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with LESLIE WILCOX

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I am fundamentally an introvert.

Even though you make seventy-five speeches a year?

Hard to imagine; yes. So, I am thrust into an extrovert's role of being out there speaking to thousands of people, and all this kinda stuff. But, you know, where extroverts would love to have dinner with … the other speakers and would love to interact with the crowd, and would love to, you know, do all this kinda stuff, I hate that.

This self-described introvert is a highly successful entrepreneur whose voice on social media is followed by ten million people around the world. Hawaii born and raised Guy Kawasaki, who's now lived longer in Northern California than he did in the islands, next, on Long Story Short.

> Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox is Hawaii's first weekly television program produced and broadcast in high definition.

Aloha mai kakou. I'm Leslie Wilcox. Guy Kawasaki says he's a Kalihi boy at heart, a kid from Kalihi Elementary who segued to prep school Iolani, then headed to a West Coast Ivy League school, and made a name for himself in Silicon Valley, marking the Macintosh for Apple. He's a visionary who saw the power of the computer to change lives before many others did. He's a venture capitalist, author and speaker, business advisor, and social media guru. Kawasaki credits some of his success to an English teacher at Iolani School.

How was that, the entry into Iolani?

I don't remember it being particularly traumatic. I had a great time at Iolani, and a great time at Kalihi Elementary. There was uh, a teacher at Kalihi Elementary who convinced my parents that, you know, I should go into a private school. Her name was Trudy Akau. And my parents, you know, lower middleclass, made a lot of sacrifices for my sister and I. She went to University High here, and I went to Iolani. And … the rest is history.

And you felt comfortable there. And who were your classmates? Who did you graduate with?

Mufi Hannemann is one, Nathan Aipa is another, Led Castillo, Dean Okimoto of—

Nalo Farms.

--Nalo Farm. Yeah; bunch of overachievers in that class.

Very much so.

Now, in high school, we tend to stereotype people. Did you have a stereotype in high school?

Well, what are my choices?

You could be the jock.

Yeah.

You could be the nerd.

I wasn't the nerd. I was probably closer to the jock. I played for Eddie Hamada and Charles Kaaihue. I loved football. I mean, there was—there's only—you know, you were either training for playing for football or playing football. John Kay was the biology teacher. But the one that really left a mark in me … that surfaced decades later was Harold Keables. So, Harold Keables was the English teacher, and … I took English from him twice. And he basically taught me how to write. And I think he would be amazed that I have now written thirteen books, 'cause that was not foreseeable.

Did he have to nudge you a lot in class?

Yeah. You know, I wouldn't say that he would list me as his prize pupil, ever. You know.

That must be great for teachers to hear that. You said decades later, this latent learning came out?

Yes; because I graduated from Iolani in 1972, and I didn't write my first book 'til 1987. So, that's quite a while.

Well, what did Mr. Keables tell you about writing? What was the magic?

He had a very, very specific technique, where you wrote compositions. If you made mistakes, he would circle the mistake. So, you would have to write the sentence incorrectly as you did, you'd have to cite the rule of grammar that you broke, and then you'd have to rewrite the sentence correctly.

I bet you loved doing that.

And this is prior to word processing. I think it was prior to even pens.

So, that was a pain. So, you quickly learned about …

Don't do that.

--splitting infinitives, and you know, what's the difference between an independent clause and a dependent clause, and why you need a conjunction between two independent clauses, and a comma, and … that was drilled into us.

Did you ever have a chance to tell your teacher that? That …

No; he died before I achieved any kind of writing.

Someone who had a stronger influence on Guy Kawasaki was his father, the late Hawaii politician Duke Kawasaki, who died at age ninety-four, just a few days before this conversation took place in 2015. Duke Kawasaki was a dissident Democrat who bucked Hawaii's status quo. Guy and his sister, Jean Okimoto, who attended this taping, both remember their father admonishing them repeatedly not to take any guff from people.

My father was a State Senator for twenty or twenty-two years, beginning in about 1968, I think.

And he was an independent Democrat, and a maverick.

He was Democrat, liberal, maverick. Although, he supported the death penalty in there, so certain things. He fought the unions all the time. He fought George Ariyoshi all the time.

He surprised people too, with his positions.

Yes.

Yeah.

He was enigmatic, let's say.

And I've heard him described as both assertive and aggressive.

I never saw him that way, but you know, I guess … well, let's just say he did not believe in taking crap from anybody. And I would say that is something he probably passed on to me. I don't know if, behaviorally or genetically, but somehow it got to me.

He had a lot of different jobs.

Yes.

A lot of hyphenations there.

I know he was a fireman, a stevedore, fire dispatch, state senator, band leader.

Yeah. And he was … I think he was number three in the City and County of Honolulu. There was Fasi and Jeremy Harris …

As managing director?

And then, my father. I think my father was the third guy.

And again, Fasi was a very independent Democrat.

Another tough person to figure out. Yes.

Right.

Yes.

Was he hard for you to figure out?

You know, I mean, he was my father; right? I never looked at it that way. I saw how tough politics was. You're constantly out. You're constantly, you know, being asked for stuff. I will never go into politics. Really. It's too hard; right?

When Guy Kawasaki graduated from Iolani School, he had no idea what he wanted to do with his life professionally. But he did know he wanted to attend college, something his father hadn't done, and he wanted to do so away from Hawaii.

I went from Iolani to the mainland.

To Stanford.

To Stanford. But that sounds more impressive today than it was back then. Seriously. 'Cause there's no way I would get into Stanford today.

I think it was always hard to get into Stanford.

Boy, I'll tell you, man. You know, I definitely didn't have … back in those days, it was sixteen hundred, not twenty-four hundred. I did not have sixteen hundred SATs, and I

was not straight A. But also back then, believe it or not, Japanese Americans were oppressed; right? So, we were a minority.

So, you're saying that's what helped you get in?

I think so.

And you did well at Stanford?

Well, you know, one life lesson I learned is, you know, it's not how you get in; it's what you do once you got in. So … yeah, to this day, I don't know how I got into Stanford.

And what was that experience like for you?

Oh, it was fantastic. Because … you know, I think everybody from Hawaii, every student, if they can afford it and if the situation works out, they should go to school on the mainland too. It is an eye-opening experience. And it increases your perspective, it increases your horizons, it increases your expectations for life. And I think that if you only stay in one place … you judge things, you judge yourself in only one context. And that's not enough. So, you know, I go to the mainland, I say, Wow, you know, you could start a company. You don't have to go work for just a hotel or just for a store in Ala Moana Center. I mean, you could start it, you could be with Apple computer, my god. So, that opened my eyes. And … I never looked back.

When did you have a plan?

Arguably, I still don't have a plan.

You majored in psychology.

I majored in psychology, because that was an easy major. My father wanted me to go to law school, so like a good Asian, I went to law school. I hated it; quit after two weeks.

Why'd you quit?

I couldn't stand it. They were, you know, basically telling me that I was crap, and they're gonna remake my mind. My delicate psyche could not handle it at that point. I've gotten over this problem. So, I quit law school. Called up my father, told him I quit law school, I think he's gonna disown me. He says, You know what? As long as you're something by twenty-five, we're happy. Oh; why didn't you tell me that before I went to law school? So anyway, I quit law school, couldn't stand it. And actually, with some hindsight, I think, you know … many lawyers take twenty, twenty-five years to discover they're miserable. I figured that out in two weeks.

That's how smart I was. So, I come back from quitting law school. I worked for Nelson K. Doi.

Your father's political ally.

Yeah; at the time, he was lieutenant governor of Hawaii. And he was starting the Hawaii Commission on Crime, so I worked on that project. And the following year, I went to UCLA to get an MBA.

Had you seen a bit of Silicon Valley at that point? Was that what you were gunning for?

At Stanford, definitely. Because you know, that's the epicenter of Silicon Valley.

And so, was that on your mind in getting an MBA?

Oh, absolutely. I wanted to start a career, wanted to be an entrepreneur. And back then, believe it or not, you know, an MBA was necessary for many careers. It's not as necessary today, but it was really necessary back then.

A few years after receiving his Masters in Marketing, Guy Kawasaki landed a job at Apple, where the ornery visionary Steve Jobs presided. In 1983, Kawasaki was part of the team responsible for marketing the Macintosh, first to software developers, and then to consumers. He became an innovator in what's called Evangelist Marketing, drawing on word of mouth to drive brand loyalty.

Evangelism comes from Greek words meaning, bringing the good news. So, where a salesperson might say, you know, Give me twenty-five hundred bucks, I'll give you this computer; we were trying to bring the good news or increase creativity and productivity.

What a great job title.

Yeah.

Chief evangelist for Macintosh.

Well, that wasn't the first job title; it wasn't that simple. So, I met a guy in college from Phoenix, Arizona; his name is Mike Boich. And we just immediately hit it off, because we shared a passion for cars. And we became very good friends, very good friends to this day. When I started going to school at UCLA, I started working part-time for a jewelry company. So, I was counting diamonds, and they gave me a job after I graduated, so I was in the jewelry business for about five years. And then, Mike Boich calls me up and says, You know, I'm working on this really interesting project called Macintosh, you gotta come see it. So, I go see it, there's a job, I didn't get that job. Which in hindsight

was okay. He calls me back in a few more months, and now there's this other job, which is the software evangelist job. You know, I don't know how I got past the C-job filter, but somehow, I did, and so, I became a software evangelist at Apple, having you know, I a psych degree, dropping out of law school, marketing degree from UCLA. And the rest is history.

So, first, you were getting people to write software.

Yes.

And then, when you moved up to chief evangelist, you were talking to prospective buyers.

Yes; of not just writing software, but just regular consumers.

And you know, I'm tickled by the evangelist name. But it was not just a branding word; it's you know, marketing.

No, no; we truly believed—a guy named Mike Murray was the director of marketing at the Macintosh division, and our approach was that Macintosh was not just another computer that you sold in terms of, you know … certain amount of RAM, and certain amount of hard disk storage. Macintosh was a way, it was a religion, it was life-changing, it was you know, universe-denting. So, you don't just sell that kinda stuff; you evangelize it.

When you worked for Macintosh, you were working all the time.

Yes.

Right? I've heard stories of total burnout. I mean, how many hours a week did you work?

Well, we had a tee-shirt that said, Sixty hours a week, and loving it. And that might have been low. But you know what? We were on a cause; right? We were on a mission from God. And we were gonna do in the IBM PC, we were gonna increase people's creativity and productivity, we were gonna save people from a George Orwellian totalitarian 1984 nightmare. So, if you're doing that, you know, sixty hours a week is not so much.

And that ferment of Silicon Valley and all that dynamic stuff led you to all kinds of other ventures.

Yes; let me to entrepreneurship and writing, and all kinds of stuff. The Macintosh division was a remarkable experience. And … you know, I am honored to have been there. Steve Jobs was a remarkable person; just absolutely amazing. So difficult to work for.

The New York Times recently had this article about working at Amazon, and you know, how people cry and, you know, not everybody's supporting you, and sometimes you know, people raise objections to what you're working on. I look at that, and I just like, laugh. You know, you're telling me your life is tough. Let me tell you what it was like working for Steve Jobs.

And you had to have a thick skin to work where you did. You developed it, if you didn't have it.

Well, you needed a thick skin, but you also needed a thick brain. Because, you know, if you're dumb and thick-skinned, you would not have survived at Apple. You had to have both.

So, that gave you confidence to do a lot of other things.

Well …

Venture capitalist.

Yeah; you know, it gave me confidence to do a lot of other things, but with hindsight, maybe if I had less confidence and I just stayed an Apple employee, it would different; right?

Because?

'Cause I quit Apple twice, and if I had stayed either time, I would not be here right now.

You would be retired in the Bahamas.

Yeah. No, I'd be standup paddleboarding right now or, you know, I'd be at the Halekulani. But I didn't, so you know. But listen; don't cry for me. I'm okay.

I mean, do you go back there and regret that a lot?

I don't lay awake at night about it. But you know, you have to at some point in your life say, Wow, just imagine if I had stayed at Apple. 'Cause … that move probably cost me … several hundred million dollars. Yeah. I could really pledge a lot to PBS.

Much later, Guy Kawasaki would again become a chief evangelist, this time for an online graphic design company based in Australia named Canva. Coming out of Apple, Kawasaki founded several software companies and a venture capital firm. He also started writing. Kawasaki is the best-selling author of more than a dozen books, including a classic about the use of social media. He's an acknowledged master of social media, with ten million followers around the world at the time of this conversation. This kind of engagement requires relentless and interesting postings. This helps

generate interest in his personal brand and in the Canva Company, and in his books, which generate interest in his major public speaking events.

Social medial is the best thing that ever happened to me, 'cause it's fast, free, and ubiquitous. I'm on it all the time. I also have virtual assistants helping me on it all the time. So, I'm an introvert who loves social media, because it allows me to avoid extrovert activity.

And you know, to succeed at it, you could be Tweeting to no one, but you have a huge following. How do you pick your content? How do you make it work?

Well, funny you should mention that, you know, seeing as how we're at PBS, and you know, PBS NPR. I love all that kinda stuff; right? So, I call this the NPR model. Maybe I should call it the PBS model. But the way I look at it is, if you provide great content … all the time, not promotional, great content, content that is informative, analytical … entertaining, valuable, then you earn the right to then run a promotion. Your promotion is the pledge drive. My promotion is, use Canva … read my book. But I feel that I cannot make those kinda social media posts, read my book, use Canva, until I earn … the right to do that. And the way I earn the right to do that is to provide value. And the way I provide value is, I create or curate content.

So, what makes a great Tweet or social media item on Facebook?

This is very easy.

How do you make it work?

At the highest level, a great social media post has to pass the re-share test. And by this, I mean it is something that's so valuable, so interesting, so entertaining that people not only like it, they also send it to people who follow them. So, this is the difference between just tipping a waiter or tipping a valet, versus telling people to eat someplace. Right? So, every time I squeeze the trigger—and I've trained all the people who help me. Every time you squeeze the trigger, think in your mind; Is this something that'll be re-shared?

You like lists, too.

I love lists. I think that in the social media world, a bulleted or numbered list is the key to make a point.

And you're irreverent.

I'd say so; yes. Yeah.

And basically, it's who you are; right? You don't put on a personality.

No, you know, really, I have enough problems maintaining who I am, much less trying to fake people out. I can't do two; one is hard enough. So, I'm very much a Wiziwig kinda guy. I mean, you might not like what you see, but that's what it is.

Guy Kawasaki, a husband and father of four, is a sought-after keynote speaker around the globe. He gives fifty to seventy-five speeches a year to audiences ranging from Fortune 500 companies to high school graduates.

Next week, I'm speaking in Austin … New Orleans, Cleveland, and Helsinki, in five days. That's the nature of my travel.

In how many days; five days?

Five days, I'm speaking in those cities. So … that's not trivial. My speeches are all based on my books. There are really four or five speeches that I give regularly: enchantment, innovation, entrepreneurship, social media, lessons of Steve Jobs. Those are like the five I give. I always use a top ten, because I think a top ten adds a lot of structure. I always use PowerPoint, not because I need PowerPoint as a crutch, but I need PowerPoint so that people can see and hear what I'm talking about.

And it builds.

Yeah; and it makes it makes it more effective. At this point, do I get nervous before a speech? No. I always use the bathroom right before a speech, but I am not particularly nervous. The secret for me and the advice I have for other people; I'll give you some tips. So, number one, if you want to be a good speaker, you need to have something to say. Okay, so duh.

Don't forget that.

Duh. And if you don't have anything to say, you should just shut up and decline. Tip number two is, you should … rehearse. And and for me, in a sense, I've given speeches thousands of times, I have had thousands of rehearsals. So now, it's second nature. When I started, I was very nervous, but now … And so, that is because just repetition.

You did a graduation speech where you gave, I think, ten pieces of advice for your audience members. And they were really interesting. And you said essentially, Yeah, you're gonna become your parents.

That's right.

And you knew it.

Yeah. And I am becoming my father. I can't find my car keys, I can't find my wallet. And … I really love photography, and he really loved photography. The only place I'm not like my father is music; he loved music, and I could care less about music.

He actually named you for a musician.

Guy Lombardo; yeah.

Guy Lombardo.

So, the good news is, I could have been Carmen Lombardo.

Who is her brother.

Right. Yeah.

Why did he name you after Guy Lombardo?

He loved music. You know, he played multiple instruments, and he led a big band.

And you never got into music.

Not at all.

What were some of the other points you said in this graduation speech?

Oh, well, number one was, live off your parents as long as possible, which I may come to regret telling people that. And another is … take up a sport that you can play your whole life. You know, at sixty-one, it's hard to play football. Right? So, take up tennis or in my case, hockey or standup paddleboarding, or you know, something that you can play the rest of your life.

And the reason you wanted students to live off their parents was so that they could travel and really experience some life.

That's a mistake I made. You know, I went through Stanford in three and a half years, I came in with a lot of credits, I took a heavy load. Stanford had these campuses in Japan and Italy, and South America, and you know, all that. I never did any of that, 'cause I wanted to get out of there as fast as possible. It was a big mistake.

And you turn down a lot of speaking—

Yeah; you know, I have four children, and I'm sixty-one years old, so I I made a rule that if I get on an airplane … it's gonna be for money. It's not gonna be for strategic reasons. Although, I have to say, I'm here, not for money.

Yay! It's a nonprofit. Thank you.

Right. But generally speaking, I'm not on a plane because it's taking me away from my family. And so, you know, it's a very objective test that you either want me bad enough to pay, or you don't. And if you don't, it's okay.

Although he speaks to thousands and thousands of people in person at a time, sometimes filling arenas, Guy Kawasaki says he doesn't like crowds.

Because it just sucks energy out of me. And at these events … you may think it's fun to go to a cocktail reception and, you know, maybe meet the person. And so, that's your positon on it. But for me, I'm on from the minute I get there 'til the minute I'm off, 'cause everybody wants something from me. And … noblesse oblige, you have an obligation to do that, but I'm not looking for more of that. And so, that drives some people crazy that, you know, they can't understand how I could have this attitude. But it's the only attitude I can take, to survive.

And yet, you communicate with millions of people.

I do.

And you work hard at it. I've seen you. I mean, you're busy with the thumbs.

Well, but you know what? That is on my own terms. I actually find that energizing. So, maybe I'm a social media extrovert, but I'm not an in-person extrovert. The social media, I can do whenever I want, I have my agenda. You know, it's not necessarily back and forth. I'm not necessarily thinking. I also, believe it or not—this may be rationalization, but I have something called Meniere's disease. And so, Meniere's disease has three symptoms. There's tinnitus, which is a ringing in this ear, hearing loss in this ear, and attacks of vertigo. So … going to a cocktail party where there's music, loud noise, and hard floors and walls … is one of the most difficult things for me, 'cause I literally—this side of my head is just gone. I mean, I just cannot hear. It's very difficult. So, we're in this perfect condition here; right? So, you would never tell anything like that. But right now, my ear is ringing, and it is almost painful. So, it's draining for me.

Is it continuous? Is it twenty-four hours?

Twenty-four by seven, by three sixty-five, for the rest of my life. Now, don't get me wrong; okay? I'm not trying to get sympathy. Because you know what? If somebody said, Well, you can have Meniere's or you can have pancreatic cancer, you know, what would you pick; right? So, nobody ever died from Meniere's. So, I think it is maybe … the worst of the best diseases. There's no cure for it. My interpretation is that I listen to so many crappy pitches during half an hour coffees that it has physically ruined half my brain.

So, you must have less coffee meetings.

That's right; that's right. So, this is a physical reason why I shouldn't meet.

Mahalo to Guy Kawasaki from Kalihi, to Northern California, with a following around the world, for sharing your remarkable story with us. And thank you, for joining us. For PBS Hawaii and Long Story Short, I'm Leslie Wilcox. Aloha, hui hou.

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When I was at Stanford, there were these Parent Days, and I used to see my friends' parents come in their Porches and Lamborghinis, and Maseratis and all that, and Mercedes. And I said, Someday, I'm gonna buy a car like that. And I have bought cars like that. And … you know, this is forty years old or, you know, forty, fifty years old. Then I drive to Stanford, and I look at those kids playing basketball, and their biggest care in the world is … midterms. And I say, I wish I was back at Stanford. And they're looking at me saying, I wish I was driving a Porsche.

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