

EPISODE 101

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:09.3] JG: Welcome to The Portfolio Life. I'm Jeff Goins. This is the show that helps you pursue work that matters, make a difference with your art, and discover your true voice. Do you wish you had a dream job? Do you even know what that would look like or if it exists? A lot of people talk about dreams but fewer people actually take practical steps to get there and I think few people know about this better than my friend, Chris Guillebeau who for years now has been exploring the inner section of creativity, non-conformity and entrepreneurship.

And in his latest book, *Born for This*, he talks about this idea. It goes beyond his other book, *The \$100 Startup*, which is all about how to build a business, how to quit your job and go to work for yourself. It goes much, much deeper into this question, "What was I made for? What is my purpose? Do I even have one of those?" Chris answers all those questions and much, much more in his latest book and I am psyched to be able to bring this conversation to you today where he and I sit down, we talk about all these things and a whole lot more.

I even asked him a few questions that frankly in the past I've been a little bit hesitant to ask him about. So we go deep into all the stuff that matters and I hope you walk away with a better sense of what your calling is, what your purpose is and the kind of work that you were born for.

So here's my conversation with Chris Guillebeau.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:01:34.7] JG: Well Chris, welcome to the show.

[00:01:35.9] CG: Hey, thanks so much for having me.

[00:01:37.9] JG: Yeah, I'm glad to have you. It's an honor. I think I've interviewed you. I think I have interviewed you more than anyone else. So there's like a trophy or something for that I'm sure.

[00:01:47.8] **CG:** Oh, that's great. Well thanks again, yeah.

[00:01:50.5] **JG:** Well yeah, I mean I just think it's more testament of how available you make yourself to people.

[00:01:56.6] **CG:** Maybe eventually, I'll get it right. Maybe it's just a matter of I haven't answered the questions properly yet, so keep working.

[00:02:01.8] **JG:** I think I have interviewed you for all of your books actually.

[00:02:05.6] **CG:** Oh.

[00:02:05.7] **JG:** The first of which was like a text interview and I had a picture of you and a tiger on my blog.

[00:02:10.4] **CG:** Okay, it's a way back.

[00:02:13.2] **JG:** So good times.

[00:02:14.5] **CG:** Yeah.

[00:02:15.0] **JG:** So you have a new book now, tell me about it?

[00:02:18.0] **CG:** Yeah, thanks. The new book is called *Born for This*. It's about how to help people find the work they were meant to do. First thing I should say is I know you've actually done a lot of work in this area as well. I remember reading and writing about your book, was it last year?

[00:02:30.8] **JG:** Yeah.

[00:02:31.2] **CG:** Or at some point, which is great. So I'm just continuing the progress of helping people find what they call their dream job or whether they're creating their dream job or finding it

in their organization, helping people win the career lottery. I talk to a lot of people like you do who say they feel very fortunate that they can do what they do and that's how I feel as well. So the question is, what steps do people take to get there, what kind of choices do they make along the way, and how can readers do the same thing?

[00:02:59.2] JG: So this is interesting because when I first heard about your research project for this and for people who aren't familiar with how you have written the past a few books that you have written, you basically run surveys and collect lot of interesting stories from your readers and from people all around the world and when I saw that you were asking people to share and take this dream job survey, I thought, and I don't think there's any more now that I've looked at the book.

But I thought this was going to be like *The \$100 Startup Part II* but it's not that but for those who are familiar with that book which is a book basically about how anybody who wants to can be an entrepreneur, how is this different?

[00:03:37.6] CG: Yeah, well in some ways it is a continuation. I think it's fair to say that back there that was the first time I was doing this process, this research oriented process of gathering lots of data and then trying to extrapolate the lessons then presenting some stories but not just random stories. Trying to present stories in a way to tell a narrative.

Now, I kind of fast forward a few years later, I'm still using that method, I still have a bias towards entrepreneurship because I am an entrepreneur. But I guess I've also come to realize that not everyone does want to be a full time entrepreneur and there are lots of ways that you can find your dream job or fulfill your mission in life and also get whatever you need for yourself in a bigger company or an organization.

I would say that the focus of Born for This is helping people to apply entrepreneurial skills whether they want to go into business full time or not, and it's also helping people figure out what their path is and helping them to see, "Okay, how do you navigate life's choices?" Because all of us have to make choices based on limited information.

We have to decide what to major in college or what to study or if we're going to choose formal education. We have to decide what job we're going to get into first and how we transfer and promote. Do we go into the military, do we work for the government? All these kinds of things, we don't make these decisions knowing everything. In fact, we know very little.

So people who are very successful in life have often made a lot of changes. They've actually gone down multiple roads and have gone back and tried something different and so basically the goal, the reason why this is different is showing people how to navigate those choices regardless of what they're final outcome or destination is.

[00:05:13.8] JG: Do you feel, Chris, like you're doing what you were meant to do?

[00:05:17.8] CG: I do. Yeah, absolutely. I want to improve. I don't want to be complacent but absolutely, I feel like the broad vision is very much what I want to do and it's the strategy that changes along the way.

[00:05:29.1] JG: And has that changed significantly over the course of your life?

[00:05:33.5] CG: Yeah, it's changed because I had no idea what I want. I had all these inklings, I had all these desires of like, "Well I want to do something that matters?" But that's very broad and non-specific and I want to travel, I guess I started with values. I started with values of freedom, independence, I want to go against the flow, non-conformity. I don't even think I knew what that word was when I was first going down the path.

But then as I went down the path, I too had lots of false starts and went in lots of different directions and experimented with a lot of different stuff and then gradually forged this career but I didn't actually start the career that I have now as an author and speaker or whatever until I was 30. That's almost been eight years since then, so it's been a process to get to the beginning and then it's been a process since then.

[00:06:23.3] JG: And I think we talked about this in a previous interview so I will link up to this. Your story of going from breaking and entering to becoming an entrepreneur which is a fascinating story and you talk about that some in the *Art of Nonconformity* too I think and we'll

link up to that, that interview. So when I was talking with our mutual friend, Jonathan Fields about that book that you were so gracious to endorse, *The Art of Work*. I have a similar subtitle about doing the work that you were meant to do.

Jonathan had me on his podcast and he said, “Okay, I’ll have you on my podcast but just so you know I’m really skeptical about this idea that there is a thing that you’re meant to do,” and I said, “Okay, let’s talk about it.” What do you think about that idea? I know you’ve talked to a lot of people who are doing their dream job whether it means working for themselves or being, what did you call it in the book?

Like a self-employed employee, like an entrepreneurial employee, somebody who is made their day job their dream job just through being more conscious about that. So what do you think about this idea? Is there this thing that you’re meant to do and what did your research yield? Because I love the stories that you find through these books? It’s amazing.

[00:07:35.4] CG: Yeah, sure. The book is made better through the stories just as your book said have as well. I don’t necessarily think there is one thing only so let’s be clear about that. I think we put so much pressure on ourselves especially young people but really people of any age to like, “I’ve got to find a calling. I’ve got to find this one thing.” But even people who have found their calling, or whatever term you prefer to use, again, they probably have gone through multiple iterations of that. They probably have done a lot of different things so that’s first.

But then second, I think if you look at people who are really, really successful in their fields and by successful, I don’t just mean wealthy. They are really doing something that they’re good at. You can tell that they enjoy it and they probably are compensated well and rewarded well in some way for it. I think if you look at those people, you can from the outside say, “Wow, they really were meant to do this thing.”

So we could take a couple of examples and say look at a great entertainer like Taylor Swift or Beyoncé. Beyoncé could probably be a good accountant, right? But we wouldn’t know her for that. That wouldn’t be the work that she was meant to do. She really has gone to the height of this particular career by following a passion but then connecting it with skill, making it something that is viable along the way. So to me it’s all about this journey towards this intersection of,

“Okay, what is it that we love to do? What is it that is financially sustainable and what is it that uses our skills in the best way?” Because we can all make tradeoffs in life.

There’s lots of people who do jobs that they don’t really love because it pays the bills and maybe that’s fine for a season but I would say if you’re listening to this podcast, you have an interest in bettering your life and you are actually trying to follow the path of the art of work or the work you’re meant to do or whatever you call it. So it’s the goal to really find something that’s as close as possible to that intersection.

[00:09:30.2] JG: I think I heard you use the word calling, you just used it now and I know people may use the word vocation or dream job or whatever and I agree. I don’t think it’s one thing but I think the Beyoncé example is a good one because when I think of Beyoncé, I actually do think of accounting so that was...

[00:09:46.4] CG: Yeah, exactly. She’s a really good bookkeeper. I mean you look at QuickBooks, whenever I have a question, I tweet her.

[00:09:53.3] JG: But yeah, there are people that you go, “Oh yeah, they’ve got it figured out,” and so there is something that we may be missing in life if we just sort of settle. Do you think of what you’re doing as a calling? Can you unpack that term more for me?

[00:10:08.8] CG: Yeah, yeah. This is a good question, do I think of what I’m doing as a calling? I do feel that it’s what I’m supposed to do. It’s what I like to do. I don’t really know any alternative. I’ve said like we started talking about my juvenile delinquency days, some of the stories are funny but I actually do think I’m fundamentally unemployable.

That doesn’t mean that I couldn’t help someone else or try to be a part of an organization but I have learned overtime what I’m good at and what I’m not and for whatever strength I have, I have to really, really clear the weaknesses as well and then maybe the second part is just like you, I have this community. I have these great people out there who are also on a journey.

I get positive feedback from them so I guess I feel like I have a responsibility for them and it’s not so much an ownership but it is kind of like, “Wow, I have a great life. I’m able to do things

that I love,” so therefore my responsibility is to serve them in some way. So maybe you can think of that as a calling also.

[00:11:11.3] JG: Yeah. When you were doing the research for the book, this is something that fascinates me because frankly, it's something that I'm learning from you in my own way trying to emulate just because I think your books are so interesting because you find these stories that you've not heard before. It's not like the 110th version of that same Steve Jobs story that you've heard.

It's so interesting and I am just personally curious about how you find these stories and the process by which you select the ones that are going to be in the book and maybe how that worked in the writing of *Born for This*? Did you begin with some hypothesis that you then proved true or disproved? That's a process that's always interested me and I'm just selfishly using this time to get all your secrets.

[00:11:58.8] CG: Yeah, of course. I would never claim to have no bias. I am not a scientist, I'm not a journalist. This is not an anthropological study. I'm actually trying to be prescriptive and I am trying to share less engine tips that the reader can actually follow rather than just reading about, “Okay, here's what happened.”

My goal and this is true for your books as well, my goal in writing a non-fiction prescriptive book is always that the reader should not go more than a page or two without having something that they can do and it doesn't mean that everything is going to apply to each person but there's always something actionable there.

So I'd probably start with some of my bias with these but then, the stories do lead the way. We get a lot of data. I think for this book, it was maybe seven or 800 case studies that came through and that was the initial survey and that's maybe two to three pages but then we go back and follow up with maybe a 150 to 200 of those people to do more in depth interviews.

So I would say a rough percentage maybe 70% of the content in terms of the lessons and strategies and how I kind of formulate the arc of the book comes from those stories and that

data. So obviously, those people have their bias as well and their own experience but I do think it comes forth across a broad pattern of people.

So that's always my goal as well, it's to share stories from different perspectives and one, it's because different perspectives are valid and valuable but it's also because just as I want readers to have actionable stuff, I want them to be able to identify with some of the people in the book and if it's just me writing the book or some author or whatever, then they think, "Oh that's good, but that just applies to their life."

And the same is true with any one story or any two stories and also, like you mentioned Steve Jobs. That's a very good point, when you tell superhero stories or celebrity stories, it's the same thing. People can appreciate it from a distance like People Magazine kind of thing but they don't necessarily think that they can do the same thing that Steve Jobs did or whoever.

So another important thing is to find people from different backgrounds who nobody has heard of and then explore where they were before and how they got to where they are now and what happened along the way.

[00:14:04.7] JG: What was something in the research project that surprised you? What was something that you uncovered through a story or a lesson that you weren't expecting?

[00:14:12.2] CG: Like I said, I always talk about entrepreneurship and I knew from in an intellectual perspective, I understood that not everybody should be an entrepreneur but I think I have learned maybe much more just emotionally or factually that there's all kinds of things that people can do in the world. It's not like they're "settling", to you use that word that you used a little bit ago, to work for an organization.

And I don't really think about my parents but both my dad and my step mom worked for NASA or for various contractors that worked for NASA for most of their careers. They were in the space industry and if you want to be in a space industry for the most part you want to work for NASA, you don't do that as a freelancer.

You have to be part of something bigger and to give even a greater example, I did a story about this woman who is the first female firefighter in Mississauga, Ontario 20 years ago. She has this great story of overcoming resistance and it wasn't just that she was a woman, she was also very small and very short so she was the opposite of what you think of this stereotype for a firefighter. So she went through all these different trainings and finally succeeded and she's been doing that for more than 20 years.

So she's found the work that she was born to do, at least according to her and again, to be a firefighter, you don't just do that on your own put out a website learn how to fight fires. You have to go through this process. You have to be a part of a team. You have to accept oversight and discipline and all those things and they're not necessarily bad things for some people.

[00:15:37.8] JG: Yeah, you use this term in the book that I loved and resonated with and honestly, it's the same idea that is behind the show name, The Portfolio Life, but you call it an "umbrella profession". What does that mean?

[00:15:52.4] CG: Well it means just a reflection of the reality that a lot of people are doing lots of different things these days and lots of people are kind of pursuing a hybrid lifestyle where they may have a job for a while and then they also have a side hustle, which I write a lot in the book. Or they quit their job to go out on their own but then they make a change and go back to being a part of a non-profit or something or they do more than one thing at once.

That's also something that historically has not been accepted very well but people have always done it and now, I think more and more people are doing it and more and more people are understanding that it's not necessarily a bad thing to divide your time or create some kind of work shifting model where you have two jobs or you have one part time job and one thing you're building on your own.

People have known about this for a while but I am trying to actually provide some resources and instruction on how to actually do it because a lot of people like the concept but they get overwhelmed with how to schedule their time and how to prioritize and all of that stuff.

[00:16:51.0] JG: So in the book, you had this definition that I liked. You called it “a career consisting of multiple jobs or roles but all under a unifying theme”. So good job.

[00:17:04.7] CG: Thanks, I totally forgot about that definition. It’s good you told me that right now. Yeah, people use them. You probably have the same thing. People are like, “So remind me what you wrote about on page 212 on the third paragraph,” and I’m like, “Okay, there.”

[00:17:18.7] JG: I just outsource all that stuff.

[00:17:20.4] CG: That’s great.

[00:17:22.8] JG: No but I love that and then as you said, it’s becoming more and more viable with work from home options that you’re not just this one thing. So I’m curious what you would say that you do these days, Chris. Because you do a lot of things and I’ve been following you for a long time and I’m sure I’m not the only one who’s looked at the life that you live and the way that you organize work and purpose.

You do things that are fun like travel every country in the world but you’re also not afraid of making money and it’s an interesting intersection of all these different areas that sometimes we’re competing with each other and that’s one of your chapters in the book is whether or not you can have your life or you can have the kind of money that you want to make and you can have both.

A long question, I’ll go back to the original question. What is it that you say that you do? How do you organize this umbrella and what is the unifying theme for you?

[00:18:22.9] CG: Sure, well I mean the short answer is I say that I’m a writer, a traveler and an entrepreneur. Pretty much everything I do fits in one of those buckets and maybe the bigger answer is that I do have a lot of balls in the area at different times and sometimes, they drop. I think any aspect of my career probably would actually be more successful if I focused on it exclusively.

I thought that a lot about entrepreneurship. I haven't ever built like one huge scalable business and part of me wants to do that but another part of me just knows based on myself and my experience and my strengths and weaknesses that if I were to do that, I don't think I would be able to write books or have the meet-ups with readers or host the events.

Or I mean, something would have to fall by the way side basically. I think you have to choose at a certain point. I guess I've come to the point of saying, "Okay, if I could do only one thing and it would be writing, it would be writing books and connecting with people."

[00:19:19.8] JG: You run an online business, I think I remember reading on a blog post once and I think I stole this for my business description when I have to file for my LLC, you said you run like an online publishing company because you publish guides and resources for people based on the various subjects that you talk about. I was like, "Yeah that sounds good, because the bank, nobody understands this sort of thing."

[00:19:43.0] CG: Right, for sure.

[00:19:44.1] JG: So you said if you could just do one thing you would write. So why did you start doing the online business thing and why continue to do it?

[00:19:51.0] CG: Well, I've actually always done online business. I was doing online business before I was writing. I mean I am attracted to entrepreneurship. I like the freedom and independence. As I said, I'm not oppose to making money. I'm a capitalist and it's also not just the money, I enjoy the experience of putting things together and putting them out there in the world.

There are different Media in which some things are better than others. So yes, books probably are my favorite if I had to do just one thing but as you know like we're talking on this podcast. Lots of people really enjoy that, lots of people learn best this way and with a blog, you can put something up immediately. It doesn't have to go through a process. There's no gatekeepers. There's all kinds of pros and cons to each thing and so some of them might dabble in and the only one I try to focus well on is the writing.

[00:20:37.8] JG: Yeah, I love that. I just ask because it's tempting to say, "Okay, I'm going to do this one thing," and I think I would actually be bored with that.

[00:20:46.9] CG: Yeah.

[00:20:47.8] JG: You were talking about, "Yeah if I just did, I'd be more successful," and I feel that. Sometimes I feel shame for that, I feel guilty for, "Gosh, I wish I were more successful at my business or books or whatever." Well good and it's good to know that we're both feeling shame about the things.

[00:21:01.9] CG: Yep, that's true.

[00:21:02.9] JG: That we're doing what we're meant to do. No, I think it's good. It adds some humanity to that. I saw you at an event not too long ago and somebody said something. You did a Q&A and somebody said they were asking about why everything you do is so great. It's just so well produced, do you remember this question?

[00:21:20.5] CG: I don't but that is such a ridiculous question, but go on.

[00:21:23.3] JG: It was at the blogging thing.

[00:21:25.1] CG: It sounds like a plant. It sounds like somebody got like paid to be put there. I'll be like be like, "Thanks man. Send me a PayPal invoice," but you know?

[00:21:31.8] JG: We were at a little blogging breakout conference thing before. One of the academies before World Domination so somebody said, "How come everything you do is so successful? How do you make everything so consistently successful?" And you said, "I don't. I fail lots of times but you just don't see that or remember it."

So you were talking about, in the book, how this is really an action based thing and you wrote a book based on the actions that people take to get to their dream job or doing what they're meant to do and that may be many things under this umbrella career that you talked about. But you

also said something that I wonder if you could unpack briefly, which is, you might make a decision and then it's the wrong decision or you've got to backtrack.

I think we all know a few people in our lives that are like they're doing the thing that they said they're going to do since they were six years old but most people, myself included, I think yourself included are not doing, they didn't know they would be doing this when they were a toddler. So where does failure fit into this process?

[00:22:33.9] CG: Yeah, great question. When I was six years old, I wanted to work at Burger King. That was my aspiration so I think the lesson is, it's okay to change your mind. It's good that I didn't follow that dream or follow that passion but really, again most successful people have done a lot of different things and not all of them have worked out.

I talked to Brian Clark recently, you probably know him from Copy Blogger, and on his bio it says he's founded eight successful businesses and so I asked him. I said, "Are there any other businesses?" And he said, "Yeah, there's actually like 10 or 12 or something," and so the first point was, that's a really good conversion rate.

Actually, that's actually wonderful but secondly, what if he had started that first business and it wasn't working out since it didn't work out, but he had followed this time honored advice which is very common in American entrepreneurial culture, which is, "Never give up. Just keep going. You've got to make it a success somehow."

That would have been a terrible advice because the best thing for him to do is to just close that down and try something else and so, I think this is a key point. I tried to focus a lot on it in the book that giving up on something is not necessarily a failure. You use the word failure but it may actually lead to success and so most successful people are actually kind of closing doors all the time.

If something doesn't work, they do persist toward the vision, the overall big picture thing but they don't necessarily persist on each project. If something isn't working or if you're not enjoying it anymore, life is short. Why not keep going?

[00:24:05.3] JG: Yeah, I love when Seth Godin talks about this in that short wonderful book called *The Dip* where he says, “Forget this idea that winners never quit. Winners quit all the time,” and then he listed all these people who quit their way to success and I think that’s true. Okay, as we wrap up I want to share this quote that you begin the book with by Melody, who says:

“For a long time I thought I should find some passion. Now I realized that passion is not uncovered, it is created but most people never put in the effort required to get good at something to the point where you grow to love it. I think the passion myth is the number one reason my friends are miserable at their jobs,” and melody is a systems and processes architect.

So I’m curious, what do you think about passion and for the person listening to this going, “Yeah, I want that. I want to figure out what I’m meant to do. I’m willing to quit stuff but what do I have to do?” You make it very clear that this is not a book just about quitting your job and going to do that. That’s very much *The \$100 Startup*, but what do we do if we don’t follow our passions? Where do we begin?

[00:25:09.0] CG: Yeah, so I would say there are probably two kinds of people listening. If you already have a vision, if you are pretty clear on, “Here’s my passion and here’s how I want to express it in the world,” then you keep going down that path, that’s great. For everybody else, then it was like Melody, I think you follow your skill. You don’t necessarily follow your passion.

This is an idea that comes from another good friend of ours, Cal Newport, I think you know Cal as well. He’s very much focused on this notion of as we get better at the things that we’re drawn to, then that actually creates passion and so you don’t necessarily know in the beginning like you had this — everybody is doing this exact exercises where you have a blank sheet of paper and you’re like, “Just write down anything.”

Well sometimes you don’t know what to write down and you discover that as you go through things. I can think back on my career as well and in my process. I did a lot of different stuff but I had no idea that years later I would be writing books or sharing with communities or whatever. I

can look back and see, “Okay, this led to this and this led to that,” but you just don’t know in the beginning and that’s okay.

So you go down a different paths and you close doors and you keep thinking about that intersection of, “Okay, what am I good at? What do I love to do, and what is viable?” And the closer you get to that, then I think the more the big thing, the calling or whatever it is appears.

[00:26:26.5] JG: Okay last question because I know people are going to ask this. So once you get to doing the thing that you’re meant to do, how do you know? How do you know you found it?

[00:26:35.4] CG: Well, I do think we’re all in a journey. I do think, like I said, I feel very happy with what I found but yet I want to improve. I want to go beyond. So maybe it’s like this Buddhist kind of thing or something where you’re never really there or something but again, we can look to other people and we can see this in them.

We can see whether it’s Beyoncé or something and not just celebrities but if you think about your friends like the example I use in the book, this actually came from my editor. She says, “You know, sometimes you run into somebody that you knew back in high school but you haven’t kept up with them like all these time and it’s been five or 10 or 15 years or whatever and you hear what they’re doing now and you think back to when you knew them long ago and you realize that makes perfect sense.”

You’re like, “Oh of course that person became a teacher. They were always good at communication, they were always well organized,” and you can pinpoint their skills. So maybe you don’t necessarily know it yourself but you can see it in other people.

[00:27:31.0] JG: Yeah, it’s that idea that life is lived forward but understood backwards.

[00:27:35.3] CG: That’s good.

[00:27:36.6] JG: Yeah, well that’s me. No one said that.

[00:27:37.9] CG: Oh that's good. Okay, good.

[00:27:39.0] JG: I think that's a nature or something. Well Chris, I know you're super busy promoting the book, thank you again for writing another wonderful book. I love how it's action oriented, every chapter has an objective, something to do not just think about. Thanks again for your time.

[00:27:54.7] CG: Awesome man, thank you so much Jeff.

[00:27:56.0] JG: Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:27:57.1] JG: Well, I hope you enjoyed that conversation with Chris and me. To find out more about his new book, *Born for This*, you can go to Bornforthisbook.com. There's a cool little quiz in there that you can take to figure out what it is that you're meant to do and learn some of the things about yourself and of course, an opportunity to buy his book.

So I encourage you to check that out, order on all the outlets and at this time, if you go to Bornforthisbook.com, you can even get some free bonuses depending on how many copies of the book you buy. So a special thanks to Chris Guillebeau for joining the show and thank you for listening. I hope this helps you in taking the next step in building your portfolio.

Thanks. Have a great day.

[END]