**The Power of Passion and Perseverance**

**Male speaker**: Welcome to the Chalene Show. Chalene has helped thousands with her books, seminars, and online academies. She’s the author of The New York Times Bestselling book, *PUSH*, and a mother of two.

**Chalene Johnson**: Steve, thank you so much for being on the show today. I think people are going to be really blown away by your story and inspired.

**Steve Kamb:** Hey, Chalene. Thanks so much for having me.

**Chalene Johnson**: Now, when you graduated from college, what were you working - or what were you doing?

**Steve Kamb**: I moved to San Diego with my brother and I got a job by the beach. And I was in sales for a construction equipment company.

**Chalene Johnson:** Your dream job.

**Steve Kamb:** My dream job, yeah. And, you know what, there’s nothing wrong with that. Some people are cut out for sales. I very quickly learned that I was not. Sales was not my cup of tea. I love talking to people. I just don’t like selling to them. And, you know, I had worked some manual labor jobs to pay the bills through, you know, through high school or, you know, summer jobs between college. But the construction industry was something very foreign to me.

So I quickly learned that this was not my calling. And I remember on a lunch break one day while at the day job I went to a bookstore and Tim Ferriss’ 4-Hour Workweek had just come out like a week before that or something. And I was so unhappy and mismatched in my job that I saw the book cover with, you know, the - it’s like a silhouette of two palm trees and a guy in a hammock between them.

**Chalene Johnson**: Yeah.

**Steve Kamb:** And I was like, “Oh, that looks - you know, I wouldn’t mind being in a hammock at home.” So I bought the book. I read it in like a day and a half. And two days later, I purchased the domain NerdFitness.com. So this is about a year and a half or so after I had my, you know, my personal kind of transformative breakthrough when I realized how important diet and fitness was.

**Chalene Johnson:** So you just started a blog. But it’s not a business. It’s just a blog, right?

**Steve Kamb:** Absolutely, yeah. I was like, “I’m not sure how to turn this into a business.” But I know there’s other people out there like me that are nerdy, that love to play video games, and are interested in getting fit but don’t know where to turn. And like there’s no websites out there that are just telling you like straight information, like there’s always something to sell or there’s always sponsored by some supplement or whatever.

So, yeah, I just started writing. And I wasn’t sure how I was going to monetize it or even if I ever would. But I was like, I just - I like helping people. And if I could help a few people not make the six years of mistakes that I did, then maybe there’s a way that this thing can grow and I can help some more people. And maybe, maybe someday eventually down the line turn it into a business that I could run fulltime.

**Chalene Johnson**: Well, what was the very first thing you did as the founder of Nerd Fitness that actually created income?

**Steve Kamb**: The first thing that I did, so I started the website and wrote articles. And honestly, it wasn’t until 18 months later that I finally put out my first product for sale. So up until then, I had just been focused on building an audience and helping people as much as possible.

And I continued to get the same question over and over again. “Steve, just tell me what to do.” I’m like, if there’s…

**Chalene Johnson**: Tell me what to do, yeah.

**Steve Kamb: “**Tell me what to do. I’ll pay you but you need to tell me what to do and I’ll do it.” You know, I wrote an article. It’s like how to build your own workout plan. And for some people, they love that. But other people, it’s like this is a - give me a paint by numbers and tell me which colors to put where and I’ll paint you a picture.

So for me, everybody was just asking like, “Dude, just tell me what workout plan to follow because I’m so afraid of doing the wrong thing. Or if I do six sets of five or four sets of eights, you know, which one’s better? I’ll just do nothing,” you know. So ultimately we put out - we - actually back then it was just me. Now it’s a lot more than just me.

At the time, I put out what was called the *Rebel Fitness Guide*. So the Nerd Fitness community is called the Rebellion based on, you know, Star Wars Rebel Alliance. So our first eBook was called the *Rebel Fitness Guide*. And that came out 18 months after I had started the site. And I had actually quit my day job about a month before putting the eBook out. So I actually quit with no income coming in.

And just this idea that I knew - Nerd Fitness had got to a point where I couldn’t keep up with both. And, you know, I put the eBook out. I was like, “If I can just sell a handful of these-” I think it was like 40 bucks. “If I can sell just a handful of these, it will buy me a few months’ income and I can figure out how to sell more of them. And then that’ll buy me another few months or another few weeks of income.”

And I think I ended up selling like 200 copies in the first few days. And I just…

**Chalene Johnson**: Wow.

**Steve Kamb:** I remember bawling my eyes out, like crying like, “Okay, god.” It felt like this is actually I think I can actually…

**Chalene Johnson:** What were the tears from? Were they like - did you feel relieved? Did you feel…

**Steve Kamb:** Yeah.

**Chalene Johnson:** …scared? Did you feel what?

**Steve Kamb:** Oh, a combination I think of relief, fear, and excitement.

**Chalene Johnson:** Yeah.

**Steve Kamb:** You know, the fact that, you know, up until then I never asked anybody really to put their money where their mouth was and say like, “Hey, if you really like -” or like if you say like, “Give me something that will really help me get fit,” I’m ready for it.

So I remember putting it out and just saying like, “Hey, guys. I made this eBook. If you want it, cool. Like there’s a lifetime money-back guarantee. Like, honestly, I just want to help you guys and I know this website is my future. And if this doesn’t work out, then I’ll pick up a day job as a bar-back or something to make ends meet.” Yeah, fortunately, it worked.

**Chalene Johnson**: Let me go back to that for a second because there are people all the time that will say to me, “When do I quit my day job? I have this business with this blog or this thing that it’s not making much money. And, you know, I hate my job. Or I don’t love my job but I love this hobby of mine. Chalene, just tell me when I can quit my job.”

And I think what you’ve just said is really cool because there is no right answer. For you, it was quitting your job before - and you had exactly zero income coming in from your business. But would you say it was the catalyst or the motivation behind like, “Okay, I just have to put this out there. And I’ve got to get my butt in gear and I’ve got to find a way to monetize this because I’m so passionate about it.” And we’re going to get into your amazing success. You’ve got academies, you’ve got camps, you’ve got - dude, you have a killer tribe.

I mean, it is amazing how people, like, they belong to your community. But I want to ask you a few questions to help people listening who are Steve, you know, back before this thing was making money. And I want to ask you a question I don’t know the answer to it.

But you said you’ve been working on the eBook for about six months before you finally put it out there. Knowing what went into that book, if I had said to you, “Steve, you’ve got two weeks. Write this eBook, get it done,” could you have done that?

**Steve Kamb:** Absolutely. If there was no other option, absolutely.

**Chalene Johnson**: Yeah. So, like you gave - what you did was, it sounds like, you gave yourself a fast-approaching deadline. So if we say, “Hey, you’ve got a year to write a book,” every one of us will take a year, you know.

**Steve Kamb**: Yeah, yeah.

**Chalene Johnson:** But if we say to ourselves, “Like, I don’t have a way to pay my rent if I don’t get this done,” it’s amazing what we can do and how amazing the content is when we have a fast-approaching deadline. So you gave yourself that.

And what I want people to take away from this is there isn’t one like Holy Grail answer. I don’t know when you should quit your job. I don’t know if you should quit your job. If you’ve got kids and a family, responsibility and people you take care of, maybe the way Steve did it isn’t right for you. But maybe it is. Maybe you need that kick in the pants, that fast-approaching deadline of, “Uh-oh, I have no job. I do have this book that’s almost done. And I have these people who have been asking for it.”

And when you say, you know, “I don’t like selling,” if you create something that you love and people are already asking for it, you don’t have to sell. They’re asking for it.

**Steve Kamb:** Right.

**Chalene Johnson**: Tell us a little bit about your academy.

**Steve Kamb:** As, you know, Charles Xavier’s School for Gifted Youngsters, this is our version of that academy which people can sign in to the academy and create a character. And then they receive missions and quests. And when they complete those missions and quests, they earn experience points and level up.

And it’s all done in a way where they receive, you know, 6 to 12 months of exercise programming, diet advice, recipes. There are some videos in there, video demonstrations of every exercise. So we kind of look at the academy as like the first - like if you’re brand new to fitness and you’re lost and you don’t know what to do and you want somebody to virtually hold your hand through the entire process, check out the Nerd Fitness Academy.

And, you know, it’s a one-time fee that you have lifetime access to. And, you know, we’re consistently adding to it. There’s also a really cool community component to it as well. We have regular Nerd Fitness message boards and then more specialized boards split into both men and women in the Nerd Fitness Academy, along with some moderators in each of those.

**Chalene Johnson**: Okay. So I have a bunch of questions. So the first one is, so first let’s just talk to the person who wants to put something out there but they’re really fearful that others are going to say, “But wait a second. This isn’t your degree. You don’t have enough credentials. There’s no letters behind your name,” you know. Their fear is that if they call themselves an expert or even put themselves out there as someone with expertise that other people would judge them. Did you have those fears and/or are you a fitness expert?

**Steve Kamb**: I have a lot of things to say about this question, so I’m glad that you asked it. First and foremost, when I started, a big reason - I bought the domain, NerdFitness.com, and then I did nothing with it for about a year and a half. And a big reason behind that was that I felt like even though I was helping other beginners get fit and not make the beginning mistakes that I did that nobody would take me seriously online without a piece of paper that said I’m a fitness expert.

So I got a weekend certification as a personal trainer. You know, I walked into my local gym and said, “Hey, what sort of certifications do you require to train here?” And they said, “We require this one, there’s another one coming up in a month. It will you take a weekend, blah, blah, blah.” I said, “Okay, great. I’ll sign up and I’ll do that.”

So I got the personal trainer certification. But even then I still didn’t feel right coming across as a quote-unquote, “expert.” So on my about page on Nerd Fitness, I put I think it was in capitals, underline and bold. And it might even still be there. But it says, “I am not a fitness expert.

And it’s funny, once I put out that first eBook and actually co-wrote it or have the workouts were co-created by the guy that did my personal trainer certification, we actually become pretty good friends after that.

After that, I very quickly learned that people didn’t really care that I didn’t go to school for exercise physiology. And they were more interested in the guy that was down in the trenches with them that had been through the things that they had been through and knew where they were coming from.

You know, the way that I like to look at it is, you know, on a scale of 1 to 10 or 0 to 10, 0 being a complete newbie and 10 being the world’s most, you know, world’s foremost authority on a particular subject, if you’re a 3 or a 4, there’s no reason you can’t help the 0s and 1s and 2s.

And when you help those people that are beginners, because you have just been through that stuff and present yourself as like, “Hey, I’m not a 10 expert on this stuff, but I’ve made the mistakes and I’m going to teach you how to not make them.” I think people respond to that a lot more. And then as you teach them, you can slowly move up from a four to a five, a five to a six. Like right now, I’m probably I’d say a seven or an eight, maybe on the fitness scale.

You know, now my life has been dedicated to this over the past decade. But even today, I would still consider myself a student more of fitness than I would consider myself an expert of it.

**Chalene Johnson**: You know, there’s this cool thing about what you’re doing that’s it’s so like unrelated and weirdly niche. You know what I mean? Like to think of like, “Well, it’s fitness for people who consider themselves nerds.” Like I think that’s so cool because it makes you realize, you don’t have to compartmentalize yourself. Like I love fashion and I love music. And I used to say to people like, “I workout harder when I have a cute outfit on.” But I would only say that to like my closest friends because I knew they would get it. You know, I’m like, if my hair is done and I’ve lip gloss on and my outfit makes me feel thin, I work out like a beast.

But if I have like baggy sweats on and a sweatshirt and I look horrible and like my - you know, I just look like I just rolled out of bed, that’s great if you can kill it. I can’t.

**Steve Kamb:** Sure.

**Chalene Johnson**: I go so much harder when I look better. But I would never say that like publicly. I would only say it to my friends who kind of feel that same way too.

And I think the important piece for everybody is to recognize, you know, you don’t have to hide that thing that is you because there’s other people who are in that same odd, strange niche who almost don’t want to admit it either. And that’s who’s looking for you.

**Steve Kamb:** Yeah, absolutely. I think the best - my favorite quote relating to this, Seth Godin said, “Be judged or be ignored.” And it’s so true. Like if you just want to blend into the background, feel free.

However, if you’re going to step outside of that and embrace the things that are important to you and they don’t necessarily align up with those around you, like, hell yeah, you’re going to be judged for it. And I think that fear takes away from a lot of people.

And I think hopefully when people find Nerd Fitness, everybody is like, their nerdy pursuit happens as like their super power or, you know, their mutant power that they then bring to the table and get to be unique in that aspect. But they’re surrounded by really supportive individuals that are all interested in being, you know, in that niche of like, “Yeah, dude, I play Dungeons and Dragons and I can also deadlift 400 pounds. Or I run half marathons and then I do live action role playing on Sundays like with my friends in town.” Like that is so cool to me that people can do both those things and be celebrated for both halves of it.

**Chalene Johnson**: What would you say is the one piece of advice that you wish you would have taken earlier because you might have been more successful quicker?

**Steve Kamb:** The worse thing - I didn’t start building a proper email list until like a year or something in…

**Chalene Johnson**: Let’s give a big round of applause on that answer. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

**Steve Kamb:** So dumb. I mean I can’t think about how many people stumbled across the site and there was no opportunity - you know, back then, I was like, “This is 2009 or 2010.” I was like, “Oh, people use RSS and, you know, they can sign up via FeedBurner and get emails that way. And I don’t have to do anything. They just automatically get sent out.” So dumb. And finally, like when I was getting around to like, “Okay, if this is going to be real business, I’ll start looking at it like a real business.” And created an email list for people to sign up for.

And another thing that I wish I’d done early is create some sort of offer on - like I’m embarrassed to admit this, but I’ve been running Nerd Fitness for six, it’s probably coming up on six-and-a-half years now. And it wasn’t until probably two years ago, two-and-a-half years ago that I put together an actual compelling reason for people to sign up for email list.

**Chalene Johnson**: Okay. So you mean like a freemium or a giveaway, a lead…

**Steve Kamb:** A giveaway. Before that, I was like, “Sign up for the email list and get two emails a week.” It was like an email series and you get five emails scattered over two weeks. And it was very disorganized.

But that just by sheer, you know, hardheadedness and keeping just writing two articles a week for four years up to that point, you know, I built a pretty sizeable list. I think at that point, it’s probably up over 100,000 despite all the things that I was doing wrong. And then I remember like we’re getting like maybe 200, 300 opt-in, maybe like 100, 150, 200 opt-ins a day which is still a bigger than I’ve ever seen.

And then we finally created a - you know, if you go to nerdfitness.com, like the new version of the site that you see now is what we launched two-and-a-half years ago. And I was like, “Sign up, get two free eBooks and join the email list.” And like overnight, we went from like 150 sign ups a day to 500, 700, I mean it was like the biggest slap in the face.

**Chalene Johnson**: That’s huge. So huge.

**Steve Kamb:** Yeah, like I’m so thankful that we - I’m just to bombed out that, you know, thinking of what I missed out on although, you know, live and learn and we all make - just as I make mistakes with fitness, I had made them in business too. I just kind of figured out as I went.

**Chalene Johnson**: But I think so many people assume, “You know, this is just a hobby. I don’t have anything to offer them. I don’t have to monetize yet. So I just can’t be bothered with creating and managing and figuring out an email list.” I just have to commend you for being honest about that and saying, you know, “I wish I’ve done that.” Because it just makes life so much easier.

I’m going to ask you and uncomfortable question.

**Steve Kamb:** Oh boy, okay.

**Chalene Johnson**: Are you ready? It’s two-part. Number one, who are you looking for and who do you not want to be a part of your community?

**Steve Kamb:** Good question. You know, honestly, I…

**Chalene Johnson**: Don’t you dare say we want everybody. Don’t you dare.

**Steve Kamb:** No, we don’t. We don’t. I think we welcome everybody, but then we gladly tell people that, “Hey, this might not be for you.” Right around the time, about a year after I’d started this site, I was getting to ready to launch message boards and put message boards up in the site so the community have a way to talk to each other, you know, to quote - you know, as you mentioned earlier, you know, we wanted to build our tribe. And we named ourselves the Rebellion.

Actually, I asked people if they wanted to start a rebellion or build an empire. And the response overwhelmingly came in for they wanted to join the rebellion.

**Chalene Johnson**: I love that.

**Steve Kamb:** So there was a big crowd, so we nerd sourced that one. I think I asked through the Facebook page for Nerd Fitness. People asked me when I’m going to run a marathon. And I generally tell them, “Hopefully never.” It’s just not my thing. Like I don’t love to run. We get emails everyday from injured runners that are like, “Oh, you know, my knees don’t work anymore because I used to run so much,” or, “I’m trying to lose weight and I’m running all the time and my joints hurt and blah, blah.”

And I’m also a huge fan of the paleo diet. And not for the reason that like, “Oh, a caveman ate this so I should eat it.” But it’s like, it’s a very simple way of looking at how to consume food. And that you just eat real things and you don’t worry about counting calories. You mostly focus on vegetables. You add in a protein source, generally from meat. And then you get some healthy fats in there.

And as a result of this, I get a lot of angry emails from pissed off vegan marathon runners. They’re like, “Hey man, why don’t you write about running marathons more?” Or, “Why don’t you write about, you know, being a vegan and how important that is?” And I’m like, “Sorry, but that’s not, you know, that’s not my particular…”

**Chalene Johnson**: There’s a site for you someplace else.

**Steve Kamb:** There’s a site for you, yeah.

**Chalene Johnson**: Yeah.

**Steve Kamb:** That’s called nomeatathlete.com. It’s run by a friend of mine and it’s fantastic.

**Chalene Johnson**: That’s great.

**Steve Kamb:** My friend Matt who runs No Meat Athlete is a vegan marathon runner. And like that’s what his tribe is about and like, fantastic. So like if you want to stick around for the nerdy stuff, like that’s great. But, you know, if the idea of strength training and this concept of the paleo diet is, you know, don’t align up to your core, do not align up with who you are, then like that’s fine. Like this community probably isn’t for you.

**Chalene Johnson**: I love that. And do you believe that that has so much to do with your success that you’ve just boldly said and unapologetically, said, “This is who we are. If it works for you, cool. If not, see you later, good luck.

**Steve Kamb:** Yeah. I think especially at the beginning too, when I started out, we were such a tight knit group of people. Like our message boards launched with I think we had like 50 people on them, 30, 40 like in any - and most of the communities, like you have a message board with like 30 or 40 people, and that’s like a death sentence. It’s like, don’t even bother, nobody’s there. Nobody is going to show up.

But because we’re so excited about being a part of this thing, being part of this really unique group of people, that everybody was just posting on there all the time. And, you know, I feel really fortunate that I was able to recruit the right kind of people, to lead by example, to start with like, “Hey, you might be nerdy. Yes, you might love fitness. But also, remember where you came from.” So like even if you are power lifting, you know, if you’re deadlifting 600 pounds now or you can run marathon in 2 hours and 45 minutes, like we all had to start somewhere.

So there’s no bad question when people join the Nerd Fitness community. Like, “Hey, you know, I just got here to the community. I’m doing, you know, Weight Watchers and Nutrisystem and I drink Slim-Fast every morning and I’m doing this other thing.” And so it’s like, “Okay, you’re working non-stop, you’re trying, that’s awesome. Like now we have a place to start. Finally, we can build on that.

**Chalene Johnson**: Well, I just feel like your kindred spirit. It’s been awesome chatting with you, Steve. I know this is going to inspire so many people because, you know, like what they say, “The riches are in the niches.” But truthfully, it’s not even about the riches. It’s like, everybody likes to geek out, you know. And we all geek out when we find this like odd, strange thing and we run into somebody else who’s into this odd, strange thing that doesn’t relate to all the other things that we do. And we’re like, “No way, you’ve got that side to you too.” And like you’ve built not just a community and a business, but you’ve built a live and a purpose around this. So I just want to high five you and say congratulations.

**Steve Kamb:** Thank you so much. It means a lot. And honestly, I feel very lucky that every day I get to wake up and do the things that I love, work with a team of people that I’m proud to work with and be part of the community that like, I’m proud to call friends.

**Chalene Johnson**: Yeah.

**Steve Kamb:** You know, I know you mentioned briefly earlier, but we have this thing called, Camp Nerd Fitness, and we just had our fist one last year where we finally brought the whole community, well, brought 200 of our closest community members together to this camp in Georgia and we’re having another one coming up this fall.

And I held it together for the three days at camp. But on my drive home, it was in Atlanta. So on my four-hour drive home, I probably cried like 10 times. Like I was like I can’t believe that just happened.

**Chalene Johnson**: Yeah.

**Steve Kamb:** I can’t believe we pulled it off. And now I’m just watching like the message - the Facebook group from people that came to camp last year, like they’re coordinating me they’re absolutely flying across the country and like setting up nerd vacations with each other and things. It’s like so much fun to watch to happen. And the fact that, you know, I get to be a part of it - and that’s the way I look at it, like I’m just a small part of the Nerd Fitness Rebellion and a part of Team Nerd Fitness. And it’s really cool to watch it grow and watch these people transform. And I’m just honored to be a part of it.

**Chalene Johnson**: Well, we are honored to hear your story. I know people are going to check out your website after this episode. And I hope that they will become nerds unite, you found your home. And Steve, thank you so much for everything you do.

**Steve Kamb:** Thank you so much for having me here. I appreciate it.

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