of the very biggest steps. The mold to make the outsole for each size is it's like one, one to \$3,000 per size. This is a injection mold. Yeah. Yeah. Injection mold. Okay. Yep.

[00:20:48] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. Yeah. I understand. So there's the molds. And then during this time, are they sending you like just a single pairs back and forth and you're walking around town everywhere, testing them out or what's going on during this time.

[00:21:04] **Mountain Chang:** Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. They was 70 something. I would test it out. I would send instructions back. They're going to test it out. Send instructions back. Yeah.

[00:21:13] **Drew Stegmaier:** And are we talking like a couple of days between weeks months or some combination?

[00:21:18] **Mountain Chang:** It takes at least a month between samples. Yeah.

[00:21:21] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. And then after some rounds of this it's summer 2011, what happens then?

[00:21:29] **Mountain Chang:** 2011? We get that actually it's more like fall early fall around September often. I have the first fully finished prototype, which has the outsole and I have a crowdfunding campaign. I do want it. And our target was 50. I had no idea I was doing so I just threw out 50. And then we ended with 13.

[00:21:53] So we, we felt quite a bit short, but it was Paris. Oh, 50, \$50,000 goal and then waking \$13,000. Okay, cool. It was Indiegogo, so we still got the funding and and even though we didn't hit 50, it was still enough for me to see that, Hey, there's a fraternity here. People are willing to buy this. So with that with the completion of the crowdfunding campaign, I left my accounting job a few months after, and then went full time.

[00:22:26] **Drew Stegmaier:** And so when did the crowdfunding campaign end.

[00:22:31] **Mountain Chang:** December, 2012. And now that I think about it no. December, 2011, December, 2011. I left my job in February, 2012, which in hindsight was premature, but we didn't get inventory until may of 2013. Yeah.

[00:22:48] **Drew Stegmaier:** Wait, so you left your job February, 2012 and then it was a year and three months before you got inventory.

[00:22:55] Is that right?

[00:22:56] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah. So between that time, let's see a couple of things happened. I bought a shoe to reference and I was like, oh wow, I'm getting so many ideas on the shoe. So that I put some more I had some more ideas that I put into development. At another point, the factory said like, Hey, your bigger shoes, they're too wide for our machines.

[00:23:19] So we're going to have to make them a little bit narrower, but we'll compensate it by adding more height to the toe box. But we have when they told me by K the bigger shoes are too wide for the Michigan shoot, does this mean like this project is done and we can't make it wide enough, right.

[00:23:34] Yeah. And then and it wouldn't, I finally went into production. There was just, there was a lot of issues. This factory you know, I, like I said, I was an accountant at the time. I didn't really understand shoes. And for me, like dress shoes just means it's a black leather shoe. So I didn't really understand that there's like grades of dress shoes, you know?

[00:23:57] So what of this factory that I was working with, they're primarily a work boot and uniform shoe maker, the manufacturer in the U S still because they have a lot of defense contracts or they do a lot of like made in USA style, work boots. So they're not like a fine dress shoe maker. And our project ended up being very challenging for them to do that.

[00:24:21] Very first batch that I got and may of 2013. I believe I sent back a third of the first shipment for quality reason. Okay. And from then now working with that us shoe factory I kept the fulfillment in-house the entire time I worked with them because I just could not trust the quality that they were sending to me.

[00:24:43] I had to personally inspect everything before I went out. So yeah it was it took a while to get inventory a lot longer than I thought.

[00:24:52] **Drew Stegmaier:** And then what were you doing from the time you left your accounting job? Like, were you living off of savings, couch surfing or some combination?

[00:25:01] **Mountain Chang:** We still have money rolling in from just having the website up and accepting pre-orders.

[00:25:06] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. Got it. And was that enough to support you or like that plus savings was like kind of keeping you afloat, that plus savings?

[00:25:11] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah.

[00:25:12] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. Man. I'm smirking here because and you know, this is like a little personal, but like, I think it's funny and listeners will appreciate it as like, you emailed me about like, worrying that you have fast stuff and I'm like counting the time.

[00:25:27] I'm like, okay, 2010, we're talking four years before you got inventory from reading the book, getting the idea for years. So I think that's the opposite of half passing anything. Right. Cause when I

read the four hour workweek, I think other people might get this impression too of like, oh, okay, here's the deal.

[00:25:48] You just whip up some crap on the internet and print cash with the little cash printer and then you live on the beach and yay. And it was like, no, not at all. So to backtrack in the story a little bit you got an NDA when you met these people in Vegas, did you write your own NDA? Did you hire a lawyer for that?

[00:26:09] How did that godown?

[00:26:09] **Mountain Chang:** We just found a template online and I switched around the words that I had the sorts around and send it over to them. Yeah, it wasn't too rough. Going back to what you were saying about half passing and then, you know, relating it to taking like four years to get the inventory three years, three years to get inventory.

[00:26:27] I would say I have asked it because I could have gotten it sooner if I put my full ass into it, you know? I think if I. As soon as I quit that job, I got an apartment in Wisconsin and I was just on that factory all the time, making sure they were getting my samples done correctly, then maybe I could have had the production much sooner.

[00:26:51] And yeah, instead of being subject to their whims, I could have been for another factory backup just in case. And yeah, I since late 2017, I've been working with a college buddy. And these are the types of things he has me think about like when a factory tells me something, he's just like, you just kind of accept everything as is, you know, you gotta push back and like, look for solutions and and not push back as in like, like dictate what to do, but just like ask questions to see like, Hey, is there something I could help out with?

[00:27:27] **Drew Stegmaier:** Right. And I guess when you hear like, this is the option, maybe your college buddy interprets that as this is a option and there are 800 more and here they are, what do you think? Right. Which is just like a low, like a different worldview where like someone tells you the temperature and you're like, I disagree.

[00:27:46] What, like, you're using Fahrenheit, I'm using Celsius here, your number is wrong.

[00:27:54] **Mountain Chang:** Country for windshield and humidity.

[00:27:56] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. Well, and I guess maybe we'll separate half-ass sadness a little cause to give you some credit, like, dude, you're an accountant who came out with a shoe or right. You're not supposed to know how to do this. There is no reason for it to go so smoothly the first time.

[00:28:12] And now, you know, and maybe you have the scripts or the experience, but I just think that's. I love the story, right? It's such a compelling one. I would say it's like, man, reading a book gets inspired. Make an idea, develop this thing, go through struggle, persist, and you're still doing it, right. I mean, Koretz is still around, still exists.

[00:28:37] We're now in 2021, this is 11 years after you read the book. Right. And you could say 10 years after contacting the first manufacturer. Right. That's a solid decade. And as far as I understand, this is your livelihood, right? This is what pays the bills. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I think that's cool as hell.

[00:28:56] Oh man. Like maybe you're like, okay, well it's my life. But like, well, I think it's cool. So I'm curious about this persistence thing, right? Or you could call it these moments, the dark night of the soul. Right. And I won't say Sol either because that's too cheesy, but like what caused you to keep going or what caused you to not quit and be like, gosh, like, I'm just going to go back to accounting.

[00:29:26] This is hard, or this is annoying.

[00:29:29] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah. Well, I would say I will, I didn't have that great of a career to go back to. So when I left that accounting job, you know, I got into that accounting job. Right, right. As the recession hit. So, I'll just throw some numbers out there. I started at 45 Katie with them after.

[00:29:49] Two years, year and a half, two years. I was at like 47 K. So it wasn't like a super well-paying career that I was forfeiting. Although if I did stay in there and I kept getting promoted I'm pretty sure my net worth would be bigger than what it is now having to do the entrepreneurial route. But of course, like from this position, there is still a lot more upside potential as a business owner, as a career accountant.

[00:30:16] So, so one is like, you know, what else am I going to do? That was one and two. You know, I kind of had a story that I was that I've been a quitter and I didn't want to keep being a quitter. And so, you know, part of that was like three times you know, middle school, but my mom had sent has started me off at like a nicer, in like a nicer cities middle school.

[00:30:44] And then I was like, dude, like, I don't wanna, I don't want to sit in a car this much extra time just to go to school. And the same thing happened with high school. My mom had me go to her nicer

school and then like a year later I was just like, this isn't worth losing the sleep. I remember quitting band quitting football quitting.

[00:31:02] What else did I quit? Oh yeah. Yeah. And even college, I went to a better school and then I feel like I like downgraded a state school. So yeah, looking back at my life, I just felt like there was a lot of quitting and then here was something I was like, you know, I'm not going to quit this one. It's, there's a lot of potential here.

[00:31:24] And I am making a bigger impact than I would with an accounting career. And you know, I get these really kind of messages from people about how their Workday was previously filled with pain and B because of their shoes. And now because of our shoes, they don't even think about it anymore. So yeah, that's really motivating.

[00:31:48] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. Wow. Yeah. I think that's a great point. I mean, there's a couple things going on there. I'll call it the non-cash comp, right? The compensation you're getting, knowing you're making a difference in the world. And that's one of those things where I think Markets don't know how to value, right? Like what's the value of an email saying, oh, mountain, my feet don't hurt anymore.

[00:32:11] Thank you. Like, is that worth a dollar? A million? I don't know. Right. But it feels great. It feels great. And I think maybe saying, oh, each of those emails is worth \$7. So if I get a thousand of those emails a month, I will keep going. It just seems messed up. And the quitting thing did anything. I would say spur that on like, of all the projects or things you decided to stop for some reason, this one bucked the trend, so to speak and maybe that's chance, or maybe you don't know, but I wanted to ask if it was like, oh, I was watching Rocky one day and,

[00:32:52] **Mountain Chang:** No, there was nothing in particular.

[00:32:54] Nothing. Okay. Yeah. Sorry.

[00:32:58] **Drew Stegmaier:** No worries. I suspect, right. I'm not sure, but once let's say the company is up and running, so to speak or stabilizes, I don't know if that's the right word, but there's less pressure that it will fail. Right? It's like, Hey, we've sold shoes to a thousand people. Therefore we're confident we can sell them to a thousand more people.

[00:33:23] And when you're coming out with new shoes, having already made some, I think there's a, both implicit and explicit, I'll call it confidence via competence. Right. It's like, I know I can do more of

this because I've been doing it, but I'm curious you know, if that's true, right. That's just my best guess or my take, like once, what, was there a moment where you felt like we're good?

[00:33:48] Like w maybe we're good as in, we're not going to fail, which might be separate from I've made it

[00:33:55] **Mountain Chang:** right. Yeah. Yeah. Oh my God. I'm so glad you asked this question because the answer is not what you expect. So, I would say personally, the biggest misconception of entrepreneur-ism is that it gets easier.

[00:34:10] No, it only gets harder.

[00:34:18] **Drew Stegmaier:** Oh, geez.

[00:34:19] **Mountain Chang:** But like in the beginning, you know, everything's like fresh and new and fun and nobody expects you to succeed. You know, every, everybody expects you to fail. And there's no pressure. And I would say I did have I, I did start with the benefit of youthful, naive optimism, you know, like reading the four hour work weekend thinking it was literally that easy.

[00:34:45] I will say that, you know, Indiana. You know, here's how hard I thought starting a businesses and here's how easy Tim Ferris says it is. And the truth is in the middle, but it's closer to how easy he said it, but still nowhere near as easy as what he said is, you know? Yes. Yeah. And so, so, you know, I, in the end I didn't have to build a factory, but it was still a lot more work than just running ads and, you know yeah.

[00:35:15] Having this working machine. Yeah. So, so. It's. Yeah, so, so in the beginning it was a fun and easy and light. And now it's just like, now you have something to lose. Now you have people watching you. Now you have competitors who are gunning for you taking your ideas, you know? And yeah there's people counting on you like suppliers and contractors and people that were paying.

[00:35:44] So yeah it's only gotten harder, I would say. But at the same time, we've also gotten better at the business.

[00:35:53] **Drew Stegmaier:** I would say maybe new problems or different kinds of problems relative to the beginning. Okay. Yeah. I wanted to talk a little more about implementing the four hour work week for real. And I have read the book as well, probably around the same time.

[00:36:10] It might've been 20 13, 14. And yeah, my take on the book is that and again, I don't fully remember it, but my understanding is that the Genesis for the book was Tim Ferris had a business and

was working, I would say, an ungodly amount of time and was making great money and had this moment of, well, what's the point or who cares, right.

[00:36:35] If I can't spend any of it, or if I have no freedom and then go on a vacation, I am terrified that the business would get destroyed as a result of said vacation. And the opposite happened during the vacation, the business got even better. And then this germinated the book. And I think that first bit about working eight hours a week for a long time before going on vacation gets massively over it.

[00:37:01] Just like, Hey, maybe we should come up with something called the 80 hour workweek. I lived for a while before I wrote the four hour week.

[00:37:11] Yeah.

[00:37:12] **Mountain Chang:** And I didn't like that he needed to put in the 80 hours in order to create the four hour lifestyle. Is that what you mean?

[00:37:19] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. I don't know that I would explicitly make that claim, but I think it's not given nearly enough attention. Like, Hey, you were able to power down so to speak and go into this four hour a week mode because yeah.

[00:37:32] You built this massive business infrastructure. Right. It's like, oh, Hey, I don't need an umbrella now because I have a house that's like, but it took you three years of working in the rain to build your house. Like, I'm glad you were dry now, but what about all the time you spent in the rain? We don't talk about that.

[00:37:52] I'm dry now. You should be dry too. You should build a house. Yeah. Yeah. And I think this is just humbling and inspiring for myself. And I think for many other people I've had many ideas and inventions and projects and usually I just quit. Right. Or I just don't care enough to see it to fruition.

[00:38:12] Right. And it's making me rethink how I approach that. Or also just face that reality of like, Hey, it could take a while and it could be difficult. And just, you know, from our interactions and how much I've gotten to know. I think it's really easy as an outsider to be like, oh, you should have followed up more with the factories.

[00:38:32] You should have moved to Wisconsin and gotten that apartment. And it's like, but I didn't know anything about shoes. And I was an accountant, you know, like it's so easy to armchair quarterback it. And maybe now you would do that. And I think anybody is doing something, so I guess I'd call it interdisciplinary, right?

[00:38:51] Like innovation often comes from outsiders, cause someone is outside and sees something like, why aren't they all doing this that way? Don't they know they can just remove the heel from the shoe and stop hurting their feet all the time. And the shoe manufacturers like to remove the heel, really.

[00:39:04] **Mountain Chang:** Look at this guy.

[00:39:06] **Drew Stegmaier:** Right.

[00:39:06] **Mountain Chang:** That is how it goes.

[00:39:08] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. But at the same time they have this massive know-how of factories and infrastructure. Right. So if they just decided to knock the heel off, they could probably get one of those out the door in six months. Right. And sell a ton of them, but they didn't have the idea. And so I think there's this asymmetry.

[00:39:25] Oh, call it creativity. Right. And you start a new thing. You have this creative spark or idea, and then there's this giant Mount Everest of operational and institutional knowledge. Any take on crossing that gap for newbies, or let's say if you're working on other projects, right. If you were to approach me, I don't know.

[00:39:46] Koretz 2.0 or just some random project. What would you do differently? Starting since you've started a project

[00:39:54] already, what would I do differently? Well, I would have marketed more and earlier. Yeah, it would have been marketed earlier. I didn't really market our crowdfunding campaign too much.

[00:40:08] I think a big chunk of it came from just landing in Mark's daily, apple on one of their weekend, weekend link glove posts. And I thought to reach out to mark because I was a mark fan, but I didn't really, I didn't really do like recent who else I can reach out to promote this campaign, you know?

[00:40:29] Yeah. So there was that, and there were some interviews, just content that was created with some blogs. And I foolishly said like, Hey, can you bank this until we have. More inventory or whatever event. And they would say, yeah, sure. We'll bank it. And by the time I asked, like, Hey, can you publish this now?

[00:40:50] And they'd be like, oh, actually, like we don't do format of video anymore. Or or they would just take forever to like finally publish it. And now it's just like strike while the iron's hot, get the, I get

the first article out there. And when we do launch something, like just publish another article saying like, Hey, it's here now, you know?

[00:41:09] Yeah. That aligns. So I guess that's what I would do there. Did you

[00:41:14] have something more to add? I didn't want to cut you off.

[00:41:17] Let me think about it. Oh I was frugal in the beginning about buying competitors products and I'm not in anymore because you just learn so much from seeing what other people are up to.

[00:41:28] Okay. Well, man, now I want to ask like, like, do you have this massive dress collection?

[00:41:34] **Mountain Chang:** Not that many dress shoes. So typically when I start developing a new style all brainstorm together, like a lot of different examples of that style.

[00:41:46] Like, let's say I want to do a checkup, then I'll just find all the different chunk of styles that all the dress shoes are making. All the barefoot brands are making all the direct to consumer startups. The ones that they're making. And I just kind of look at it right. And see like, okay.

[00:42:00] Which ones are more common, which ones are associated with other features. And how does this, what does this feature evoke when I see it or when I'm handling it? What other people say about this feature? And that's when I start to narrow it down. Okay. Do we want to have like a flowy back strap or like a very straight back strap or something like that?

[00:42:20] And so in the end I would typically keep one good example of like a dress shoe and then maybe keep one good example of a barefoot shoe as a reference. But that's after buying like a whole bunch of them to check out. So, yeah. I have a fair amount of dress shoes and barefoot shoes here. Yeah.

[00:42:40] Okay.

[00:42:41] **Drew Stegmaier:** So yeah, I wanna, I want to segue into something you mentioned, which was, this was before the show, but talking about you know, starting a dress company, so you'd never have to wear dress shoes. And then embracing your role as a shoe designer. Let's go down that road.

[00:42:58] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah, sure. So, I remember my ex she would say that like, yeah mountains, one of the few people who looks better without clothes than with clothes.

[00:43:09] And at first I thought it was a compliment about my physique, but it was also avail to dig at my fashion sensibility. Okay. Yeah. Yeah. And so later on it became not so valid. She was just like, yeah, you dress terribly. But when I, you know, part of the origin story of this company was a one day on a casual Friday.

[00:43:33] I wore my Vibram five fingers. Like the toe shoes. I wore them into the office on a casual Friday because I took that word very literally like casual. Right. And so some coworkers saw me in those shoes and they thought I was just like barefoot in the office because they were kind of like the 10 color.

[00:43:52] One of them turned a corner and screamed when she saw me. And I was like, Aw, man, like, it's not, she screamed. I want to, yeah, she's screaming.

[00:43:59] **Drew Stegmaier:** I'm like you weren't wearing pants.

[00:44:03] It's not like you're just swinging it around like a pendulum. Like it's just weird. I just want to meet the woman. Who's afraid of bare feet. Like he's showing us his feet.

[00:44:21] She screamed. Yeah, she's good. Oh man. I don't hang out with a lot of accountants, but David, if bare feet make you scream and you need some more excitement in your life. So that had an impression on you.

[00:44:36] **Mountain Chang:** For sure. Yeah. Yeah. So I, you know, I thought very practically about clothing without really considering the social practicality.

[00:44:45] Yeah. And so when I started this company, I knew I didn't have to work in the office and he's like, yes, like I don't need to do this like a dog and pony show. And so I would joke that I started addressing your company. Never have to work or wear shoes again. And I think I was just wearing cargo pants, because those are the most practical pants.

[00:45:06] And I was wearing homemade sandals, homemade Wenatchee's just like a flat sole and I tied some rope through it. And that was like my daily way. And it wasn't until I wanted to meet Antonio Centeno he was the resident style expert, that art of Manliness. And that's how I found out about his work.

[00:45:29] But no, Okay. Work as its own body is much bigger than willing with automating this. So he runs a blog, real men, real style. And he put out a email saying like, Hey, I'm going to be in Vegas. If

anybody wants to come hang out and I was like, oh, Hey, you know, Vegas is really close. I want to meet this guy.

[00:45:46] And in preparation to meet him, I started consuming his work. I bought his ebook, a man's guide to style. It's a very comprehensive book talking about just all the different. Pieces that you find in men's wear, like, what's the difference between a suit jacket and a blazer and a sport coat, and what are the different materials that you can get them?

[00:46:07] And you can get them in linen wool, a polyester, and what are the different advantages of this and that. And he goes a lot into like the history, but w which I totally nerd out about I love his book but the real meat of what he gave me was was that, Hey, clothing makes your life easier. If you're able to generate a favorable first impression with just your clothes before you even begin talking with them, like that just makes your life easier.

[00:46:35] And that was when the light bulb like mine was like, oh, dude. Okay. Yeah. I'm all about making my life easier.

[00:46:42] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Well, on that I'm curious because. I would say we maybe share similar styles before you read this man's material. I might still have that style maybe. And so I have noticed yeah and I'll just tell a story, frankly.

[00:46:59] So when I was in high school, the last semester of my senior year, I lost 40 pounds. Okay. And around that time, people started being a lot nicer to me, but I didn't pick up on it. There was a delay, there was a lag and I was like, going on, why are people nice? And I was like, oh my God, they were discriminating against me because I was fat.

[00:47:21] Like the world is full of evil bastards and F all of you are right. And at the same time that comes with this awareness of, Hey, look, we all have inherent human value and no one can ever take that from you. And you'll get better service if you dress well, the choice is now yours. Right? And it's like, huh.

[00:47:43] You know, and I still dress mostly like a slum dog. Right. But having that awareness, I think, lets me sometimes use it when I know I need it. Like, Hey, you know, dressing better will make a difference here. I have this slovenly looking beard action going on, like, okay this gets cleaned up when I'm meeting someone that I think is really important, especially if it's an in-person meeting.

[00:48:05] And I think that just that little tidbit of clothing makes your life easier aligns with the whole four hour work week, life hacker, ethos, right? Yeah. So like, look, set it and forget it, you know, get you

some nice clothes. Maybe make them tailored to good quality stick with neutrals. Right. If you're not really color coordinated, neutrals will work for you and or monochromatic.

[00:48:30] And then you're good. You're just good. That's an oversimplification, but yeah.

[00:48:35] **Mountain Chang:** And that, that is the extreme that I do take it to oversimplify my wardrobe. So can I get into this? Yeah. Hell yeah. So I pretty much have just one pair of pants that I wear. They're Uniqlo and they have a dress cut to them, but they're very stretchy material.

[00:48:56] So they work casually, formally and as sports. So I wear those pants for everything and yeah, but pretty much everything in my closet is just copies of each other. Everything is black, so I never have to worry about like spilling coffee on myself and everything matches and pretty much the only two things I have to consider when I'm getting dressed is temperature and format.

[00:49:22] And the formality, a lot of my pieces, like we'll cover a mask. Really? It just comes down to the temperature.

[00:49:27] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. I'm taking some notes from this. So first question would be, you said you have to think about temperature and formality, and you've gotten to that in place because of this planning, right.

[00:49:40] That you've done. What would maybe be other, I don't know, I'll call it dimensions or aspects of fashion planning, or like when someone asks the question, what should I wear today? What are the, maybe the standard dimensions? Cause I've never heard someone break it down in this way, where you said temperature, formality, what might be some other.

[00:50:04] That you've ruled out because they add stress or complexity. That's unnecessary.

[00:50:11] **Mountain Chang:** Oh yeah. Colors to start with color. Everything's black and yeah, everything matches. What else? Patterns. I don't do any patterns. It's all solid blacks. What else? Textures are largely out of the picture. Everything is very smooth.

[00:50:28] And not woven I, I did have like black cardigans before. But that woven material, it just pulls in like dog for whatever else gets trapped into. And will the materials tend to pill too? So I stay away from woven materials. I think every article of clothing I own has some element of stretch built into it whether through the base material or with spandex woven in.

[00:50:54] Yeah. Yeah. All of those things.

[00:50:56] **Drew Stegmaier:** What does woven mean? Like, well, I'm thinking they aren't all closed woven, so like what, what does woven mean?

[00:51:03] **Mountain Chang:** Oh, I'm sorry. Not woven knit more like a knit, something that's with a more open stretchy knit. It's just like, it doesn't like, things don't really get caught in it.

[00:51:13] **Drew Stegmaier:** Like, like a sheet would have a higher thread count.

[00:51:15] **Mountain Chang:** Basically higher thread count would mean. Like more density. I'm looking for a higher density.

[00:51:21] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. Okay. Basically. So cat hair and stuff. Don't get stuck in them. Okay. Yeah, exactly. Do you have anything that you categorically say no to?

[00:51:31] I mean, obviously you going with all black, but for example, I have my male birth control Crocs shoes. Right. For a lot of people it's like, yeah, they're called male birth control for a reason. Right. Are there things that are categorically nose?

[00:51:47] **Mountain Chang:** I don't do cute, so. Okay. No bow ties, no animals, things like that.

[00:51:55] No nerdy glasses.

[00:51:56] Yeah.

[00:51:57] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. I would hope you wouldn't wear a glasses with LASIK. That wouldn't be bad.

[00:52:03] **Mountain Chang:** Well, I mean, a lot of guys though and girls they'll accessorize with glasses without needing.

[00:52:08] **Drew Stegmaier:** I didn't know. That, that explains my ignorance actually. That's not totally true.

[00:52:13] I had a friend from college, Phil and cadet staff, Sergeant Carroll day. Yeah. He had a pair of glasses without the glass. They're a stylistic element. And yeah, so I do have an example in my life of like, oh, wait, I know a person who accessorized with glasses.

[00:52:29] **Mountain Chang:** Oh, that's the other thing I I don't do jewelry.

[00:52:32] Okay. The last time I attempted it was knockoff Fitbit and even then I didn't feel like it provided me more value than having this clunky thing on my life all the time. Yes. And before that I was wearing oh, I could show you.

[00:52:49] **Drew Stegmaier:** And all narrate for folks who are not on video so they can get somewhat of a better idea.

[00:52:54] And while he's getting that, if you're not on video, you guys need to check out the background. There is a piece of martial arts equipment, Florida ceiling. There is a fitness thing called so right. PSO, like for your, so as I see a back buddy back there, I psychoanalyze people by staring at their living space and I like it.

[00:53:15] Right. Cause it, it makes me see you, right? Like it makes me see you and understand you. Yeah. Feel free to present the idea.

[00:53:23] **Mountain Chang:** Okay. So it's a spork from the Columbia river knife and tool company. And I would wear it in a pair. Of course. Necklace. Yeah. It would ask like, Ooh, tribal talisman.

[00:53:35] Huh. And I was like, no, actually it's an Eaton tool. Yeah. And yeah I did that for a while and then I dunno, I eventually, I think I think I just thought like, okay, it's kind of weird. And so I stopped doing it, but I keep it in my bag all the time. Yeah.

[00:53:51] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. I think that's a good point.

[00:53:53] When you said it's kind of a weird fashion rule I've heard and frankly don't follow, is that with your appearance, whatever your appearance is, it should look like it's on purpose. Right. And the ultimate full pause, like leaving the restroom with TP on your foot. Right. That's like, oh sir kinda got a thing there, sir.

[00:54:12] So yeah, whatever your look is, it should look like you're trying to look that. Right. I think, you know, maybe the worst thing you can get is, Hey, this person is confused. Or when you get into issues of hygiene, right? It's hygiene often relates just to health, which often relates to attractiveness, for sure.

[00:54:33] You know, with maybe the ultimate form of that being like I mean, you could say with the pandemic now, right? It's like, we determined people aren't healthy and we dissociate from them. So if your appearance gives other people a sense of that it definitely doesn't fall into the making your life easier and bucket, right?

[00:54:48] Like your life can get a lot harder. So is there anything else you wanted to touch on in terms of the journey to becoming a shoe designer? And I have more questions, so. If not that's cool. I can pepper you with them.

[00:55:04] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah it was just about, you know, re Antonio Centeno realizing that there's a hidden to everything.

[00:55:09] And also that clothing curve as a shortcut, I guess, or expediter. And then from there, I just, I decided to embrace being a shoe designer and I took the role a lot more seriously. And I give a lot of that credit, also do my business partner Darious who had a faith in me as far as designing outside of men's dress.

[00:55:35] You know, I came up with some cool ideas for men's dress shoes, like the hollow heel and the taper toe box. And. You know, having not had the formal training, I did kind of wonder like, am I just like a one trick pony or can actually do more than once, you know? And women had been asking for dress shoe long time.

[00:55:54] So the obsession, the company, and I was just like, I don't do like, there's, you know, there's already like flats out there and it's not like I could simulate like a stiletto heel, you know, I can't hollow that out and let your foot things like that. So I don't. I'm out of ideas here. Like maybe, okay.

[00:56:09] Maybe we can put tiny projectors around a. Around a ankle cuff that will project the image of a heel, right. Or it or something. So, so I was kind of at a loss of ideas, but then Derrius was like, dude, look at our Google analytics. 30% of our traffic is women who come up with something, man.

[00:56:29] I know you can do it. So I was like, okay. Okay. All right. All right. So, so I did take it more seriously and I was looking at like, what's out there and I thought about like, oh, okay. Yeah, actually, there, there are a lot of things I can improve on. So, yeah I think in the end having somebody believing in me and that helped a lot to grow as a true designer.

[00:56:50] **Drew Stegmaier:** Would you like to share, like, what are some of those things, because when you initially thought, oh, there's nothing I can do that. That makes perfect sense to me. Right? If one of your main innovations was, you know, removing the heel again, well, flats exist already. And Hey, I can't make a fake stiletto.

[00:57:07] So ergo I'm stuck. What were the other things you saw the other inroads where women's shoes were lacking?

[00:57:15] **Mountain Chang:** So, one thing that kind of slipped my mind was that women also wear Oxfords. So what we could do is bring that hollow heel concept to a more feminine silhouette, like a more feminine or something like that here.

[00:57:30] The men stuff it's so funny. So, so for a men's dress shoe, they want it to look long.

[00:57:38] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. Maybe some of the phallic three going on.

[00:57:40] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah. Yeah. It's a phallic thing. And for women's dress shoes, they want it to make your feet look short and cute. And so a lot of the design elements are made side length.

[00:57:52] **Drew Stegmaier:** Oh. And that's interesting. Yeah. I didn't think of that, but you know, there's those tropes of like, man with big feet go like mainly the bigfoot that there's a story around that. Right. And then woman with big foot right. Is usually ostracized or made fun of right. Like, yeah. And the Chinese foot binding and there's tons of, I guess, design things you can do to basically work as optical illusions, right?

[00:58:21] Yeah.

[00:58:21] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah. So, so yeah, with women's, Oxford can bring a lot of a lot of the same differentiators that we do with men and just bring to account for how women choose, have a different stylistic goal. And also women's shoes. On average, they are anatomically different from men's as well. So what I learned is that women's feet tend to have a narrower heel and a wider ball and toe.

[00:58:49] So there, there is more of a triangle, whereas men are more of like a box, so they're a bit wider and they're relatively okay. And that's one of the differences. And another one is women tend to have higher art than men do. So these things were also taken in, into designing our women. A lot of companies.

[00:59:07] I think especially the barefoot one, they just sell the same exact slap on a different size. Okay. But our dress shoes our deliberately designed with the anatomical considerations of women's and that's for the dress shoes. And also we are doing something that's like a. Let's do the label that could look kind of funny, but yeah, this is like a flat pump

[00:59:31] **Drew Stegmaier:** on the screen.

[00:59:32] Okay. A flat pump.

[00:59:33] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah. And you know, even though we don't have the hollow heel here, what we're really differentiating with is this toe box, right. Like it's both wide and slake and that's just something that nobody else offers.

[00:59:47] **Drew Stegmaier:** So there's lots of room.

[00:59:49] **Mountain Chang:** That this is another concept. Interesting. I did a lot of research into these different types of straps and I learned that, you know, the ones that are just around the ankle, those do nothing.

[01:00:03] **Drew Stegmaier:** They're just form, not function.

[01:00:05] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah. Yeah. Okay. I guess it'll keep you from losing the shoe entirely, right? As far as like stability, stabilizing it on your foot, does it do anything? And this design did start with like a arch, an arch that goes around. And then I thought like, oh, okay. What if I put a strap in the.

[01:00:23] Right. Could create more stability and also recreates like this a long gating effect.

[01:00:29] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. Yeah. That reminds me of those sandals that go between the toes and over the edge of the foot. Like a flip-flop, but I would say obviously much much dressier looking. Right. In terms of how the stability is created just by those, you know, that the, or that fork.

[01:00:48] So I mean, it makes me think like, and I don't know if you have a short, pithy answer or if it's a long-winded messy answer, but I think in many you could say fields of study, right? Like take any field. People often conclude that, oh we've done everything there is to do there. Right? Like shoes, like, oh, people have worn shoes forever.

[01:01:11] We've worn shoes since we had feet. How long have we had feet? Right. Yet, you know, even your journey, right? You started out as a newcomer. Now you're an incumbent and now you're coming up with things that no one has come up with before. So I guess where I want to go with there is I would call it. Maybe you're outside of work, you're into a lot of what I would call esoteric hobbies.

[01:01:34] And I suspect they heavily influenced your creativity. Does that sound like a fair analysis?

[01:01:39] **Mountain Chang:** I would say so. Yeah. I like to mix different disciplines together and see what, when new things come out from it.

[01:01:48] **Drew Stegmaier:** And so, you know, just maybe list some of the hobbies, cause there's probably many.

[01:01:53] That I don't know of. This is where I said like, oh, like, man, like you don't half-ass anything like a lot of people will be like, oh, I'm doing this barefoot thing. And oh, I do some running. And you're like, oh, I did a barefoot marathon in six months. It was just casual. It was a Tuesday. And like there's plenty of people that lift weights, but you know, you've done a powerlifting meet.

[01:02:14] Right. You have a singing instructor. Right. And I think what maybe ties a lot of the aspects of the conversation so far together is action. Right? Many of these things just are not hypothetical for you. And it's like, I want to get better at singing. And then you get a singing instructor, right. Or, oh, it'd be cool to lift weights.

[01:02:35] I'm going to do a powerlifting wheat meat, right. Barefoot running, doing a marathon. Cause to me that's a totally different vibe than like being a. Right. That's like a level of, you could call it seriousness or passion to your hobbies. Right. Where does that come from?

[01:02:50] **Mountain Chang:** Curiosity comes from curiosity. Yeah. Yeah. You know, some people could take some people I've looked at my body of work and have said like, oh I love how you're passionate. You're so passionate about things. And for me, I'm passionate. It doesn't really describe how I feel. It's more just a curiosity.

[01:03:08] Yeah. So with with the marathon, it was just like, I'm curious where this barefoot running thing can take me. And it took me to doing a marathon with power lifting. That was, it started off as a curiosity. I was like, I wonder how much somebody. Cause I'm a small guy. I was like I'm still in like the one 20 range right now.

[01:03:30] I've never seen like one 40 on the scale. So I was curious like what everybody else was bigger than me. And I was curious what is a good number for a guy, my size to live. And I was looking at up and when I saw the California records, I saw that my weight class was open. And I was like, what does that mean?

[01:03:49] And I reached out to the records office and they said like, oh, it just means nobody's gonna be doing that in a number of years. So they just wipe the rocks. And I was like, oh, okay. All right, cool. I was like, are you saying if I just show up and I don't get disqualified, I win. And they're like.

[01:04:07] **Drew Stegmaier:** So wait, you have California state weightlifting records.

[01:04:10] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah. Yeah. Come on. I held you to withholding. And then slightly after I, I have a friend who is like very similar build to me and I was like, yo, you should take the record from me, man. And so now he, I think somebody probably took it from him ever since then, but yeah. So that was curiosity. Curiosity led me to everything.

[01:04:37] **Drew Stegmaier:** And I wouldn't even call it maybe a persistent curiosity. I don't know if that's the right word, but I know in, in terms of playing small in my life, I'll maybe try something or not even try it and I'll engage in masturbatory hypothetical fantasy of like, oh, it could be like this.

[01:04:58] And then I played out enough fantasies in my head and I'm like, okay, thanks. And it's like, no, this isn't hypothetical. Imagination, right. This is, Hey, I'm going to try this and see where it will go. And it seems like you've done that across a variety of domains. The powerlifting thing I'm curious about.

[01:05:18] Cause I would guess but let's say for men who are more petite I think there's often pressure to just be. Right. And so I would suspect a lot of smaller guys feel pressure to get into bodybuilding because their main goal is hypertrophy rather than strength. It's like, Hey, I want to be big and get big because I mean, I suspect it was a shock for you.

[01:05:38] It was a shock for me of like, wait, you just show up, you just crack the barbell off the floor. And you're like, champion, you know, that's wild.

[01:05:47] **Mountain Chang:** I did still take the training seriously on the prep seriously. And I was able to put up some respectable verse. Cause I mean, yeah, it's going to be there for everybody to see.

[01:05:57] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I think that's an important clarification because you did it because you were curious, you weren't trying to exploit the system of like, where could I move on the earth to where I guarantee that I break the record. Right? Cause there are people that do that. There's a guy I want to say a venture capitalist from Northern Califor.

[01:06:16] Who was, I want to say in his forties and wanting to go to the Olympics. And as far as I understand, he made out a plan and it was get citizenship in a south American country that does not have hand to compete in the winter Olympics on there. He's the guy. Yeah I'll try to dig up that story. And that's different from, you know, literally putting in the reps.

[01:06:38] Right. And it's like, yeah, this category was open, but you still trained in training the training. And I think your, I want to say your g-mail photo is you lifting or I saw that somewhere. Yeah. So

clearly that's, you know, evidence that this is an important part of your life. So I'm curious about this and that's odd word play.

[01:06:56] I'm curious about this curiosity. But. This is a, I mean, this is uncommon, man. Like, maybe you view it as unremarkable, but I meet a lot of people and I don't often meet people who are into this many different things who actively do them. So I want to drill down more like you have this curiosity I would say no disincentive here, but like accounting is not a creative field.

[01:07:22] Like most creative people. I know. And the creatives I knew in college were not accountants. Right. So how do you have this blend? Was it you got into accounting for safety? Cause it's a safe career or. You know, riddle me this Batman, if that makes sense.

[01:07:35] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah, sure. Let's talk about that.

[01:07:37] So a big part of it was safety. I was the oldest child and my mom was a single mom raising three boys. So there was a lot of pressure on me too. And not so much succeed, but like, yeah. I was gonna say not so much succeed, but not fail, but no. I think the pressure was to succeed.

[01:07:57] Yeah. Yeah. So, I took an accounting class over the summer and it came to me very easily. At the same time, I was having a really bad time trying to do general chemistry and calculus to get into like science degrees. And I also took an economics class, which talked about your competitive advantage, which isn't your absolute advantage, but you know, like.

[01:08:22] If you're better at something than another thing, then it's better. It's often better to just the thing that you're better at. That was my takeaway from that don't know, I was like, okay, well this accounting thing, it sounds like a lot of people don't want to do it. I'm pretty good at it. It offers pretty great flexibility.

[01:08:38] There's really hard driving jobs and there's also very chill jobs in accounting. So you can dial it up, dial it down. And the work itself. I did enjoy work itself. I like the details of it. I like the focus and the flow that you can find as going into details. And I also really liked creating the processes systems to make everything.

[01:09:01] So, I remember during interviews for accounting jobs, they would ask me like, Hey, how'd you get into this? And I would open with a joke that like, oh, I got into accounting because I'm bad at math. And they'd be like, what? And I said, yeah, because you know, the computer does all the math for you.

[01:09:17] And the more important part about accounting is the organization. And that's where I really shine. I'd like to organize and. Present information and you know, I, at the time, a lot of my extracurriculars involved writing like high school journalism, things like that. So, so I told them that like, yeah, I like writing and I think a financial statement, it's like an essay of sorts.

[01:09:41] **Drew Stegmaier:** Okay. Wow.

[01:09:43] **Mountain Chang:** So there is room for creativity, as far as optimizing things, creating the processes.

[01:09:49] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. I can see that creativity can emerge anywhere if you allow it and that's the kicker, right. Because if you don't allow it, you won't find it right. If, you know, for sure that it won't be there, it will not be there.

[01:10:06] Well, do you have anything else you want to make sure gets attention right now?

[01:10:12] **Mountain Chang:** Well, I did mention a lot of new products that we come have coming up and as part of getting these products ready, we a lot of testing with our community. So, if you put the testing links in your show notes, I appreciate that.

[01:10:27] Yeah. Especially if you have people who are knowledgeable about this barefoot stuff having their feedback is very valuable.

[01:10:35] **Drew Stegmaier:** Yeah. And for listeners again I've been wearing barefoot shoes for eight years and I am a tester. Right. I'm waiting on them to come in, but I have signed up my mom's signed up as well.

[01:10:44] So I'm trying to get the wife into it. We'll see. But yeah, it's the whole barefoot lifestyle, if you will. I don't know if I'd call it a barefoot lifestyle. I think is maybe part of a larger trend of a lot of folks are reconnecting to nature. And. I had a I'll call it a transformative barefoot experience, frankly, related to the whole earth and movement, which was, I used to work at a restaurant and this was after I'd worn barefoot shoes for some years.

[01:11:13] Right. But I worked at a restaurant. So you're talking about, I'd say roughly eight to 12 miles per shift of just walking. Right. And in uncomfortable work shoes. If you've ever worked one of those service jobs where you have to wear a black shoe with a non-slip sole Like, if someone could take the worst design for shoes and force you to wear them, that's what you'd come up with.

[01:11:38] Right. And my feet would hurt after work. That was common. Even starting, people were like, Hey, your feet are just going to hurt you ready? And after work, one day I had a meeting and we had an outdoor part of the gathering where we circle up barefoot. And that was probably 45 minutes and my foot pain just went away completely.

[01:11:59] And I was like what the hell is this? This earthing stuff must work. And for you to earth properly, you either need a conductive shoe or you can just go barefoot right on the earth. Right. And that made, you know, that made a difference that made an impact for sure. Or I guess that's my story, right?

[01:12:20] I suspect you've had many from customers. Right. What are some of the more memorable ones or do you have a particularly memorable one? Because I think people just don't understand how much of a difference this can make in their lives.

[01:12:35] **Mountain Chang:** Yeah, so it'd be a lot of those kinds of things where things hurt back knee, ankles, neck, even.

[01:12:45] And as soon as they switch over to barefoot shoes, things go away and this is safe. If you have a pain and you switched to barefoot shoes, go away, then not that at all, but it definitely happens. And I think one of the more memorable ones was this one guy who bought a new balance minimus just cause he thought they looked cool and he had no idea about barefoot shoe.

[01:13:08] Okay. He saw people bringing them around town and he's like, oh, those are cool. And then he started wearing them and experiencing benefits and having no idea. It was because of the shoes until like a year later when he started learning about it. And he's like, oh, that's why I feel best in those shoes.

[01:13:23] What the heck?

[01:13:25] **Drew Stegmaier:** Wow.

[01:13:26] **Mountain Chang:** Okay. Wow. So that was like truly like a double blind study right there, you know?

[01:13:31] **Drew Stegmaier:** Oh yes. Yeah, the perfect double-blind and it makes perfect sense. It's like, look the shoes can solve a bunch of problems because some of your problems could be coming from your foot. But you can have problems from other things too.

[01:13:44] Right. So if you know, if you wear barefoot shoes, you can still have health problems, maybe not from the shoes. Right. And yeah, I mean, if you're a person out there, somewhere in the world or on the internet get you some barefoot shoes, man. You know, I just say try it right. Try it out.

[01:14:01] And now thanks to yourself and some others we have some non-family varieties, right.

[01:14:09] **Mountain Chang:** So, yeah, I think there is something to be said about making things more palatable like, like, you know, making barefoot shoes that look better or what was the example that you were just giving? Or like healthy food.

[01:14:23] It doesn't have to taste bad, you know? Yeah. And when you, we were talking about like all the curiosity, a lot of them I stuck with just cause it felt good, you know, lifting weights feels really good. Like the, like there's certain lifts let's say like overhead press, you know, you feel like the incredible Hulk at the end.

[01:14:44] Oh yeah. Yep. Yeah. Running, especially like trail running when you're like hugging the curve, if feel like your Sonic, the hedgehog and just being barefoot in general. Isn't it's it feels good that the nerve endings of your feet, if they just pick up some data and so many amazing textures and so much of the world to.

[01:15:05] **Drew Stegmaier:** Well, it has been a pleasure and I really appreciate having you on as always, you're welcome to come on at a later date and where should folks go?

[01:15:14] Especially the audio folks I'll put links in the show notes, but if you're just listening, if there's a place you want to point folks, where should they go? They want to find more of your work, or if you just want to point them to something like a charity, right. You can use my microphone writer.

[01:15:26] **Mountain Chang:** I would say go to carrots.com and the way that you spell that is C a R E T s.com. And let me explain what carrots mean. Yeah, sure. So a carrot is shift six on your keyboard and it's like the little hat exponent symbol. And the reason why I chose this name is oh, So the name carrots, the reason why we decided on this is just that there's so many levels to it.

[01:15:54] So a carrot shifts six on your keyboard. It's the little hat sign and it's like an exponent sign. And I really love this because this product is about enhancing you. It's like the power of you, you know, it helps you with your career goals and also with your health and fitness goals. And another reason why I really love this is because that symbol is also used in logic and computing to represent like an overlap and where that overlap between health and luxury and expanding off of that overlap.

[01:16:28] A carrot is also a homonym for a healthy vegetable, you know, that's whether you're vegan or paleo or whatever, like everybody loves carrots. And it's also a homonym for both the quality of Dying. No, the quality of gold and the weight of diamond. So there's health and luxury coming together and that's carrots.

[01:16:53] And I, I really love the spelling of it too, because it's care CaRE care with a T at the end, that is very beautiful. And so, yeah, stop by our website, carrots.com. From there, you can find all of our socials and you can sign up for our newsletter. So, you know, when the women's stuff are coming out, when our sneakers and sandals and the safety toe boots are coming out and yeah, we'd love to have you long for the barefoot journey.

[01:17:16] **Drew Stegmaier:** You're awesome. Thank you.

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[01:17:42] Since that might sound a little confusing. I'll repeat it.

Compassionateconnecting.com/hashtagworkshops. Check the episode description as well for a link again, free yourself from reactivity. Check it out.

I hope you all enjoy that. One quick thing and closing stegdrew.com/juicy. Steg Drew is just like the show [.com/juicy](https://stegdrew.com/juicy). You can sign up for my weekly musings here on all things like we spoke about in this episode and other assorted weirdness just drop in your email stegdrew.com/juicy. Thank you.