The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts
Episode 86: Stanley McChrystal, Chris Fussell
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Tim Ferriss: Hello, ladies and germs. This is Tim Ferriss. Welcome to another episode of the Tim Ferriss Show, where I interview and deconstruct world class performers to tease out all the tactical, actionable bits that you can use: the morning rituals, the favorite books, the meals, the workouts, the influences, all those things that you can replicate and pull into your own life.

This episode is chock full of all sorts of good information. It was a lot of fun to do. And there are two guests: Stanley McChrystal and Chris Fussell.

Stanley McChrystal retired from the U.S. Army as a four-star general after more than 34 years of service. Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates described him as, "perhaps the finest warrior and leader of men in combat I have ever met." From 2003 to 2008, he served as commander of the Joint Special Operations Command, otherwise known as JASOC, where he was credited with the death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. His last assignment was as commander of all American and coalition forces in Afghanistan. He's a senior fellow at Yale University's Jackson Institute for Global Affairs, and the co-founder of CrossLead, a leadership consulting firm.

Chris Fussell is a former U.S. Navy SEAL Officer, also former aide-de-camp for General McChrystal – and we'll get into what that means – and a current senior executive at CrossLead. And in this conversation, which is very wide-ranging, and I think particularly important for people who are anti-military or have very strong feelings – pro or con, related to war – to listen to.

We dig into, of course, some very personal habits and backgrounds. So Stanley's very well known for eating one meal per day. Why is that? What does he eat? We dig into it. And workouts, all of the very personal bits, we dig into for both of these gentlemen. And then we also talk about combat. We talk about the realities of fear, of death, of combat, of high stakes. How to come back from death in the field. All of these things that, I think, have implications across many, many disciplines, including for the private sector, quite frankly, although the stakes are often lower.

So I hope you enjoy this interview. There is a lot here. There are a couple of areas where we get into a little bit of inside baseball related to special operations, and things like that. Please bear with me and go through it because there are gems hidden throughout, I think, from both of these gentlemen. So I hope you enjoy, and thank you for listening.

Tim Ferriss: Stan and Chris, welcome to the show.

Stanley McChrystal: Thanks for having us.

Chris Fussell: Appreciate it.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, I have been looking forward to this and have way more questions than we'll ever get through today. But I have been fascinated by not only the military and the training of the military, the pros and cons of different aspects of the military, but also how those translate to the civilian world. And after *The 4-Hour Body* and *The 4-Hour Chef*, I spent time with the Defense Language Institute and really became fascinated with the habits and rituals of the top performers in that world. So I have a slew of questions. But the one that I have been asked to ask you, Stan, more than perhaps any other is, why one meal a day? Do you actually eat one meal a day?

Stanley McChrystal: I do. And people ask me why. Is it some Zen connection with something? And no. What happened was, when I was a lieutenant in Special Forces, many, many years ago, I thought I was getting fat. And I started running. And I started running distance, which I enjoyed. But I also found that my personality was such that I'm not really good at eating three or four small disciplined meals. I'm better to defer gratification and then eat one meal. And for me, that's dinner. And so what I do is I sort of push myself hard all day, try to get everything done and then reward myself with dinner at night.

Tim Ferriss: What time do you usually eat dinner?

Stanley McChrystal: Well, whenever I'm finished working. It would be like 8:00 or 8:30. There's a challenge when you work really long hours, because suddenly, you start to eat very late and then you go directly to bed. You feel like you're sleeping with a football in your stomach.

Tim Ferriss: And do you drink coffee earlier in the day? I'm just thinking with the workout and that many hours, a lot of people would fade. How do you prevent yourself from fading?

Stanley McChrystal: I have a tendency – I'll drink coffee, I'll drink other beverages, too. Water and different things. And I do find that there are certain days your body just says, "Eat, and eat right now." And I used to keep a bin of those hard pretzels in my office in Afghanistan, and I'd grab a handful of those. And other times, I might be out doing something physical in the military, like road marching. And suddenly, your body communicates, "Eat pretty quickly, or you won't keep road marching." And I'll do that. But otherwise, I like to stick to the idea of one a night.

Tim Ferriss: Got it. This is a constant topic of conversation in the intermittent fasting worlds. Ori Hofmekler has his thing, the paleo guys have their thoughts, obviously. Chris, are you a one-meal-a-day kind of guy?

Chris Fussell: Well, when I was working for then General McChrystal as his aid-de-camp his last year running the Joint Special Operations Command, it was sort of by directive. There was no other choice. That was just what we'd call the battle rhythm of the organization. And when the old man got to eat, you did it then or you didn't do it at all. I've lived on that train. But I would be the first to tell others because, as Stan alluded to, it sort of became the driver in the organization. This is what we do.

And I would tell people, as his aide, "He won't judge you if you eat breakfast. This is the way his metabolism works. He doesn't do this as a demonstration of personal strength. This is just what works. So don't think you're impressing him by not eating lunch, or whatever.

The classic story around this, when I first joined the inner circle staff. We had this command sergeant major, who I'll call Jody – a legend in the community – he had been with Stan for about 3 and a half years, at that point. And so I was asking him about the one meal a day thing. And he said when he showed up, for the first year, he's two feet from Stan for the entire five years they worked together. And he said, "Well, this what the boss does, this is what I'll do." So he did a meal a day and he does not have the metabolism that drives toward it. And we lived in these little crummy Quonset huts next to the headquarters—

Tim Ferriss: Did you say Quonset huts?

Chris Fussell: Just wooden huts, pretty Spartan living, about 50 yards from where the headquarters was in Iraq. And Jody said about a year into the tour, General McChrystal calls him and says, "Jody, get in there." So he runs over. "What's up, sir?" And he said, "I hadn't looked through his hooch before." And he said, "General McChrystal was pointing at this little tin of pretzels he has, and he goes, 'I think there's mice eating my pretzels.'"

Jody said, "I almost whipped out my gun and shot him." And I said, "You've been eating pretzels, and I've been eating one meal a day...

Tim Ferriss: Dark secret.

Chris Fussell: ... for a year, and you have pretzels in your room?" He goes, "It was the most unprofessional I've ever been with an officer. I had to storm out of the room."

Tim Ferriss: You know low blood sugar will do that.

Chris Fussell: It was so funny.

Tim Ferriss: It makes cowards of men. Long-distance running and low blood sugar.

Chris Fussell: That's right.

Tim Ferriss: So you mentioned hooch. One of the challenges that civilians have, and probably where a lot of movies make a million and one mistakes is just with the terminology. So let's start with "hooch". Hooch is where someone is living? Their quarters?

Chris Fussell: That's right. Your overseas quarters, everyone will refer to as your "hooch".

Tim Ferriss: Got it. So even if you're in a room with, say, 10 or 15 other people, would your particular bunk be considered your "hooch"?

Chris Fussell: If you had a common berthing with ten folks, or so – In the special operations community, we break into teams of four, so we would share a common space – and that would be like that fire team's "hooch".

Tim Ferriss: Got it. And so you spend, correct me if I'm wrong, and I'm going to apologize in advance, because I'm sure I will misuse

terminology, but... So you spend 15 years with the SEAL teams, with a development group known as DEVGRU...

Chris Fussell: Correct.

Tim Ferriss: ... and JASOC. And what I'd love to talk about for a second, just to get everyone on the same page with vocabulary – Could you explain to me how the SOCOM or JASOC is broken up? What are the groups within it? And the reason I ask is, I was spending time in Monterey at the Defense Language Institute, and I remember before I got up to speak – because we were doing Q&A and keynotes – and they said, "Whatever you do, do not refer to all the people serving in the armed forces as soldiers." They were like, number one, they're not all soldiers. And I was like, "Okay, I need an education here."

So could you, perhaps, explain what the people in the different branches like to be referred to as, and then what JASOC is comprised of?

Chris Fussell: Sure. At the most macro level, you have the four-stars in D.C. that run the military. And then you have each branch—

Tim Ferriss: Four-star generals?

Chris Fussell: Four-star generals. And then you have the army, the navy, the air force, the marines, etc. And then underneath those, going back a few decades, there are special operations components of each one that develop. The Navy SEALS, back to Vietnam, the Green Berets, the Army Rangers, etc.

Tim Ferriss: The Green Berets were within which group?

Chris Fussell: Within the army.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

Chris Fussell: So you started to develop these highly specialized teams inside of each branch. And then going back to the failed rescue mission inside of Iran under the Carter Administration, there was something called the Holloway Commission that came out of that inside of Congress. And what they basically found out of that was, even though we had these special operations units, we don't know how to work together in a truly joint fashion. And so at that point what evolved out of that. You have the Special Operations Command, which is a four-start command down in...

Tim Ferriss: SOCOM.

Chris Fussell: ... Tampa, SOCOM. So each one of these special operations units basically created a dotted line relationship, both to their parent service – So the SEALS report to the Navy – but they also report to SOCOM, which is a joint headquarters. And then also, off of SOCOM was created the Joint Special Operations Command. And the idea there was to...

Tim Ferriss: JASOC.

Chris Fussell: ... JASOC. And out of each of these special operations units, they all have a subcomponent of a secondary selection phase that people go through to get into even a more elite... like the Army Rangers, the Development Group, etc. And those all report up underneath the Join Special Operations Command, JASOC. And the history of that organization goes back to the early '80s. A lot of our experiences post-9/11 were, obviously, centered in and around the evolution of JASOC, which Stan commanded for five years, from 2003 to 2008.

Tim Ferriss: Got it. Thank you. And what does an ADC – that's aide-de-camp – do? What were your primary functions in working with Stan? And I think this was for the last year that you were in the field?

Stanley McChrystal: In JASOC.

Tim Ferriss: In JASOC, right.

Chris Fussell: So Stan commanded that unit from 2003 to 3008. I was inside the community at that point, and then was brought up to be his aide-de-camp for 2007, 2008. And then he went on, obviously – came back to command all the forces in Afghanistan about a year or so later. So the role of an aide-de-camp goes back as far as there have been militaries, and it really varies from senior leader to senior leader in how they use their immediate staff. But my experiences there – I think we're pretty unique – because a few things that General McChrystal did differently was that he selected people to be in his immediate staff – even down to a junior level, like I was still a mid-grade officer at that point – that sort of pay into the... the idea was, you want to pay in the units to pull out people with real experience to be on this immediate staff.

Not that it made life easier for him, but he had developed such an understanding of how broad networks are really what was driving

the organization, that he wanted people that really came in with a knowledge of key players, both inside of our organization and then external units that you could connect with. So if you had the right relationships, you became a force multiplier for how quickly the organization could move.

And the simplest way I could describe it, on that immediate level of being very involved with the day-to-day and week-to-week actions of the commanding general, myself and one other individual in the military's called – so you have an executive officer and an aide-de-camp. And the way I always looked at it was, my job was to keep the commanding general's life as fluid as possible. So I thought of it like this: Never touch a locked door, never wait for an aircraft, never slow down the train.

Tim Ferriss: Removing all the friction points.

Chris Fussell: That's right. Not to protect the individual, but because you realize we're moving so fast that every wasted minute of the senior leader, whether it was General McChrystal or if he got shot, whoever came in next. Every wasted minute there has real impacts on the battlefield. So your job was to create a seamless, fluid approach to the organization.

Tim Ferriss: What were some of the ways that you reduced friction and kept everything running smoothly?

Chris Fussell: I think the number one thing I learned was, you have to have good relationships. Actually, Stan told me, I think probably day one of my in-brief, because he had been running the organization for four years at that point and the organization had a phenomenal relationship. And so, I'm paraphrasing, but he basically said, "You'll get whatever you want." You're very much at the front line of coordinating all the logistics for the movement of the commanding general. So you'll win pretty much every argument, if it gets to that. You can do that as a good person or a bad person.

And the opinions people have of the organization will be drawn, in large part, from their encounters with you. How you come across on email, how you come across on the phone, how you interact with our junior staffs. Many, many people walk away, ultimately, and think, "I have a good or bad opinion of JASOC based on this five-email exchange I had with this mid-grade officer." So you really have to protect that, first and foremost. And if you do that well, everything else will work well behind it.

Stanley McChrystal: Can I add some observations? When I was a captain, I was a company commander in a mechanized infantry unit, and the division commander, the two-star general was a guy who later became pretty famous and he was a pretty forceful kind of guy. And he had an aide-de-camp, and he wanted me to be the new aide-de-camp. So he came to visit me in the field when we were in the desert. And he was standing in front of me, it was early morning on a battle position, and he's looking at me and it was cold out, and he was talking to me. And I knew his aide-de-camp who was behind him. And he was standing there with a bag, and the general said, "Captain McChrystal, you want some coffee?" And I said, "No, thanks." He said something about some soup and I said, "No, thanks." All my troops around, you're not going to take anything that your troops don't get. And then he said, "I think I'm going to have some soup." And he didn't turn around, he just reached his hand back and held his open hand there.

And as I'm watching, his aide had to open this bag, pull out the soup, put the cup in, pour soup in it. I was embarrassed for my peer. And then they're trying to convince me that I wanted to do this job. And 1.) I swore to myself I'd never do that, and 2.) I swore to myself that I would never *do that* to people.

And so when Chris became aide-de-camp, it was more like being a chief of staff. As Chris says, what he really, in my view, was – He was the connection to the command. He was one of the connections, but probably the primary one. How I was viewed, in many cases, depended upon how he coordinated with people.

Tim Ferriss: Right, and presented himself.

Stanley McChrystal: And then also, they would come to him for, "What does the old man think?" Because there were times when I'm moving 100 miles and hour, and they'd come. And so a couple things had to be true: 1.) He had to know how the old man thought, and 2.) He had to be able to articulate that in a way that was mature, and whatnot. So it's really an interesting job. And as Chris described, you pull somebody up who's very experienced, but you also pull someone up that's got great potential, who will benefit from this unique experience and visibility. And I think Chris was my fourth or fifth aide-de-camp, and by far the best. But also, I'd learned.

Tim Ferriss: Of course. And I'm so interested in this aide-de-camp position, partially because I'm trying to draw for myself parallels between military and civilian life. Particularly, military elite units and fast-growing startups that could change the world, potentially. And the aide-de-camp position reminds me a bit of an article I recently read

called “Ten Thousand Hours with Reid Hoffman,” – Reid Hoffman, chairman of LinkedIn. And his equivalent aide-de-camp was Ben Casnocha. Very young guy. Very high promise. So I’m personally looking to, at some point soon, hire someone like an aide-de-camp. So this is all very self-interested.

But let me ask a couple of questions about routine. And then I’d love to go back in history a little bit. Do you work out every day?

Stanley McChrystal: I do.

Tim Ferriss: What type of exercise and why?

Stanley McChrystal: When I was younger and I got serious about working out, I was a second lieutenant. And as I mentioned, I started getting fat. And I had a first sergeant in my parachute infantry company that liked to run. So we would do loosening up exercises, and then we’d run. So I started running. And for the first 20 or so years, I ran. I had one period, when I was a captain, when I ran 15 miles a day, 7 days a week. Didn’t vary, didn’t take days off. Wore lousy running shoes. It was stereotypically all the mistakes you can make.

As I got older and I started to have a series of shoulder surgeries and back surgeries, predictably, what I learned to do was alternate. So I will run one day, I’ll lift weight the next day. I’ll bike when I’m home and I have that capability, so I can round out. But for me, it’s very important to do something literally every day. I’ll only take a day off when I’m forced to because I’ve got some weird schedule thing that makes it impossible.

Tim Ferriss: What does your resistance training workout look like?

Stanley McChrystal: I will start at my home, if we’re at home. And I go down to my basement and I do four sets of pushups, as many as I can do for four sets. And I alternate that with a series of abs exercises. So I’ll start with a set of sit-ups, and I’ll do 100 sit-ups. And I’ll flip over and I’ll do three minutes of a plank. And then I’ll do some yoga that I learned for about two or three minutes. Then I’ll do another set of pushups. And then I’ll go to my next abs thing, which is a crunch-like crossover.

And then I’ll do a two-and-a-half-minute plank. And then I’ll do more yoga, slightly different. Then I’ll do another set of pushups, and then I’ll do my third set, which is crossover sit-ups. And I’ll then do a third plank of two minutes, I’m decreasing each time. Then I’ll do some more yoga. And then I’ll do my fourth set of

pushups. And then I'll do my fourth, which is a flutter kick – 60 flutter kicks, followed by static. Then I'll do my fourth plank, which is now a minute and a half.

And then I'll come back. I only do four sets of pushups, so the last time, I don't do pushups. I then do one more set of the crunch-like, and I'll flip over and do my last plank, which is one minute. And then I'll do some final yoga. And that'll take me about 45 to 50 minutes. Then I'll leave my house and go to the gym because my gym opens at 5:30. It's three blocks from my house.

Tim Ferriss: I assume we mean a.m.

Stanley McChrystal: Yeah. So I can do all this from 4:30. If I get up at 4:00, I can do all that from 4:30 to about 5:20, 5:25, go down to my gym, and then when I get to the gym I do four sets of pull-ups, alternated with inclined bench press, alternated with standing curls. And then in that, I'll also do these one-legged things. Balance exercises is the break between them. I was taught that was good for balance, and whatnot. And then I'll do a few other things. And I can do all that in 30, 35 minutes. So by 6:15, 6:20, I can be done at the gym, head back home, get cleaned up and then be starting work.

Tim Ferriss: Ready to rock and roll.

Stanley McChrystal: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Why is exercise important to you, both when you were overseas and at home? Maybe the reasons differ but why is that routine, ritual important?

Stanley McChrystal: I think it's several things. There's a certain self-image. I think that if I was struggling with my weight or if I was not as fit as I wanted people to perceive me and I couldn't perceive myself that way, I think my own self esteem would suffer. And particularly over life now, whenever I'm injured, even if a slight period, it bothers me a lot. So I think that's part of it. Second is the military. There's an expectation. If you are not a physical leader in the kind of organizations that Chris and I were in, if you can't do those things physically – You don't have to do it better than everybody else, but you have to do it credibly and they can look up to – Then I think your status in the organization is going to go down.

I left Ranger Battalion command in 1996 and I went off to spend a year at Harvard. And I remember one of my non-commissioned officers said, "So what are you going to do at Harvard?" I said,

"I'm going to study." He says, "You going to work out?" And I said, "Yeah, presumably, I will." And he goes, "You know, you come back here with a PhD., but you're out of shape, we're going to have a word for you, and it ain't going to be doctor." And I just thought that was so good.

It also puts a discipline in the day. I find that if the day is terrible, but I worked out, at the end of the day I'd go, "Well, I had a good workout." Almost no matter what happens. When the Rolling Stone article came out, it came out at about 1:30 in the morning. I found out about it. I made a couple calls, I knew we had a big problem, and I went and put my clothes on and ran for an hour. Clear my head, stretch myself. Didn't make it go away. But that was something that I do in those situations.

Tim Ferriss: For me, it's a way of diversifying my identity, in a way. So that if everything else is suffering, if I'm losing at everything else for factors outside of my control, at least the bar doesn't care.

So Chris, I'd love to ask you – and then I'm going to come back to the Rangers with Stan in a second – but if you could pick a handful of books, say, two or three books for all West Point graduates to read before being deployed or going into combat situations – doesn't have to be West Point, but given my limited knowledge of where people come from before the military, let's just assume that's the case. What books would you assign to them? They don't have to be military-related.

Chris Fussell: That's a great question. The tendency is to look for something written by a platoon leader, or some sort of geopolitical here's the current state of our relationships with this country. I always encourage folks, if you're going to – we have multiple deployments to Afghanistan – read old English works from British soldiers that were on the frontier, years ago. Read travelogues from people that were traveling through Afghanistan in peaceful times a century ago. Go back into the history because one of the key variables in all these current conflicts, at least, that we continually miss on as a nation, and all the way down to an individual level – I know I've been guilty of it – is really understanding the cultural context that we're seen through.

So I found over the years, the best way to empathize with the locals on the ground is to try – and you'll never be perfect, it's nearly impossible – but try to understand their view, their sense of history, which frankly tends to be on a much longer time horizon

than ours, as Western leaders. And try to see yourself in their timeline.

Take Afghanistan as an example. It's easy to look at Afghanistan as born into being on September 11th, 2001. In reality, we are a section in a very, very long, complex and proud history in Afghanistan. It affects Pakistan and Pakistan affects India. So we have a little blip inside a very complicated timeline. And if you show up thinking, "Okay. this is year four of this country's relevance to the world," you're going to miss every time. You have to understand the person on the ground. When you're going out at night, what are they seeing? What do they understand as the current situation? It's really the only way I've found to be able to make some sort of connection with the reality of the situation.

Tim Ferriss: There are so many misconceptions about the military and what it feels like to be, say, in combat. And I believe I've had a couple of books recommended to me, as a civilian, if I want to have a better understanding of the realities of combat. I think there's a book called *On Combat* and *On Killing.* They're a handful. If you had to give a book as a gift to someone to give them insight into the realities of combat, do any come to mind?

Chris Fussell: Well, a classic in the special operations community is *Gates of Fire*, by Steven Pressfield. Really highly read. I think it's a great work, and it speaks to the bond that exists inside of – you know, that's about the Spartan 300 that stood at the gates of Thermopylae versus the Persians – and it's aggrandized, of course, but it really make a cultural statement about what it's like to be part of that level of an organization. Literally, the people are going to lock arms and know what they're facing together. But they're doing it for a higher purpose.

And I think what Pressfield does masterfully is talks about the culture that supports that. So it was probably the only book in that genre that I constantly recommend to wives, as well. Because I think Pressfield, wisely, give as much credit to the women of Sparta as he does to the soldiers that went forward, making the case that this wouldn't exist without a home network that made it possible in the first place. One of the greatest strengths of the JASOC community, for sure, is the women at home that raise the kids, take care of the family, and live through years and years of deployments in very honorable way. So I think that's top of the list.

Tim Ferriss: Great, thank you. Stan, what book or books have you gifted the most to other people?

Stanley McChrystal: I have probably given the most copies of a book written in 1968 by Anton Myrer, called *Once an Eagle.* It's a story of two characters, both who entered the military during the First World War. And it follows them up through the Second World War, in fact, into the post-war years.

On one level, it's a little simplistic. There's one who is wealthy and ambitious, and somewhat unscrupulous. And the other is a Nebraska farm boy who wins the Medal of Honor and thrifty, brave, clean, reverent, etc. But it's actually more complex than that, because it takes them through a whole career, with all the nuances of army life. The difficulties of peacetime service, slow promotions. And then the challenges of war, and their personal side, as well.

And I gave that to a tremendous number of young officers and NCOs with whom I served, because I thought it was a good window to them that the military seems like the day you're living, but it's really a life. It's a career. It's going to have an arc, and it's going to have ups and downs and lefts and rights, just like your personal life is. I found that really valuable.

Tim Ferriss: Thank you. So I want to talk about West Point for a second. I think there's a fascination with West Point. The name's easy to remember. It conjures a lot of images for people, cadets in uniform, etc. I was hoping you could explain – and this is from reading your memoir – what "slugs" are, and what "area tours" are.

Stanley McChrystal: Sure. West Point was designed to produce officers and gentlemen. And it was designed to be very disciplined. So early in its process it decided that it was going to have to have ways to discipline cadets for infractions, some of which were pretty humorous, some of which were worthy of great story. "Slug" became the slang term for disciplinary punishment that you received. So you would do something wrong and a slug would be a set of – typically three things – you'd get a certain number of demerits, you'd get a certain number of punishment tours walking the area – and I'll describe that – and the last part would be confinement.

When I was a cadet, they had something called "special confinement" where it was 24 hours a day, unless you were in class or in the mess hall or something, you literally were on lockdown.

Tim Ferriss: So it's like solitary confinement?

Stanley McChrystal: Very much. In fact, it was declared unconstitutional while I was a sophomore. And I was under special confinement when it was, so it was quite a liberating thing. And then the punishment tours were funny because you get in a dress uniform, and you walk back and forth across a concrete apron, or open area. And my father explained to me that typical punishment might be go clean latrines, or something, but they didn't think that was appropriate for future officers. So they said, "We're going to have them do something that's not flogging, or anything. But it's absolutely useless." So you go out and you spend, typically, three hours at a shot walking back and forth. It's tiring, but it's not physically painful. But it's an utter waste of time.

The one thing you don't have at West Point is any spare time. So they take away your spare time with no sense of accomplishment. You don't even cut the grass. You can't even look and say, "Well, the grass is better." Nobody benefited from it. You just paid.

Tim Ferriss: And you would be in uniform? Would you carry a weapon?

Stanley McChrystal: You carry an M14 that we use for parades and whatnot. As you walk back and forth, it's on right-shoulder arm and then left-shoulder arm. Back and forth.

Tim Ferriss: The reason I bring this up, of course – and I feel like everybody should read your memoir, and we'll talk about your newest book as well – I got in a lot of trouble in school. I was at the bad table starting in kindergarten, and pretty much progressed at the bad table throughout the rest of my K-12 career, as it were. You did, I believe, in your first year, 127 hours of area tours?

Stanley McChrystal: 128.

Tim Ferriss: 128?

Stanley McChrystal: Who's counting?

Tim Ferriss: Right, who's counting? So I'm curious if you noticed any correlation between those types of infractions and later high-ranking officers or people who were recognized as outstanding later. Or is that not the case? Is that kind of mischief a common component? Or is it not?

Stanley McChrystal: At West Point, doing the tours was not always a correlating factor because a lot of guys just didn't get caught. I couldn't be a criminal now because I'm just not lucky enough. So I had a lot of guys who were doing what I did, but didn't get caught.

I would say that there's a higher correlation between people who know how to live life than there is between high academic performance at West Point, or a perfect disciplinary record and success in the army. The guys who really turned out to be good soldiers that I worked with from my peer group at West Point tended not to be at the top of the class. Tended not to have perfect, pristine records at West Point. But they tended to have high peer ratings – we did peer ratings religiously. And so other people would look at them and say, "You know, so-and-so gets in a lot of trouble, but he lives life. And that's the kind of person we think is going to do well.

Tim Ferriss: The peer review mentioned in the book was fascinating to me, and I wanted to dig into that a little bit. What were the peer reviews? What were the questions or rankings, if you could elaborate on that?

Stanley McChrystal: Sure. It wasn't questions, in fact. What is was, was you ranked people in your company. There would be about 30 plebs in a company. By the time you graduated it was typically culled down by people leaving to 18 or 19. But at least twice year, you did peer ratings, and you would rank one to bottom. The people at the bottom, if it was correlated across a bunch of people, would have peer-rating problems, and they would be looked at for release from the academy.

You could also reach out across the Corps if you wanted to mention somebody very positively or very negatively. And they were called blue darts. And so if you knew me from another company and you thought I was a bad cadet, you could write one of these optional blue darts and just say, "He's a bad guy." Or if you thought good, you could do the positive. But the peer ratings were interesting because the first thing you think is, "Hey, these are going to be popularity contests without much validity." They actually didn't turn out that way. People tended to take them very seriously, and the correlation, during my period, with actual success later was very high. It was higher than anything else at the academy.

Tim Ferriss: Wow. These types of assessments are very interesting to me. There is a book called *Mental Toughness Training for Sports*, and I

remember in high school – I was a wrestler – and they provided an assessment that you could provide to your peers to evaluate you on a roster of maybe 20 points. It was one of the most valuable things I did in my entire high school career.

So speaking of vetting and assessing people, I have heard stories of your vetting people for the McChrystal Group. And I've heard that you sometimes throw a statement out there that people need to finish. So feel free to correct me here, also. Specifically, let's say you were interviewing Chris and you said, "Everyone says Chris is great but..." And then you just sit there in silence. Do you do that? Is that one of your questions, or statements?

Stanley McChrystal: I do do that.

Tim Ferriss: And can you explain why you do that?

Stanley McChrystal: It puts a person in the position of having to try to articulate what they think the perception of them by others is. Because there is a perception, and often in the vetting process, we'll figure that out because we'll get inputs from other people. But if you asked somebody and you said, "Everybody loves you but they don't love this about you, or they'd hire you but..." it forces them – it's a couple of things. One, it forces them to come to grips with, "What is it people don't love about me?" And the second is, they've got to say it to you. It could be very common knowledge, but if they don't have the courage to face up to it and tell somebody who's thinking about hiring them, that's a window into personality, I think.

Tim Ferriss: What are the answers that are a red flag to you, and what are the answers that are not a red flag? Or Chris, if you want to tackle...

Chris Fussell: I can offer some thoughts from the SEAL community. There's various gates as you advance in these different units during your career where you're going in front of a board, as in the next interview, the next interview. Once you're senior enough, you're the person sitting on the board, so I would always like to throw in some version of this question. Basically, the way I would phrase it is, "We're a small community."

The typical way of asking this questions is, "There's ten people outside, why are you the best one?" And I always like to flip that on its head. "We're a small community. You and I haven't worked together but I know a lot of your peers, and we're going to follow up with people that like you and don't like you, after this. Who are

the people that – and no one's perfect, I have my naysayers just like you do – what will the people that don't hold you in highest regard, what will they say about you?

And to me, the most important thing was that they have an answer. A.) It shows the courage to be able to address it, and B.) It shows self awareness that I might be top peer-rated and have this great career, but there's somebody out there. And here's what they'd probably say. They'd say I was self-serving at one time. Or I appear too good on paper. Or I'm lazy on these types of physical training. Whatever the case may be. Have some awareness of what your naysayers... And show me that, if you identify it, you're working on it. I don't care what you think about it. I just want to know that you're aware of how other people view you.

Tim Ferriss: And I let's say that's for – I would love for you to explain what Development Group is, DEVGRU – another one that's thrown around a lot and I, included, don't know exactly what their efforts do – but if you were vetting someone in that fashion, what are the excusable sins? The passable sins versus the disqualifying sins?

Chris Fussell: That's a good question. Like anything inside the Joint Special Operations community, and it gets into classified space there pretty quickly...

Tim Ferriss: Oh, yeah. I mean, obviously, whatever you can talk about.

Chris Fussell: All these units are basically – you're looking for folks that have a really strong track record inside whatever branch of the special operations, whether they've been in the Green Berets or the Army Rangers or the SEAL teams. And then they have an opportunity to screen again and go through and additional selection process to get into one of these units that works underneath JASOC. At the end of the day, you're starting with the same selection pool, and for people to even be considered for these units, no one's going to have a bad track record and show up and try to get in the door.

I think one of the big delineators – and I can speak to my community, because each one of them have their own tribal personalities – but definitely inside the SEAL teams. The world has shifted to this really decentralized – you have to be able to move fast, on the edges of the organization with a lot of autonomy. And you're put in situations where you have to think fast. And really, literally sometimes with geopolitical implications of the choice you make. So you're looking for people with high levels of integrity around the decisions they're going to make and how

they'll report them out. And then comfort in that environment, which to me says, "Do you have the intellectual curiosity to want to be at that tip of the spear?"

Not everyone has that. And what I would often tell guys, being in or out of those units is neither a good thing or a bad thing. You're best served by understanding the role of those types of organizations and making sure it aligns with your personality. Otherwise, you're just going to be unhappy being part of it.

Tim Ferriss: I would imagine you'd probably endanger yourself and other people if you're not a good fit. So Stan, I'd love to talk about, just for a second – and then I have some hypothetical questions – and I'm going to get this name incorrect, I'm sure – but Major Burrado, is that right? I'd love for you to just talk about your experience with Major Burrado. I think is was your first meeting. But if you could talk about that a bit, I think it seems to be a key turning point for you.

Stanley McChrystal: Yeah, it really was. Several things happened. I had entered West Point and I was from an army family, and I had expectations of myself. But my first two years at West Point were difficult. I got in a lot of trouble for discipline, in my own immaturity. I didn't do well, academically, because I didn't know how to study and I didn't study very hard. I really didn't take West Point very seriously. And it was also heavy on math and sciences and so that was not my strong suit.

So by the end of my sophomore year, I wasn't ready to quit, but I was having a crisis of confidence. I had gone through some things. I had applied to go to Ranger school as a cadet, which they let a small number each year. And in the spring of my sophomore year, for that summer, they said, "You can't because your record is – your lack of discipline is bad enough – you can't go to Ranger school." And I was really crushed.

So I went that summer and I went off to training and whatnot. They send you around the army to do different things. And I came back that fall and we had changed tactical officers. Now, I'd had a nice tactical officer the first two years, but I don't really think – I mean he tolerated my two years of problems –

Tim Ferriss: Is a tactical officer like a residential advisor in college, or something along those lines?

Stanley McChrystal: A little like that. You have a commissioned officer, a captain or a major for each company, which has about 120 cadets in it. And they don't live in the company, they're not there every day. But they are responsible for the company. Say they have an office a couple hundred meters away and they're responsible for overseeing the cadet chain of command on discipline, and they'll come down and inspect things. And they're also mentors and whatnot.

So after the first couple years, I came back and I expected to have this new tactical officer. At my first in-briefing, in-counseling – he brings each person in together – I expected him to look at my record and then give me the riot act for all my problems and shortcomings and whatnot. And I sat down with him, and he's a special forces officer. And he sat down and goes, "Well, I'm looking at your record here, and I think you're going to be a great cadet and a great army officer."

And I literally said, "I think you got the files misplaces, because this is Stan McChrystal." And he said, "No, no. I got it. I'm looking you. You've gone outside the boundaries a couple times, but your peer ratings are really good." My peers were reflecting confidence, and whatnot. He says, "I think you're going to do great."

And it was amazing. It was transformational because – sort of like that kid in elementary school, where suddenly they start to say, "You do have high potential, we've just got to pull this out." And I had also started seriously dating – now my wife of 38 years – dating her then. So after my first two years of my misspent youth, I'd say, I suddenly was dating someone seriously. So I had this tac who believed in me. I was going to settle down more because I was dating one person. And I could sort of see the end.

And for me, West Point was this dark tunnel you went into, just to go be an army officer. If it could have been done in a weekend, I'd have been happy to do that. I didn't bask in the West Point experience. I just wanted to be an army officer, and West Point seemed like the best place to do it. And suddenly I could see – it was two years out – but I could see the reality of it. Here was a special forces combat veteran who was telling me he thought I'd be good for that world.

Tim Ferriss: What effect did that have on you?

Stanley McChrystal: Well, I think it caused me, 1.) You don't want to let someone down who's got faith in you. If somebody doesn't have faith in you and they say, "I think you're a screw-up," you go, "Well, okay. If I screw up but..." But if somebody says, "No, I really have trust in you. I trust you're going to do really well," it gives you a new sense of loyalty to someone. You don't want to let them down. Plus, he's now put on the table, in front of everybody, "You can do this, it's up to you." He didn't say it that way but it was clear that's what he'd done.

So it changed my opinion for lots of reasons, this being one of them. My grade point average skyrocketed my last two years, and I finished on the Deans List, and all, which was for me, nosebleed territory. But it was a lot because of the way people around me just started shaping my expectations.

Tim Ferriss: So the question of selection in training is really fascinating to me, for all of these different stages in a military career, or a private sector career. If you had, say, 100 athletes, civilian athletes. And I say "athletes" just to take the physical component largely out of it. This question came from reading about the nine-week Ranger course. It's at Fort Benning, I think it is. So if you had 100 athletes and had eight weeks to train 20 of them for combat, how would you select them and how would you train them?

Stanley McChrystal: Very interesting. And just as an aside, the young man, the Yale graduate who worked with me on the memoirs you read is in his final week of Ranger school now.

Tim Ferriss: Well, good luck to him.

Stanley McChrystal: He's lost a boatload of weight and he comes out and he's a specialist in 2nd Ranger Battalion. He read about it, studied it, and now made the decision to go do it. It'll be interesting to hear him after he comes out.

If I was going to prepare people for combat – If you assume that they can do the basic skills; they can shoot a weapon, they can do first aid, they can do those things – if they can't do those, obviously, you've got to teach them the things that are absolutely required. But if you assume that most people come out of basic training and initial training with those technical skills, I'd spend time on things that do two things.

The first would be to push themselves. After World War II, when they talked to organization that had then been through combat,

they said, “What, of your training, was a value, and what was of less value?” They said long foot marches that forced them physically, and really caused them to reach down inside themselves, like distance running, was invaluable.

And the second was live-fire training on courses that was as realistic as it could be. There was the stress, there was the sense of danger, although they were set up to be inherently be safe – that required it. To that, I would add dealing with uncertainty. I would try to put people in cases where they have to make decisions with absolutely incomplete knowledge, and they have got to live with the results of that. And often it’ll be bad. And what’ll they do then?

Tim Ferriss: How do you simulate... Oh, actually this brings up, perhaps, red teaming. Maybe, maybe not. But how do you simulate – we’ll come back to that if I’m leading us in a weird direction – but how do you simulate that uncertainty or role play that uncertainty? Are there good ways to do that?

Stanley McChrystal: There were a number of ways to do that, to make tough decisions, and whatnot. I had a – when I was a regimental commander, a colonel of the Ranger regiment, we put together an exercise that was designed to test them with uncertainty, but also with a no-win decision. We went to a battalion on no notice, and we alerted them. And we took a company of Rangers, put them on airplanes, and flew them to Texas. And then did a parachute assault. And their mission was to then move from the drop zone to this town and rescue a bunch of Americans who were there working, non-profits and whatnot. And they were then to police them up, bring them out to an airfield and be extracted. Pretty straightforward.

And so they parachute in, and as they move toward this town, they’re told that there are a small number of enemy forces there, ten or so. Enough they can deal with and they develop a plan and they deal with it. Once they got into that firefight, I in fact reinforce that enemy with about 100. So suddenly what happened is they get in a firefight that they can’t extract from. And very quickly, they have wounded of their own.

And so now, they’re in this situation and I’m playing higher headquarters. I’m actually on the ground watching but through my controllers, I’m playing higher headquarters. And I say, “All right, your mission is to get those students out of there. Get them out and get them to the airfield.” And they go, “Wait a minute, I’ve got 40 wounded. I can’t move my wounded. I can’t get them, and I’m not

going to leave them." And I said, "We sent you for the students. Get them."

And so they always try a work-around. They try to say, "I need more aircraft. I need more forces." Something to take away the constraint. And of course you say, "Nope, nope, nope. Won't happen. You're going to have to make the decision. You're going to pull these students out and accomplish your mission at the cost of breaking faith with your comrades, or you're going to stay there, in which case you're probably all going to get killed and the students are not going to be rescued, so you're going to be a failure.

And we would do this, and it was a fascinating situation because you saw this moral dilemma on top of all the tactical dilemmas. Afterwards, we would have these long after-action reviews where we talked about it. The funny thing is, there was no right answer.

Tim Ferriss: And what are you looking for? I'm really loving this example. What are you hoping them to exhibit? What are you looking for in a scenario like that?

Stanley McChrystal: It's hard to say. The first thing I would say is you want them to be thoughtful. The first response from people was, "Okay, the Ranger Creed says I'll never leave a fallen comrade, so I'm not leaving a fallen comrade. We're staying here, period." And then you say, "Wait a minute. The President of the United States sent you to rescue those American citizens. If we fail, then we are going to have the loss of Americans and we're going to have this embarrassment and all of these things. So the nation that is relying on you, you're going to let down. So what's more important? Your personal promise or the promise to the nation and your mission and whatnot."

And it was this quandary that you're looking for them to be more thoughtful than just this automatic black and white, reflexive, "This is what we do because that's what we do."

Interestingly, I didn't have any of the companies leave the wounded. I'm not sure that wasn't the right answer and I couldn't tell them afterward that it was, but none of them left them. But they agonized over it. They tried everything they could. But it was just good because I said, "Those are the situations you're going to be in. It's never going to be easy, this or that.

Tim Ferriss: That's a great example. So Chris, I would love to chat with you about your decision to leave the military. I believe it was after 15 and a half years, about four years from retirement. Is that right?

Chris Fussell: Yeah, that's right.

Tim Ferriss: That seems like a strange decision, perhaps, from the perspective of someone looking at the incentives in the military, why did you choose to leave the military?

Chris Fussell: Yeah, it's a good question. You can retire, officially, at 20, so that's sort of a logical mark. And answers like that are never simple. But for me, some of the big drivers, probably the biggest one that was staring me in the face was we'd been through this amazing transformation inside of the special operations community, specifically inside of JASOC. And when I left my aide-de-camp position I went out to Monterey, California and did my Master's thesis in intelligence fusion cells, of all things.

Tim Ferriss: Intelligence – what was the last part?

Chris Fussell: Intelligence fusion cells, which were these – if you think of the JASOC organization as a global, organic thing, this was the nerve center where all the information was passed around on a 24/7 cycle around the globe. And if you removed that, you would have had incredible forces arrayed around the battlefield but really not knowing what they should be doing with great specificity.

Tim Ferriss: So these fusion cells were within these different groups under JASOC?

Chris Fussell: That's right. It was a global network. And they range from quite large ones in a place like Baghdad to very small ones in other parts of the world. The mantra of the organization became, "It takes a network to defeat a network." Once we realized that Al-Qaeda is obviously this globally distributed network of ideas, more than anything. So we have to overlay that and be able to pass information as quickly as they're able to. And then we can get the right forces out quick enough to address the problem.

Being a kinetic-focused organization, the initial mindset was all around going out on the field, on to the objective. And that was always done very well, and it got better and better and still continues to get better today. What was missing was the right information getting to the folks that are actually going out on missions quick enough. So I sort of had a sense of this shift as I was coming up through the ranks. But then spending a year

watching Stan and the other senior staff, I realized this is the heart beat of the organization is – what we've really revolutionized here is information flow.

Inside of a traditional bureaucracy, we've created this massively distributed network that shares information as fast as something like ISIS and Al-Qaeda that uses YouTube and email. And it's just totally unconstrained in how it passes its ideology. And so I went on to study that and got deeply fascinated with that part of it. And then the decision to get out a few years later was, in large part, driven by my own personal belief that this is arguably the most important thing I will have learned, at least to this point in my life.

And I think I, personally, thought I could better serve these ideas on the outside. Really trying to just – because you can't take time like this in the military – to really study them and think about what is the cross-functional application in other spaces.

Tim Ferriss: What was the time sensitivity? In other words, why not wait four years, retire, and then do the Master's?

Chris Fussell: You know, a lot of that becomes personal variables, as well. Like where you are with your wife, two kids, etc.

Tim Ferriss: Sure.

Chris Fussell: But in large part, it was driven by the idea that the time is now. I felt like the ideas are really starting to awaken in other spaces and so it's like, I don't know, deciding to move to Silicon Valley in the early days. When you realize there's something going on there, and I want to be a part of it. For me, that was a big thing. This is a massive shift that everyone's going through, is how do we transition 20th century organizational models to be able to compete in the information age? And I could feel the conversation starting in 2008, 2009. It started to trickle out, so I wanted to be part of it.

Tim Ferriss: Stan, there are some timeless principles, timeless practices. Obviously, things have evolved in many different ways in the military and private sectors, technology and so on. But if we're looking in the rearview mirror, what military leaders come to mind who are most underrated, in your opinion?

Stanley McChrystal: That's a great question because there are people who did things for which they get huge credit, and there are other people who change the direction of organizations. Of course, I think Ulysses S. Grant is often underrated. He's viewed as this mechanical basher who is

going to just bash the enemy into submission. And I think he was much more than that. He took an army that was already maturing when he took overall command of Union forces, but he understood the absolute truth that you had to destroy the Army of the South. Capturing Richmond was interesting, but it wasn't the real point.

The problem was, as long as you had a resisting army, and that that was going to take a very focused effort that was going to be high cost, and you weren't going to lower the cost by doing it more slowly. Cumulatively, you had to get it done. And I think he understood the political side of it much more than people gave him credit for. So I think he's a huge one.

There's another, and I'm embarrassed to say I can't remember his name. There was a naval admiral between the first and second world wars, who essentially championed the development of aircraft carriers. There were people who championed the development of air power, and that was pretty obvious. But building aircraft carriers during that period when battleships were still king was a dangerous step out there. So I think those people who push change when change is not otherwise going to happen.

Tim Ferriss: And for those people listening, I'm sure somebody listening or reading on the blog will have the answer and be able to look up that naval admiral. So please put them in the comments on the log and then I will put it into the post, so we'll have that.

Stan, do you listen to audio books when you work out?

Stanley McChrystal: All the time. It's funny, I first used to listen to music and I get bored listening to music. So I started listening to audio books because if you think about time management, what I found was, I love to read. But particularly when we started the fight in Iraq and Afghanistan, I would have a long day. I'd have good books. I'd go back to my hooch and I'd read about a page and a half, and then I'd wake up 20 minutes later with my head on the page. And so I realized I was going to have to get a better way.

So I started putting audio books on my iPod. I like history and I like biography, so I would put those on very eclectically. Initially, it was eclectic because audio books weren't that prevalent. My wife would go to the library, she's go everywhere she could, get all these audio books. I'd download them onto my computer and then put them on my iPod. And so it was whatever was available.

Later, as more things became available, I had a wider choice. But I found that eclectic part really good. I learned to run with audio books. My mind will stay collected on it when I lift weights. And I also – just because I get fanatical about something – I have a little set of speakers in my bathroom. So I go in in the morning, and I'm listening to one book there. I turn it on and while I brush my teeth, while I shave, while I put my PT clothes on because my wife's out in the bedroom, I'll listen to this book.

And then I'll walk out of there to go work out and I'll have my iPod, and I have another book. And I'll listen to that when I work out. And that will take me quite a while of shaving time to get through a book.

Tim Ferriss: Are those two separate books or the same book?

Stanley McChrystal: Two separate books. I just finished a book on the South African gold and diamond trade – Cecil Rhodes and whatnot – and up through the Boer War. It was fascinating, and it probably took me six, eight weeks of shaving time to do that. But then on these other books, I've found that I go through books very, very quickly because if you're working out an hour and a half a day, you actually go through books much faster than I would if I just had reading time.

Tim Ferriss: And I always love to ask people who read a lot or consume any books, even in audio format, how do you choose your books? So, for instance, in this case of the diamond trade in South Africa, why did you choose that book?

Stanley McChrystal: I go on audible.com and I buy this package deal where you get a whole bunch of credits. I look at the history, first. I look at what's trending new, just to see what's trending new. I tend to like a sweeping history stories of an era that's 20, 30, 40 years. Or big projects like the building of the Panama Canal, building of the Boulder Dam, because they've got a beginning, middle and end, and challenges. Or biographies.

I will also do binge reading. I went through a period where I read about whaling. And I read like five whaling books together. Or I'll read biographies or something about the founding fathers. And I did seven or eight – George Washington and other founding fathers – and because they're all mutually overlapping, it's very interesting because suddenly you know more about the era and the new one is more interesting because it's filing in holes. And so I'll binge on one subject for a while, and then on another subject.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, God, this gives me all sorts of ideas for how I can spend yet more time reading books.

Chris, now you also listen to audio books?

Chris Fussell: I do, yeah. I got into the habit during multiple deployments because, to Stan's point, you just don't have time during your day. And you want to continue reading, right? So I got into two real habits when it came to working out, from deploying overseas. One being treadmill running which – Stan as an adamant outdoor runner would run around the airfield in places like Iraq in 120-degree heat. I didn't like that for multiple reasons. 1.) Because you'd always get yelled at for wearing headphones by the base guards. A three-star general could ignore that, I would get in more trouble, I guess.

Tim Ferriss: Harder for you to get away with.

Chris Fussell: So I got hooked on running on treadmills. I still do probably 80 percent of my miles on treadmills. And the other was listening to audio books. It's really interesting – it takes your mind a while to shift off the music and the rhythm to keep you going and you can keep two sides of your brain awake when you're running. At first, I could only do it on long, slow, easy runs. But now I can do it if I'm doing fast-paced tempo training runs, all the way to lifting weights or doing a CrossFit-type workout. Once your brain becomes comfortable with it, you can really do it in any sort of physical activity.

Tim Ferriss: What books, and they don't have to be audio, but what books have helped you the most in taking the strengths and learnings from your career in the military and applying it to the private sector? Or what books about private sector business have had an impact on you?

Chris Fussell: I'm a big Walter Isaacson fan. I thought *Steve Jobs*, you know, the Jobs book, was amazing. Really did a good job of capturing the way that an innovation leader's mind works, especially at that time in that space.

And I'm currently listening to *The Innovators,* which I think makes some great points, and not just about that era. Sort of the history of how great ideas evolve. That one's probably in the last 18 months or so, of all the books I've read, the one that really parallels a lot of the experiences we had inside our community in the military,

which was this realization that this is only going to be accomplished through a connection of the networks. So you have to create the synapses inside the organization if you're really going to be able to share the learnings fast enough to get ahead of the problem.

And I think that's one of the overarching theses that Isaacson's making in *The Innovators* is history is not linear. It's a complex gathering and breaking up of networks. And the right ideas get shared at the right time, in the right space, with the right people. And then something amazing comes out of it. History wants to tell the story about the person, but when you break it down, it's actually much more complex than that. Same thing we experience.

Tim Ferriss: Much more nuanced. His biography of Franklin is also outstanding. Especially the first half to three-quarters, for me. Added a lot of depth to someone that you can view as the guy with the glasses with the kite and the key. But there's a lot more to it.

Stan, you're known for going out on operations with operators, as a three-star general at the time. Why? Why would you do that and what did you learn from it?

Stanley McChrystal: I think all commanders go out on operations. What was different about me is as I got more senior, the kind of organization I was in, it made sense for me to go out. So when I had joint special operations command, and Chris would go – we'd go together – for us to go on a 20-person raid suddenly made sense because that's the size of operations we did. Another commander might go with a brigade of several thousand people doing something but we'd go with 20 because that's how we operated.

It's very good on a number of levels. One level is you have to share danger with the people that you operate with. You don't' have to do it every day. You don't have to be the strongest or the bravest or kick open the door. But just being willing to go out there does send a message to them that you are willing to put it on the line with them.

The second is, you can have operations described to you. They can give you actually factual reports about what they did and the way they did it, but you don't know until you go out there. You don't understand the conditions under which they're operating. The frustrations, the nuances. And so going out there, every time you do, you come back and go, "Wow. I had no appreciation for what they're doing."

When I was commanding in Afghanistan, I had a sergeant write me an email that said, "I don't think you understand what's going on out here." And at first, I took umbrage at it, because I spent a lot of time. And I said, "Okay," and the next day we flew out and went on a patrol with a squad in his platoon. And we went into this area in which it was vineyards. But in America we'd have vineyards with wooden or metal trellises. They don't have wood or metal in Afghanistan, so they use mud. The mud walls are about six feet tall, and they're about 3 and a half feet apart, so it's like being shrunk down and being put into your corduroy trousers. And you are walking, and suddenly you go, Holy – it's acres, and acres, and acres.

Tim Ferriss: So it's just a labyrinth.

Stanley McChrystal: It's a labyrinth. And the enemy, if you think about it, all they've got to do is be at the corner, turn, shoot down there, and there's nowhere to go, or place improvised explosive devices, landmines and whatnot, in the walls of this which, of course, they did all the time.

So we went down and I wen on this patrol with them. And there's no way they could have described it. But when I went on it and they said, "Sir, we see about 50 feet in front of us, 50 feet behind, and about a foot and a half left and right," what are we doing here? What are we accomplishing? And you go down and do that, you send a signal, but you also walk back with a much better understanding and appreciation and nobody can describe it to you. So there's a certain importance. Also, if you don't put yourself through that now and again, you can forget who you are.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, you become detached from the realities.

Stanley McChrystal: I think so.

Chris Fussell: Can I offer a...

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, please.

Chris Fussell: There's a lot of anecdotes around that, not just from what Stan was doing – as he said, other leaders did this – but one anecdote that jumps to mind, the point being made around what it does for the organization – there were times when I was on a tactical level where he would come out and go with us, which was always

interesting and fun for the crew. But when I was his aide-de-camp, one of our coalition partners... one of their –

Tim Ferriss: Can you explain what that means?

Chris Fussell: Yeah, a non-U.S. force that we had pulled inside of our organization. So we had other counterterrorism organizations from around the world and the coalition that would closely inside of us. And one of our coalition partner's helicopters – they had their own [Inaudible] had gone down on a mission. And they'd lost some of their operators as a result. And the U.S. Special Operations rotary wing assets are the best the world's ever known.

And the coalition helicopter pilots went through this phase of feeling – you could see it in their force – whether they were really ready to be at this level of the game, which we all believe they were and just bad things happened in the confusion of the battlefield. But they went through a stand down. And you could see there was a lot of questioning around the role they should be playing, internally.

Tim Ferriss: They went through a stand down meaning they started second guessing or declining going out on...

Chris Fussell: Well, their leadership made a conscious decision. Let's stand down the force for the next 72 hours or so, and really deconstruct what just happened.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

Chris Fussell: If you were in a unit like that, the concern is now everybody's looking at you like you're not ready to be part of the team. That was not what was going on, but you could tell that was probably what they were thinking. And I remember that General McChrystal came to me and said – because he's got a lot of stuff on his plate – he said, "Keep an eye on that. The first time they're up in the air to go out on a mission, we're going out with them." And I said, "Okay, that's great." And sure enough, three or four days later, they're back up, rotors are spinning and we grab our gear and run out and go out on op with them.

Didn't make a big deal out of it. Didn't really tell them ahead of time, except an hour before, "Hey, the old man wants to hop out and go on this op with you." And it sent such a message to the entire coalition partnership, especially the helicopter pilots to say, "We're going through this period of self doubt. This is a massively

chaotic environment, anyway. He knows exactly what we just wrestled with for the last three days, and he's going to throw on his gear and hop on the bird and go out with us.

It put the issue to bed immediately for the entire task force. News spreads like wildfire, obviously, which is just a great way for senior leaders to get really engaged in the trenches.

Tim Ferriss: Stan, this just reminded me – you mentioned "bird," so – the word "bird" shows up first in your memoir at the very beginning. And I wanted to ask you about a decision that one of, I want to say the "operators" with you – I'm just going to use that word because I don't know a better word – said he was, I think, "wildly unenthusiastic" about it – I'm not sure what the phrasing was, but the choice not to wear body armor. I apologize if this was explained later in the book. Why did you choose not to wear body armor?

Stanley McChrystal: In Afghanistan, one of the things about American defense policy is you don't want Americans to get hurt, so you spend a lot of money, get them good body armor. And every time an American solider is injured, and some of our allies had the same policy, you have to report what they were wearing down to each piece. And the idea is, we are going to prescribe all of this because our people are so valued and so important.

Well, you're there to build confidence and rapport with the Afghan people, who don't have body armor, and they are living out in the same areas. So if you go to visit them – and I'm going to visit a district governor or a province governor, or just a society leader, and I go all body-armored because I'm so important that we don't want me to get hurt, it signals a couple things. One it signals, I think I'm more important than they are. It also signals, maybe, that I don't have the same courage they have.

And so as I'm walking around and dealing with them, for me to be in this suit of chainmail equivalent, I think it sent a very dangerous thing. I was trying to send a message that I trusted them. They were going to secure me when I'm there, and I trust them, and that gets down to the Pashtu idea of hospitality. So I thought it was very, very important. I had to wrestle with the idea that there was going to be a certain part on the American side that says, "Wait a minute. What's he doing here?" We've got a policy, he's violating it. But when you're a four-star on your last assignment, okay, what are they going to do? And I thought it was important to send that part of the message as we did it.

Tim Ferriss: So you mentioned the hopeless dilemma earlier, where you engineer putting people into a situation were none of the options are attractive. We're here in Silicon Valley. A lot of people fashion themselves warriors of one sense or another. And they read Sun Tzu, *Art of War* and they think of their business as very high stakes. But ultimately, in the field, you guys are dealing with life and death decisions.

I'd love to hear – In the cases where something goes wrong – you make a decision, people go out on a raid, there are more fatalities than expected. And you have to operate rationally and effectively the next day. What would your internal self-talk sound like? And then what would you say to the team to get them ready for the next day?

Stanley McChrystal: A little bit of historical context. If you think about it, and you can compare this to earlier times of war, but the first part of after 2001, we were worried about Al-Qaeda, worried about Afghanistan. We went in and it turned out to be remarkably rapid and relatively speaking, low cost, in terms of casualties and whatnot. And then Iraq, actually, the invasion turned out to be the same way. So there got to be this sense that, "Okay, this isn't that hard." It's not going to take this long and the cost will not be hard. We have a few fallen heroes and we celebrate them but we don't think it's going to be a grinding attrition.

Then as we got into the difficulty after fall of 2003 and got into 2004 and 5, something different happens. One, we started to realize that this was going to be very hard. And every time we lost a comrade, they were not going to be the last. And that's a different mindset because then people start to make their personal calculation. They said, "How long can I do this before the roulette wheel hits me? And is it going to even come out right? If we pay all this price, are we going to have a successful outcome? And that's a different mindset, as well.

What I found, myself, was if you stay focused on the mission and everybody understands the cost of that, when you have an outcome where people are killed or wounded, if you let yourself freeze up with either the self-doubt that maybe you made a mistake or this sense that there's just no exit to this maze, then of course, I think it's very difficult to make those kinds of calls. You can find yourself locked up.

In the summer of 2005, I had found that we just couldn't do what we had to do without bringing more of our force over. We had a third of our force deployed all the time, and then two-thirds back training and getting ready. And that was about the tempo we could maintain for a long, long time. But we hit a period when we needed two-thirds of the force in the fight. And mathematically, of course, because the last third's back on alert in the U.S., that's not indefinitely sustainable. And just at the time we made the – I made the decision to do that, we started taking a bunch of casualties.

And when you take casualties in a very elite force, it's not the nameless rifleman at the end of the squad that nobody knows. It is Chris, who I have served with for ten years. I'm the godfather to one of his kids. I'm married to his sister. That's the effect. T.E. Lawrence writes about it as ripples in a pool that go out through these small communities' tribes, and really our forces were a tribe. So suddenly, the effect of that can cause you to be even more impacted by it.

Ulysses S. Grant used to say that he didn't visit hospitals much because he found if he went and he saw the terrible carnage for which he was responsible, he'd lose his nerve to command it. So what I think happens is, you don't become detached from the loss and you don't go into denial. What I've found is you keep yourself focused on the objective. And you say, "This is what we are doing." This is important. This is attainable. And the steps we are taking to it are the best steps I can figure out. They're responsibly arrived at, to the best of my ability, and they are judiciously executed to the best of what we can do.

Tim Ferriss: So this would be, potentially what you just said, what you would remind yourself of in those moments?

Stanley McChrystal: Yeah, and of course, you don't say it quite that explicitly in the organization. But the first thing you do when an organization suffers a loss is not tell them – don't let people marinate in their grief – they can grieve.

When I was in Afghanistan, the German army got in a firefight. And they had four of their soldiers killed, and it was the first four German soldiers killed in combat since World War II. So I flew up to be with this company, and they were literally in shock. They were all in this room, trying to figure out how do you process this? Because we go to war every few years. The Germans' fathers hadn't been at war. Maybe their grandfathers had. And certainly no one on active duty had ever had a soldier killed in combat under

their command, or a comrade. So they were trying to figure out how to figure this out.

Tim Ferriss: How to process the whole thing.

Stanley McChrystal: Exactly. And so what I told them was, that's what happens in war. The enemy gets to do that. You get to kill him; he gets to kill you. And what you do is you get right back in it. And you get right back in it right away and stay focused. And that's, I think, the best catharsis you can do, difficult as it is.

Tim Ferriss: Get back on the horse.

Stanley McChrystal: Exactly.

Tim Ferriss: Chris, I'd love to segue here for a second to ask a question that I'd like you to answer in two different ways. The question is, when you think of the word "successful," who's the first person who comes to mind? And I'd like to ask you who the person would have been when you were in the field, operating at the highest level, and who that person is now, if they're different. We can also come back to that because it's not a small question.

Chris Fussell: It's a great question. But I'm trying to think of it in a military context, if I was going back to my earliest days... earliest days post-911, from a tactical level. Your world sort of shrinks at that point.

I'll answer it this way, I don't know if this gets to the exact point, but I had a great mentor of mine early on in my career say advice that I heed until now, which is you should have a running list of three people that you can, or you don't need to share with them and with the world, that you're always watching: Someone senior to you that you want to emulate, a peer who you think is better at the job than you are, and you respect, and someone subordinate who's doing the job you did a year, or two, or three years ago, better than you did it. If you just have those three individuals that you're constantly measuring yourself off of and you're constantly learning from, you're going to be exponentially better than you are.

Tim Ferriss: That's great advice.

Chris Fussell: So I think I had that rolling list constantly at the top of mind, as I was going through it. One of my earlier experiences in that more kinetic environment inside of the JASOP world, I remember distinctly one of my first squadron commanders who was a few

years senior to me, who was the first person I thought that was really tackling the problem right on many levels. Intellectual chess that he was playing on the battlefield, leadership amongst a pretty elite organization and then his personal courage and how he approached the mission. Those people, in any good organization, they sort of roll in and out of your life. So I didn't have a person that I was constantly looking to. I always had someone that was filling that space for me.

As I look back on that – and It's funny, I was just thinking about this person the other day, for some reason – I'm now two years older than they were when they were in that spot. But time freezes as you look back on these moments. I was actually thinking about it the other day. I was thinking I am maybe eight years shy of as old as Stan was when I was his aide-de-camp. And you're like, "How did that happen?"

Tim Ferriss: Sneaks up on you.

Chris Fussell: Yeah, it does sneak up on you. As soon as I know it, I will have this frozen imagery of then General McChrystal, who was that person for a lot of us for many years. And I'll suddenly think, "Well, I'm two years older than he was when I was..." I think that's part of the beauty of how the human mind works. You have these people captured in time.

Tim Ferriss: Definitely. Is there anyone, now that you're working a lot in the private sector, anyone – aside from, say, Jobs – who comes to mind? And there are people here in the Valley who would argue that Jobs in many, many ways, was unsuccessful. Perhaps not the happiest guy. Perhaps not the happiest home life, etc. So it comes down to your personal definition of success. But these days, who comes to mind? And it could be the same person, or it could be someone else.

Chris Fussell: Yeah, a general reflection transitioning out of the military is when you're in uniform, you have as many biases of the corporate world as they have of the military. And most of them are misinformed.

Tim Ferriss: What are the common perceptions? I would love to hear this, because, of course, I live in San Francisco. Very liberal in almost every possible capacity. A lot of misconceptions and perceptions of the military that I think are unfair and inaccurate. So what are the military guys...

Chris Fussell: I think one of the biggest ones on the civilian side – and I would have the same one if I had never served in the military – is in the military, you can just order people what to do. And I'm 5'8, a buck fifty on a good day. I didn't once in my career walk into a squad room in a place like Development Group and tell a 250-pound operator what he was going to do.

You have to learn to lead through influence, understanding people's perspectives, developing the right relationships, understanding the key influencers inside of your network. It's just as complex as trying to lead a startup or lead in any division in a successful organization. Takes the same amount of nuance.

I think the bias we had of the corporate world is, "Well, if you don't like someone, you can just fire them. In the government, it's not that easy." And they laugh just as much. You can't fire anybody from a Fortune 500 organization just like that. They think we have just this silly perception of how easy that is.

In more ways than not, the two organizations are very similar in how they have to connect with their people and lead.

Tim Ferriss: At least at the highest levels. I think that's very true. The not being able to fire poor performers is a huge problem everywhere. I've spent a lot of time involved with educational reform and all sorts of startups, for-profit and non-profit, working in the education space. A huge challenge. Public school education is being able to fire the poor performers, instead of putting them into a rotation and just playing hot potato. But I digress. I get all fired up.

Chris Fussell: To your question about current role models on the business side, I'd answer it more generally. One of my most positive encounters, learnings over the last three years has been how impressive a lot of the senior civilian leaders really are. When you understand, obviously, uniform leadership and as you get more senior, political leadership, and policymakers. But you don't have a lot of exposure to business leadership.

And I have been really blown away at the caliber of a lot of folks in the C-Suite around the country. I tell guys in uniform – men and women that are still serving – all the time, "You would be amazed at how they work just as hard, they're just as smart, they're lives are just as stressful. They have, in a different way, as much on the line as any one of us did in uniform. We're fighting wars, they're fighting to make people's lives work. So there's a lot more similarities in personalities at the top, than differences.

Stanley McChrystal: Can I jump on that?

Tim Ferriss: Absolutely.

Stanley McChrystal: Because I actually agree strongly with Chris. Military leadership is actually easier than civilian leadership, and for lots of reasons. One, the military culture is this incredibly seductive or addictive thing. Most military people will tell you, they don't like the big bureaucracy, they don't like a lot of things about what you do in the military. But being a part of that camaraderie, being a part of the organization is just absolutely magnetic. And most people who served a while would tell you they would go back in a heartbeat to be back in that.

And it's easier because one, there's this very clear sense of who you are. There's uniforms, there's a tradition. There's this lofty mission of defending the nation. The issue of money is never on the table. The government pays you a certain amount, everybody knows. So there's no idea, I'm not paid enough and Jim got more than I did. So that's completely gone. And there's also this sense of selfless sacrifice. And maybe it's actually more than it should be. Because most of us joined the military because it looked interesting. And yet, once you're in, you get this self-reinforcing idea that you're making this huge sacrifice to serve your nation.

So I would actually argue, it's far easier than leading in the civilian world is. In the civilian world, where you're dealing with markets, Wall Street, boards, employees, the vagaries of competition and all these things, I think a leader – the impressive ones that leave Chris and me really, really in awe, is they can pull through all of that, and they can pull the sense of purpose in the organization and the positive leadership even through the challenges that I think those things add to it.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it's a multifactorial, sort of a multivariate problem, which we're going to come back to. I obviously want to talk about the McChrystal Group and a lot of what you guys are up to. What I'd love to do is – I have to ask this. It's kind of out of left field, here but Stan, have you ever had a meditative practice? Have you ever meditated?

Stanley McChrystal: Not really. When I was at West Point they were experimenting with transcendental meditation, so the psychology course I took, we did a little of that. But the answer is no. I had that just glimpse at it. But never really followed through.

Tim Ferriss: Chris? Have you ever meditated? The only reason I ask is that it's come up a lot in conversations with may 70 percent of the people I've had on the podcast. Not all. And all of them are world-class performers.

Chris Fussell: The short answer is no, I don't get up and meditate once a day. But I do find that when you talk to people about what they get from meditation, I'm in the same mental state when I finish a good workout, which I try to work out six days a week.

Tim Ferriss: Agreed.

Chris Fussell: I got into yoga practice pretty intensely for about three years. I just haven't had the time for it in the last two years, or so. But personally, I think the combination has to have a physical component to it for me to reach that mental balance state, which I can do running – I can do through yoga. Some people can do it just by sitting and concentrating, but I think the instinct's the same.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, and having looked at it really closely, I think the psychological and even neurological biochemical effects of meditation are very similar to some of the effects if you look at, say, exercise. That daily practice increasing brain drive neurotrophic factor, and so on and so forth. Very, very similar mindfulness effect.

I'd love to ask a couple of questions from my fans, and then I would love to spend the last portion of our conversation talking about the work that you guys are doing now, as well as the most recent book.

So the first question is from a Daniel Morolli, if I'm getting that name. And he wanted either of you guys, but Stan, I'll pose this to you first, the red team concept. Stan, he was referring to the mention in Blink but he was curious to know, and I'm paraphrasing here, but just elaborate on how it's used in the military.

Stanley McChrystal: Sure. The concept of red team is designed to test a plan. What happens is, as you develop a plan, you've got a problem and you develop a way to solve that problem, you fall in love with it. And you start to dismiss the shortcomings of it, simply because I think that's the way the mind works. You start to say, "Well, this will work." And sometimes you're actually skipping over real challenges to it or vulnerabilities in it because you just want it to.

And as we describe it, sometimes a plan can end up being a string of miracles. And that's not a real solid plan.
So red teaming is, you take people who aren't wedded to the plan and you have them take a look at it, and how would you disrupt this plan or how would you defeat this plan? And if you've got a very thoughtful red team, you'll produce stunning results.

There was a wargame back before the invasion of Iraq where a retired marine general officer – he was the Iraqis – and he didn't wait to be attacked. He attacked Kuwait. He hit the ports. And he sent the entire plan into a tailspin. And there were people who said, "No, no. You can't do that. They'd never do that." And he goes, "Well, it worked."

Tim Ferriss: So maybe they would do it.

Stanley McChrystal: That's right. He forced people to think. And so the entire idea of red teaming is – And yet, it's hard to red team your own plan.

Tim Ferriss: Right, because you become too – the sunken costs, cognitively, become something you need to defend. Are there ways – for instance, one of my friends who's on this podcast, Sammy Kamkar – he gets hired by companies. He's a hacker who got a pretty strong slap on the wrist by the FBI and so on and so forth, not too long ago. But he's hired to red team security systems. So he'll try to break into – virtually – break into offices and so on. So then he can help them plug their defenses before someone really malicious does that. Are there any other examples of red teaming that apply to the business world?

Chris Fussell: Well, yeah. Some of the work we're doing now with organizations, we've designed systems and they're pretty unique and nuanced for each organization. But as a broad example, one of our personal beliefs from our own experience is it's one thing to create a strategy. It's another to really have thoughtful contingency plans built in. And that's something that the special operations community does really well.

So we've done deep work with organizations, saying, "Let's – whether it's quarterly, rolling, or your annual strategy – Let's take the time to do a separate two-day offsite or some sort of working session. You play the competition, you play the market analyst, you play the – whoever the stakeholders are that can read and affect your strategy and then attack it from multiple different levels. If this happens, the competitors are going to do this. How will we react? What's our media campaign? What's our P.R.?

What's our distribution plan to react to a supply center that gets hit by a hurricane? And you can run through all these scenarios. And you design out branch plants. And you put them on the shelf. If you don't need to touch them, that's great.

Tim Ferriss: The branch plans are, "If this, then that."

Chris Fussell: Yeah, and so you thought through what happens if my main supply up on warehouse on the east coast gets hit by a hurricane. That doesn't happen but there's a fire in your west coast warehouse. So something similar evolves, you can pull that off the thing, you put a communications play in that everybody's already seen. You can say, "Hey, pull branch plan F7 off the shelf. Here's a communication network we're going to set up. Here are the people that need to react to this very quickly. Here are the stakeholders outside the organization that we need to inform very quickly.

So when done well, it creates a very relaxed response inside the organization and people on the outside see, wow, they've got a great plan in place. They're putting it into play so the analysts are comfortable, the market's comfortable and they can move through these things very smoothly.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it's so important. I really enjoy exploring that type of exercise. Because number one, just from a practical standpoint, it allows companies to be non-emotionally reactive. Because you have these sort of crisis management, if this then that, in place beforehand.

I've always been kind of allergic to politics, but I have seen a few documentaries, for instance – I think it was *The War Room*, about Clinton's first campaign where they were very masterful at the if this, then that. What if we get hit with this accusation? Or what if this footage is used? How are we going to respond? Having all that in place beforehand was fascinating.

Another question. This is from Mike Elias. And the question – I'll pose this to Stan, but Chris, this is open to you as well – What are some good ways for the average citizen to practice military strategy? Any games or activities? And he put Risk, football, etc.

Stanley McChrystal: That's a great one. Chess is typically thought of as the classic strategy game, and it was designed to teach future leaders how they could do that. I think you could do almost anything. I think planning football games can do it. And so I think any time you are

trying to clearly define your end, and then assign ways and means to that, there's a discipline to that process.

And what I say is if you take a game or an endeavor and you say, "I've got to apply these ends," and then you do a calculation, "What am I willing to do? What am I capable of doing? And what resources do I have, reasonably, and I'm willing to put against that? It's not mathematical, it's more art than that. But there's a certain underlying math to that, so I think just going through that process to seeing whether it gets there, it's like developing a business plan, like developing war plan. And it's amazing how often we actually skip that.

And then if you go back and look at some of the great failures in history, if you do the math on Napoleon's invasion of Russia, it starts with an assumption that if you capture Moscow, Russia will collapse. Well, that assumption was bad. And then if you look at the logistics of it, where you're hauling wagonloads of fodder for horses. Suddenly, mathematically, you can't haul enough fodder in the wagons to feed the horses. So unless you can live off the land, it just doesn't work and the Russians aren't going to let you do that.

So you start to uncover basic disconnects that are not difficult to come up with. But we almost are in avoidance. We don't want to look at the hard reality of the math.

Tim Ferriss: So then I want to follow up, and then I'd love to hear from you, Chris. One of my closest friends is Josh Waitzkin. He was the basis for *Searching for Bobby Fischer.* Amazing strategist and very good problem solver. But I would ask you, would you rather have, all things equal, a very good – not grand master level – but very good chess player or a very good backgammon player. And the reason I ask that is because chess is a game of complete information. Backgammon, you've got the dice to deal with, or the die, I'm not sure I'm mixing up my plurals here – and the doubling cube, where you can have someone raise the stakes and then double the stakes again. So it's a game of incomplete information. Would you have a preference?

Stanley McChrystal: Well, I would, and it would be backgammon. But let me talk about why on chess. I think chess was more appropriate in an era when things moved more slowly and in a more complicated, but not complex way.

Tim Ferriss: Complicated meaning more pieces, but not complex, meaning unpredictable.

Stanley McChrystal: That's right. More mechanical. If you think about it, if you and I were playing a game of chess right now and we each had our sixteen chess pieces and I moved, you moved. I'm against you and we're both micromanaging our teams.

But what if, through the dynamics of shared consciousness, all of my chess pieces could decide on their own, and they could communicate amongst themselves? So, in fact, you aren't really playing me. You're playing the combined intelligence and flexibility of my 16 chess pieces. And they can move whenever they want. They don't have to wait for you to move. Suddenly you say, "Well, wait a minute, that's not fair."

But that's the environment we're in now. You're not against one iconic decision-maker. You're against this networked set of competitors. Maybe they're in coordination intentionally. Maybe they're unintentionally coordinating. So what I would argue is, chess may actually reinforce a more mechanical structured game than the world allows right now.

Tim Ferriss: I like it. Chris, do you have any additional thoughts?

Chris Fussell: Yeah, I think it's an interesting question. I would offer that – I think being on a team is important from as early age as possible. I have two children and it doesn't mater to me if they grow up to be Olympians or just barely enjoy sports. But I think it's important to be on a team. And that can be a chess team, debate team, an individual sport, like a wrestling team. A team sport like football. But just being part of that collective mentality and understanding your strengths, how you can support others. The discipline of being on time. The personal fault you feel when you don't work as hard as your teammates or you come up short in a game. All of those are just critical life lessons.

And I think the best leaders I've seen in business, military, any space – not necessarily star athletes – but had a real early exposure to what it meant to be part of the team and support those on your left and right.

Tim Ferriss: Stan, one more question, and then we're going to segue into everything you guys are working on now. During your experience teaching at Yale, what was something that surprised you, good or bad, about the students in your class? Maybe it's good and bad.

Stanley McChrystal: Yeah, it certainly surprised me. I thought that I was going to go to Yale and because of the history, they were going to be politically liberal and biased in that way, and therefore sort of closed-minded to open things. And I found that they are not that at all. They are not liberal, they're not conservative. They're skeptical. And that's a new quality.

They are skeptical of how gobernment works, they're skeptical of how business works. They're skeptical at how people who try to influence them operate. And because I teach leadership and you're talking about how do you lead something, sudeently I realized that the constituency that thye represent – and I don't think they're completely unique, I think they're largely representative – is we are dealing with a group of people who want to test the hypothesis. They are loyal, but in a different way. They aren't slavishly loyal to even a set of ideas or a party, or anything like that. They're not what their parents were, they're what they are. And to me, that's a pretty big difference.

I think generally, it's good. But at the end of the day, I do think they are going to have to migrate from being just free agents to – I think they're going to have to find that they are going to have to come together to move things in one direction or another, and hopefully, that will come naturally.

Tim Ferriss: And by that you mean to partner with groups of like-minded people, but before you can have like-minded people, you have to determine what you share in common?

Stanley McChrystal: Exactly, but not be dogmatic about what you are. I hung around a guy when I was young who said his father told him, "In every election, I want you to vote for the best candidate. You'll find it merely coincidental that it's always a Democrat. And you grow up with that. And so I don't think they grow up with that. But what I do think, they're going to have to come together to make certain things happen. And hopefully that'll happen organically.

Tim Ferriss: Awesome. Yeah. No, I've taught a bit at Princeton at High-Tech Entrepreneurship. And I've found that wherever the case study method is used, and there are many schools that use that, but basically forcing them to role-play in an inquisitive way that tests those opinions they might hold dear. That's for some really interesting students. It's been really fun to see what those students have done after graduation.

I'd love to talk about the McChrystal Group and what you guys are up to, as well as your new book. I'm not sure the best way to start off. Chris, do you want to give, perhaps, an overview of how it came to be and what you guys are up to?

Chris Fussell: Sure. So the group, itself, was founded as Stan retired. Early 2011, it was incorporated, so going into our fourth year or so. It's based on a thesis, which is we were part of something very unique that's affecting the entire world, right now. And because of the actions on 9/11, we, the military, collectively got put into what I think is bit of a time machine.

And so we were exposed early to the fact that the traditional organization models of the '70s, '80s, '90s, the late 20th century, which were built around a foundation of creating scaled efficiency. And we had refined that to a Zen level inside the special operations community. And we put that model into today's reality, which is fighting distributed networks of individuals that can move information at the speed of light, literally, just by using cellphones, YouTube, email accounts, etc. and can quickly outmaneuver and find the gaps that exist inside of hierarchical bureaucratic organizations.

We started to feel that pressure in 2004 in Iraq. Went through this series of changes under five years of Stan McChrystal's leadership of the organization and the other leadership teams that started to evolve around that. What we became was this hybrid model that retained the strength of a traditional bureaucracy. But when we needed to, which was really on a nightly cadence for years and years on end in side of Iraq and Afghanistan, we moved as a decentralized distributive network that had incredible amounts of autonomy but was allowed to move independently because we were tied into such a strategic understanding of the problem set.

Tim Ferriss: So it sounds like you were moving from – excuse the comparison – but from the spider to the starfish, but still with the economies of scale and the leverage of a large organization.

Chris Fussell: That's right. Retaining that because bureaucracies are still very important. In the military, that's how you train soldiers, that's how you deploy aircraft. That's how you budget. Same holds true in large organizations, but you also have to be able to move with speed and accuracy that networks allow for. So they can no longer be ignored.

So that was the thesis. We went through this change and we thought, this matters. Al-Qaeda's not different because they're better. In almost every way, they're worse than insurgent groups that we and other militaries have faced in the past. Their ideology is really flawed. Their actions are horrible to the local population that they're trying to affect. Yet, they're able to grow and expand, etc. and they're still a real threat out there.

So what makes them so good? It's the information age. If we're facing this problem, everyone's probably facing some form of thus. So let's take this thesis out into other spaces and see who we can partner with, and help them think through these things. And we've worked everywhere from consumer goods to finance to technology. And everyone has some version of this problem that they're facing. They're trying to grapple with, "How do I transition my organizational leadership model into the 21st century?"

Tim Ferriss: Stan, I'd love for you to answer two things. First is explaining the title of the new book, which the chess discussion made me think of, of course. And then perhaps some of the insights or learnings that you guys have had that have been most surprising or useful to the businesses that you've worked with.

Stanley McChrystal: Sure. First off, I think the title of the new book is exactly right. Unfortunately, it's not the one I recommended. I had recommended one called *The Proteus Problem* which was designed to allow organizations to deal with shape-shifters. But I was talked out of that and I'm very glad I was because *Team of Teams* is based on the idea that we have this worship of the concept of teams. You bring people together, they get this trust and common purpose. They can finish each others' sentences and they have this ability do to great things.

But the reality is, teams have limits of scale. If you go back to ancient history, the size of a Roman infantry company, a century, was 100 people. The size of an American infantry company now is about 100 people. And it's that way because there are limits to how many people you can know and the interactions you can have where that personal connection is important.

So once you get above a certain size, we'll say 100, suddenly, you can't be one big team. You can have banners in your company, and you can say we're Team X, but the reality is, you are a series of teams. And that series of teams can have several things. One, they can be under the command of the headquarters, and then you've got these separate teams. Could also be silos, into which they have,

sometimes, insular cohesive cultures that may be very strong, but they may not be very well linked to the other teams.

And the challenge we found is when I took command of Joint Special Operations Command, we had these amazing small teams. On the inside they were unparalleled. The problem is, they weren't linked together as a team of teams, effectively. So we didn't get the synergy of having those teams. The effectiveness of what was learned on Team 1 wasn't automatically transferred to Team 3. And the challenges or the effect on the battlefield that Team 3 had overcome wasn't enjoyed by Team 2 because they just didn't know about it and they weren't in that constant interaction.

And what we found is that that interaction can't come through the higher headquarters. It has to go directly, watched by the higher headquarters. Facilitated by the higher headquarters. Created, you could say, the ecosystem for that created by the higher headquarters.

So as we moved to deal with civilian firms, we found certain things work a lot. We found the comparison to what we found, silos and insular cultures tends to be pretty universal. That slows decision-making. It also takes away that sense of ownership that people have who are too far from where the decision's made. Then you become an executor, and you get a piece of paper – do X, you don't really feel as though you're vested in that.

And so there are a number of things that we found work. One is radical transparency works. Now, we are not saying that we go to a system without organization, because as Chris described, we believe in a hybrid system. Reorganization is not the reflexive response that I think people should do. But they should look at the culture and the processes for our information flows.

We went to a daily video teleconference across the entire command, where everybody got what was happening.

Tim Ferriss: That was what, 8,000 people?

Stanley McChrystal: It started about 50, went to about 8,000. And every day, everybody could get all this update. It's like going in the quarterback's huddle. Everybody here in the situation, somebody saying, "I can beat my defender." And everybody goes, "Okay, I got that. And here's where we go."

So as a consequence, we found that it did two things. 1.) It informed the organization, which allowed people to execute on

their one without more instruction, because they knew the situation. So they didn't have to have guidance. And, 2.) they felt like they were part of one big effort, as opposed to – It wasn't about their batting average now, it was about whether the team won. And that was a very important dynamic.

And we find that works in corporations very, very well.

Tim Ferriss: I have to ask, I know we're bouncing around a little bit, but Chris, what was your experience in the field during these teleconferences with 8,000...

Chris Fussell: I was able to see it at a few different levels, one being sort of a younger member of the force out there on the ground, so to speak. And which is 2003, 2004. So you're sort of tangentially aware of some changes going on. But you certainly are seeing a lot more inclusion, information flows, etc.

My first real exposure to the change was a few years later when I was a mid-manager. I was sort of an operations level officer inside the broader task force. And at that point, you started to see, "Wow I'm being – me and thousands of others – are being invited to their conversation and hearing not just what you would expect, which is direction from the top.

What you were hearing was a conversation between senior leadership and then sometimes all the way down to the tactical level. And really creating this constant understanding of, to Stan's point, in the huddle, "What are you saying, what are you saying? Okay, what play are we going to run next? Break." And we did this on an extremely tight cadence of every 24 hours for about 90 minutes for years on end. Seven days a week. Which seems – we always kid around that an efficiency guru would say, "Okay, I'm going to kill that because that's a waste of man hours and money.

But it became the most important 90 minutes of your day. And what it allowed you to do was – because we exited on this 24-hour cadence – not because we wanted to, but that was the speed at which Al-Qaeda reset itself. And so if you plugged into nothing else, you went to this massive forum, because then you had 22 ½ hours of autonomy. And you were extremely informed. You could run your plays, independently. And then you came back into the huddle and you resynched with thousands of others. And you'd hear real-time learnings from around the battlefield, which shaped your thinking for the next day.

And it was the consistency of that pattern that allowed us to really – suddenly now we're thousands of people around the globe and our decision-making cycle is faster than a 3-person terrorist team running around Baghdad.

Tim Ferriss: I know we're running up on time, so I'll wrap up in just a few minutes. I have one or two more questions. But I think these principles are so key, and that's why I really want people to check out *Team of Teams* and we're going to get to how they can learn more about what you guys are up to, in terms of different websites, and so on.

You look at, say, a tool. So that video conference is one tool. Software like Slack has become hugely popular and powerful in the startup world, precisely because it serves a very similar function. It helps to allow this kind of rapid communication, iteration without becoming a glut of 20,000 threads of email.

The question I wanted to ask, the last question, and then I'd love to hear where people can learn more about everything and I'll put a ton in the show notes for people listening, fourhourworkweek.com/podcast for all the show notes.

Stan, if you had to offer your, let's just say, 30-year-old self some advice, what advice would that be?

Stanley McChrystal: Wow. I think up through probably 35, I was very much a control freak because the size of the organizations I commanded and I was part of were small enough where I could micromanage them. And I had a fairly forceful personality, and if you worked hard and studied hard, you could just about move all the chess pieces, no problem.

About age 35 to 40, as you get up to battalion level, which is about 600 people, suddenly, you're going to have to lead it a different way. And what you're really going to have to do is develop people. And so it started to become, and the advice I'd give to anyone young is it's really about developing people who are going to do the work. Unless you are going to go do the task yourself, then the development time you spend on the people who are going to do that task, whether they are going to lead people doing it or whether they are actually going to do it, every minute you spend on that is leveraged, is exponential return.

I used to tell people we had a five-day training week in an infantry, battalion, or company. And if you spent five days training and then

you sort of spent, maybe at the end of the day sort of cleaning up, you're going to be at a 20 percent level of effectiveness. If you spent four days training leaders, developing leaders, then spent one day out there actually pulling everybody together and scrimmaging, you're going to be so much better. But yet, you don't think of it. WE want to rush to the field and try the whole thing, when in reality, we haven't put the pieces in place in the professional development. So I think it comes back to developing leaders in every sense.

Tim Ferriss: That's something I need to think long and hard about. I'm still that control freak with the strong forceful personality. It doesn't always scale. Homework assignment for self.

Chris, what about you? Advice to your 30-year-old self. Or any 30-year-old, for that matter.

Chris Fussell: Yeah, I think probably for me – so I was sort of knee-deep in my special operations career at that point. Really starting to break into what would be considered the next level. I would go back and say, "Hey, the number one thing you're ding right now is developing a set of relationships that are going to carry you through not just the next ten years, but really through the next period of your life.

Someone told me once that you don't really develop friendships after college. And I don't believe that at all. I think you develop a series of relationships at different periods in your life. And that happens to be, I think, that 30 to 35 range is a critical period for most people. Because you've got your college friends, you've done something professional.

Now you're getting into the next level, what you're going to be in a professional space. And the knee-jerk reaction is to focus in on yourself and say this is when I prove that I'm going to be in the C-Suite someday. Where in reality, what you're doing is developing a set of peer friendships internally with the organization, externally, whatever. That's really the formative years of your reputation. People will remember you as either a self-serving track person, or someone that really saw the importance of the network of relationships.

Tim Ferriss: So true. Whether you remember it as a, and served personally as a relationship person or as a transaction person. Really holds true. Well, this has been a blast, guys. I want to be respectful of your time. Where can people learn more about your group, the new

book, and so on? What websites, Twitter accounts, if they exist, etc.

Chris Fussell: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, I encourage everybody to go out and pick up a copy of *Team of Teams.* It's available on Amazon, obviously. So we're really enjoying that. That run, it's been out for about four weeks now. It's on eBook and Audible, as well. And then just www.mcchrystalgroup.com.

Tim Ferriss: Could you spell McChrystal.

Chris Fussell: M-C-C-H-R-Y-S-T-A-L group dot com. And if Stan McChrystal has one peeve, it's misspelled McChrystal. His staff was notorious for doing it. It's sort of an inside joke.

Tim Ferriss: Are you guys on social media? The Twitters, and so on?

Chris Fussell: That's right. And our links right on McChrystal Group – I'm @FussellChris. And McChrystal Groups links are @TeamOfTeams is on Twitter as well.

Tim Ferriss: Great.

Chris Fussell: And then we've got all our links on our website as well.

Tim Ferriss: Perfect. And I'll put all these in the show notes, guys. So for links to the books and everything else, a lot of the resources and so on that were mentioned in this, just go to fourhourworkweek.com/podcast. And thank you so much, gentlemen, for taking the time. This has been a blast.

Chris Fussell: Tim, thank you.

Tim Ferriss: And if you guys listening would like a round two, potentially, at some point, please let everybody know. Let me know, let them know on Twitter. And until next time, thank you for listening.