

EPISODE 107

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:09.2] AT: Welcome to the Portfolio Life with Jeff Goins. I'm your host Andy Traub and this is the show that helps you to pursue work that matters, make a difference with your art and discover your true voice. Rejection stops us, it's like a wall halting our momentum, harming our hopeful spirit. We avoid rejection, usually. Today's guest didn't avoid rejection. He pursued it.

Jia Jiang went on a rejection binge seeking rejection in 30 different situations in 30 days. Jia was paralyzed by rejection before he started his experiment but now he views rejection in a completely different way. If you fear rejection, then keep listening. You may never look at rejection the same way again.

Here's Jia Jiang and Jeff Goins

[INTERVIEW]

[0:01:05.8] JG: Hey Jia, welcome to the show.

[0:01:07.5] JJ: Hi Jeff, thank you for having me.

[0:01:09.4] JG: Yeah, well good to have you. It's been a little while since we've connected. Last time I think we chatted was when you were here in Nashville talking about your book.

[0:01:19.6] JJ: Yes absolutely and I was at your place and thank you for coming to my book reading.

[0:01:25.2] JG: Yeah, my pleasure. I saw you first as many people did at the World Domination Summit and it was probably the favorite talk of that year that I saw which was I don't know, a couple of years ago now, how long ago was that?

[0:01:40.1] JJ: Yeah, wow, time flies right?

[0:01:43.9] JG: Was that 2013? Is that when it was?

[0:01:45.2] JJ: I think so. I can't believe it's almost three years ago.

[0:01:49.4] JG: Yeah. So you were talking about rejection and since then you've had a book come out called *Rejection Proof*, really detailing your story but I would love to begin with just sharing a little bit of that story. One, because I just love hearing it, I don't get tired of hearing it and two, for anybody who is unfamiliar with you or your story. So can you just share a little bit about that story of your hundred days of rejection?

[0:02:14.5] JJ: Sure, it's basically as story of me as a tech entrepreneur, I quit my job when I was — just barely turned 30 and I was about to have a son, my first born and that's where I have this moment of where I got to be an entrepreneur, this is my dream. If I don't do it now, I can never do it again in my life. My wife and I struck a deal where I quit my job, About four days before my first son was born, to pursue this entrepreneur dream.

So I was a tech entrepreneur, so I put a lot, there's a lot at stake in this and then I had a six months to build a company that from scratch to be something that would have some traction so four months into the venture, I had this opportunity that I thought I was going to grasp, it was an investment opportunity. Very reputable investor was thinking about giving me an investment. Then he turned me down and that felt like a crushing blow and made me want to quit.

That's where I kind of thought about this a little bit, I idolized these great entrepreneurs growing up like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and would they be wanting to give up after a simple rejection like that? No way. Any successful people in their lives, they will not give up after this type of rejection, they would keep going.

So I thought, "Okay, now I figured out my big problem in my life." Because just looking back in my life, my big problem was I was so afraid of people saying no to me and every time they do, I would just go back to my shell and thinking about all those moments I grew up where either I was rejected in public by people or privately just by maybe a girl, maybe by these people and I thought, "Okay, I cannot be afraid of rejection this much anymore. If I'm going to be a successful

entrepreneur or successful anything, I have to just make this one of my tasks to overcome my fear of rejection.”

So I started this blog and this thing called a hundred days of rejection where I would just go out every day and look for rejection and I would record myself using my iPhone, I would use a secret cam, using my iPhone to record myself getting rejected and I would upload those on YouTube and make a video blog out of it and that’s where the story started.

[0:04:40.4] JG: And it’s quite a story. You did this for a hundred days based on something called — was it called rejection therapy? Is that what it’s called?

[0:04:47.7] JJ: Yeah, the concept was based on rejection therapy. Some of you may have heard of this and I mean the idea is basically, you — it asks you to go look for rejection. Most people run away from rejection, this thing is like, you go look for rejection and you do this once a day for 30 days and by the end of it, you become desensitized toward that pain so that was the idea.

[0:05:09.8] JG: What are some examples of the things that you did?

[0:05:13.5] JJ: Day one was I went to a stranger, just a complete stranger and I ask him to borrow a hundred dollars. That was quite a day one, that was the most embarrassing day as well because I was just sweating and...

[0:05:32.7] JG: What did he say?

[0:05:33.9] JJ: He said no.

[0:05:36.2] JG: Crazy!

[0:05:38.1] JJ: He didn’t make a big scene out of it either, he just looked out at me and he’s like, “No.” Then he asked me, “Why?” He was just kind of interested in what I was doing. I just turned around and ran as fast as I could. I was so embarrassed and I was like, “Wow, I hope all the people wasn’t watching this.”

[0:05:57.0] JG: Did you have an explanation for him?

[0:05:58.3] JJ: No, I just ran as fast as I could. The thing is, it's a good point you're making, why didn't I have an explanation for him? So that night, I was just uploading that video right? The thing about doing a video blog is you have to experience this twice. I was walking myself and I was uploading that video on YouTube, I was doing a bit of editing and I just saw how scared I was. I looked like this kid from the movie *The Sixth Sense*. I saw dead people.

This other guy though, he wasn't like a menacing figure, he was just asking me to explain myself and I could have said, "Hey, I'm trying to overcome my fear of rejection." I could have said, "I was trying to see if this was possible." I could've even negotiate saying, "If you can't do a hundred, can you do \$50? \$25? \$10?" I could have said, "You know, if you give me a hundred, I'll give you back \$105, just like 5% return." But I just ran because I was so scared.

And this kind of dawned on me. When you are afraid of rejection, every time you get rejected, you just want to run so I said, "You know what? I'm not going to run anymore and tomorrow no matter what happens, I will stay engaged and chat."

[0:07:19.2] JG: What happened the next day?

[0:07:21.5] JJ: Next day I went to a burger joint asking for a burger refill after...

[0:07:29.3] JG: So you ate your burger and you wanted a refill.

[0:07:34.6] JJ: It's like a drink refill. I thought, if you can give me another cup of coke for free, you might as well give me another burger for free.

[0:07:42.3] JG: That's clever.

[0:07:43.4] JJ: He said, "No."

[0:07:44.3] JG: Crazy.

[0:07:45.4] JJ: Yeah. But the thing is, this time I did not run. I stayed engaged, I said, “I love your burger, if you give me a burger refill, I promise you I’ll be the best customer ever and I’ll come here every day,” and then he was like, “Okay, I’ll tell my manager about it. I’ll give that as a feedback, but I can’t do that for you I’m sorry.” That’s where I left, and I didn’t feel scared anymore. It was still awkward but I didn’t see dead people anymore.

[0:08:15.3] JG: Yeah, wow. So it’s really perspective, you wrote that “avoiding rejection is worse than receiving it”. Most people believe that avoiding rejection is a good thing but really, avoiding it is the more anxiety producing part of it.

[0:08:30.5] JJ: Yeah, that and not necessarily anxiety but it’s like the “we want to stay comfortable”, right? The human mind is like a justification machine. To stay comfortable, we can make up all kinds of reasons of why we shouldn’t do it. “Oh he’s going to — this guy will say no to me anyway. No, she wouldn’t like me anyway, so might as well do it,” because we want to stay in the comfort zone.

The thing is, the reason avoiding is worse than actually experiencing is, over the long term, we lose so many opportunities that we don’t even know. A hidden opportunities or as we grow older, we start having this kind of regret, “We should have tried it and when we were younger or when we had a chance. Why not just ask? Now I don’t have the chance anymore.”

[0:09:20.7] JG: Yeah. The point of this experiment, was it to get people to say yes or was it to just get you to not be so afraid of rejection?

[0:09:32.4] JJ: It started as basically to get people to say no to me. The first day was like, “I just want to get a no, and let’s see what’s going to happen.” Because I wanted to toughen myself up right? I wanted to take a beating and be tougher. Then, as soon as the first day was over, I was like, “I want to actually try to do different things, not just one and done,” so that’s why I didn’t leave the second day.

Then on day three, like a big miracle happened to me and that’s where my perspective changed again. So my perspective was almost like changing every day by doing this. Basically, day

three, I went to a Krispy Kreme shop and asking them to make me donuts that look like Olympic rings and the person, the donut maker took me so seriously and she made it in 15 minutes and that's where having that donuts in my hand, I just want to get a "no", right?

There's no way anyone's going to say yes to me on that but I asked and I got it and at that moment I thought, "Wow, if I could get someone to make me donuts that look like Olympic rings, if I could get a yes while looking for no's, how many opportunities in life have I missed because I didn't even try?" So that's where I chanced again where I wanted to just ask, just put myself out there and let the results present themselves.

[0:11:00.2] JG: Yeah, that's really interesting. I mean you did a video on this and it got a lot of — a lot of people responded to it and did they charge you for the donuts? I thought...

[0:11:09.6] JJ: No.

[0:11:10.5] JG: I thought you got it for free.

[0:11:12.5] JJ: I did. Her name was Jackie, I still remember her. She's one of the sweetest human beings I ever encountered. So she made it and she was — when I asked her, she didn't know I was looking for rejection. She didn't know I was recording, she was like, "Oh, how do I make the donuts?" Then she's like, "I can do this and do that," and then she's like, "Okay, I can do it." Afterward, she didn't think she did a great job and I think that's probably why she said, "Nope, this one is on me, don't worry about it." Yeah, so she paid for it herself.

[0:11:46.8] JG: Jeez, so you made an audacious request and they did it but they also gave you the donuts for free. You said you learned three lessons from this, rejection is a muscle, rejection is a numbers game and then and then as I mentioned before, avoiding rejection is worse than receiving it. Rejection is a numbers game. Fight for enough no's and eventually you find a yes. So day one was no, day two is no but it didn't sting as bad and then day three, you actually got a yes. How many yeses did you get?

[0:12:17.1] JJ: I counted all the yeses and no's and I received after a hundred days and I got 51 yeses and 49 no's.

[0:12:23.5] JG: That's amazing. That's incredible. So not only do you eventually get a yes but for you, the majority of the time, you got a yes.

[0:12:33.3] JJ: Yeah, just because, mainly because I got better and better at this. I learned that by presenting myself in a certain way, by saying certain things, I mean I'm not talking about lying, I'm just talking about, "tell me the truth but in the more confident and in a more interesting way", I can get people to say yes to me. By the end, I was a little frustrated because I got just — every time I asked something I got a yes.

[0:12:59.4] JG: You're getting mad that you got so many yeses?

[0:13:02.4] JJ: Well, the thing is, it changes the perspective right? Of course it's good that you are going to get a yes but the thing is, I also want to experience some no's, you have to get to experience both.

[0:13:13.4] JG: What was another yes experience that you had? I love the Krispy Kreme story, what's another crazy yes?

[0:13:19.7] JJ: Yeah, so there are many and there is one that I was just — blew my mind, which is it was my dream to give a lecture in college, to teach students because I come from a family of teachers like generations of generations of teachers and I was the one who wanted to become an entrepreneur and kind of going away from the family legacy. But I was like, "If I can teach a class and I can fulfill the legacy."

I said, this is a hundred days of rejection, I can do whatever I want, this is my chance. So I went to a college and knocked on a stranger, professor's door and I just come in and say, "Can I teach your class?" I live in Austin, it was UT Austin and the professor was, he was like intrigued by what I was presenting and I didn't come in empty handed. I prepared my lecture and loaded up on the iPad and I was like, I gave an uninvited power point presentation of what I was going to teach in his class.

So he listened to my pitch, and he was like, “You know what? I’ve never seen anyone doing this and I’ll let you do it, I think I might fit you into my curriculum.” So a couple of weeks later, he called me and he’s like, “Yeah, come, give a lecture and I would love to have you.” About a couple of months later, went to his class and did my lecture and it was very well received by the students. So when I walked out of there, I had just tears in my eyes mainly because I feel I fulfilled a legacy in some way.

But also, I was like, sometimes these live dreams and these big goals are not that far away from me if you just ask, if you just go ahead and do something about it, right? I always thought, “Maybe I want to become a billionaire. I had to become so successful in my entrepreneurship that someone will want me to say, they will invite me to give a guest lecture someday.” But now, just because I asked and I’m prepared and I was able to do it just like that. So I started using that as my mantra of if I wanted something, I just go ahead and do it and I will let the world reject me, I mean, not myself.

[0:15:36.1] JG: Yeah, you talk about that in the book Jia, which I thought was interesting is you talk about, we reject ourselves and that’s the worst kind of rejection. What does that look like, what does that feel like, how do you do that and how do you avoid doing that?

[0:15:51.1] JJ: So I mean, every time you want something, our mind is constantly having this battle between aspiration or desire or maybe ambition versus this pull for us to stay where we are. Newton’s law right? We don’t want to — objects and including people are lazy, we want to stay the way we are but if we stay the way we are, we cannot fulfil those ambitions. So there is that constant battle and it’s not a level of good and evil but it’s pretty close.

A lot of times, the thing is, we have to keep telling ourselves to grow, have to get out of that comfort zone. We have to take actions, we have to do something, anything is better than nothing. I teach people just every day go out and do a little bit of thing to challenge yourself, maybe get and go ask for a coffee, when you buy coffee, ask for discount, just ask for it, you might not get it, you probably won’t but ask for it, explain why you want to get it.

When you are sitting at a restaurant and maybe before you leave, shake a hand with someone at a table or something like that. Just do this little things every day, pretty soon you start finding

a momentum going in our life and your desire to actually, to do things, to challenge yourself, to challenge other people, to challenge the status quo in our life goes up. That's what I highly advocate.

[0:17:21.9] JG: Yeah. I want to shift the conversation a little bit, I love that, I love this experiment, I love this message. Let's talk about writing. I'm a writer, a lot of people listening to this writers, we know a lot of people who are out there in the world aspire to write a book someday. It's a big dream that a lot of people have. It was a dream that I had for a long time, it's something that you've done recently. There is a lot of rejection and a lot of fear of rejection in publishing and in the world of writing.

When you were taking this idea and turning it into a book, did you face any of that? Did you deal with any of that? What is it like for you to be an author now and to continually face and encounter rejection because now you're out there sharing your story and this is so much, I hear from so many writers, so many communicators, their biggest fear of writing a book or trying to get one published or putting their work out into the world, standing up in front of an audience and delivering a talk, is rejection. How have you taken what you've learned from your experience and applied it to writing for example?

[0:18:29.7] JJ: Okay, so let's take it a little bit bigger before I focus on writing. So anything we do that's big and audacious that we feel is like a dream, right? That might have potentially a lot of rewards associated with this goal if we do it well. The reason we're so hesitant to do this is like, we are afraid to fail and to get rejected, we feel like when we get rejected, the world is rejecting us. We have this what psychologists call, "spotlight effect". We are a center of the universe, we are the heroes of our own story or villain in someone else lives, but we're the center and we feel like a rejection of anything, it's like the whole world rejecting us.

It's like the whole world is watching us, there's a spotlight on. But in my personal experience, that's just not the case. No one cares about what we are doing. It sounds bad but is actually a good thing, most people don't care what you're doing unless it's really good, unless it benefits them, unless they appreciate it. So in a way, rejection doesn't happen a lot in public. Most people just, if you fail at something, if your book is not good, you don't see a line of people lining up in front of your house saying, "You suck." That's not going to happen.

Most people just like, “Ah, whatever.” They don’t hear about it but we think that’s not the case, we think we failed it big time and if people don’t ignore, that’s okay, we can try something else. When it comes to writing, we think we’ll have this one shot, we have to do something that if we don’t write it well, it’s over. I don’t think so. Do your best job and let the results following you. There’s a lot of marketing involved and I mean, Jeff, you’re a master in this and there’s a lot of writing and marketing involved but the thing is at the end of the day, the result is what they are, if you they don’t do it well, you can try another time. You can do another thing. You don’t have to think this one time shot and by doing that, you have this crippling fear that, “I’ve got to do this perfectly or I will never do it.”

[0:20:39.2] JG: Yeah. Did you deal with any of that when you set out to write your book, was there any fear? Were you just like, “I am invincible, I’m going to do this thing”?

[0:20:49.3] JJ: Well, of course. What I’m describing, yes there is — that fear is human, it stays with me. Because my experience was a little bit different, I didn’t start it out as a writer, then become a speaker. I started out just telling my story, I gave a talk at TED Ex Austin and that TED Talk was very popular and that’s what got me a lot of opportunities and then someone invited me to, my book agent and my publisher was asking me to write a book after they heard my talk. A double yes actually.

My experience is a little bit different but the thing is, as I started writing, yeah, I was like, “You know, what if this doesn’t work? What if this is really bad? What if I don’t get any one to read this,” and — but then, as I was talking about, I keep thinking about it, doing nothing. That did me no good. I just should have completely focused on writing a book, that’s the only thing I could control and I focused on the 100% and I think that helped me a lot.

[0:21:50.4] JG: Yeah. Then you had to launch the book and I assume, I imagine some of those fears came back. So you were focus in writing the book, focusing on what you could do and then you got to share this with people. That is something that I think a lot of people are afraid of, they have a book in them or they’ve written it and then this is something that I struggle with and then it’s time to share it with the world and you do get afraid of people standing in line outside your house saying, “You’re a loser or you suck.” What was your experience with that?

[0:22:17.3] JJ: I think my hundred days of rejection actually helped me a lot in this regard. In my 100 days, when I did something was, I tried to be the worst salesman. I was just something I didn't understand. I walked to a strangers and was like, "Hey, would you buy this?" And they're like, "What is it?" I'm like, "Some sort of tech product I don't know. Can you just try it? Let's try it together." So I was the worst salesman, but the thing is what I found was, I found people actually got so intrigued by this and just sat down and started, they're like, "Oh, I might need this, this sounds intriguing."

So I'm like, if I can sell the worst thing or be the worst salesman by talking to enough people, someone will want this, that means there are a lot of people who need a lot of things. Part of being a sales person or maybe trying to market my book is to find the right people who need this thing. That gave me a lot of courage to actually just go out and do it, I tried all kinds of things was marketing the book, including going to stores and trying to sell it to people. I went to Barnes & Noble and I said, "Hey, would you buy my book?" And they were like, "What? Where's your book?" I'm like, "Here on the shelf, right here. If you buy it, I'll sign it for you." I was just having fun.

[0:23:37.3] JG: Yeah. So you did this, hundred days of rejection, sounds like you gained a lot of confidence with the experience. What are you trying now that there's the risk of rejection as it involves the risk of rejection?

[0:23:52.3] JJ: Two things. So one is, I've started seeing what I'm doing in big projects terms. I started with a hundred days of rejection, there's like maybe, that was a big project and there was rejection involved every day and also there's a possibility that no one cared about what I was doing, right? I was to have this block, no one was reading it, no one is viewing it and there was a possibility of that so it turned out to be a very successful blog, a lot of people were reading it, and it was helping a lot of people.

Then I thought, the second goal is I want to publish a book and that I mean, that involved rejection. So there are two things I'm working on right now, one is I do a lot of speaking and not just speaking but I do a lot of training, I train companies and people, how to overcome their fear and how to become more braver in a way.

Doing that, there are two parts, one is there's a book that's helping me a lot, there is my blog but the thing is, I have to do sales as well. I have to tell the companies, "Hey, your employees need this and your people need this." This is like, doing that involves rejection and I'm having a constant fun with it, it was how to do it. So now I train companies such as, I mean, I've spoken to companies like Google, and LinkedIn.

[0:25:18.1] JG: I've never heard of those companies.

[0:25:20.7] JJ: Yeah, So NetApp and Dell and, these are like big companies that in Silicon Valley, some of them are just pure me sending emails to them saying, "Hey, look at this, I'm sure your sales people need this." That has made my training speaking business taken enough. That's a big part of it and second part is, I'm thinking about ways — now I travel a lot to all over the country trying to speak and train people but the second part is, I want to develop a more scalable way to do this.

Because right now, I'm the product I'm trying to sell basically. I'm the trainer, I'm the speaker but I am looking for building technology or an app, and I'm dreaming to focus on doing this, to deliver what I'm teaching digitally in a more scalable way. That in itself is like going back to my tech roots right? That involves rejection as well. But every day I'm dealing with rejection and every day I'm trying to have the most fun with them.

[0:26:23.6] JG: Yeah, okay, one last question. If I am struggling with fear of rejection, what's one thing I can do today to work through that fear?

[0:26:34.9] JJ: Okay. So just start small. Start small. If you are afraid of rejection to go out, if you're afraid to maybe write a book or something, start small, try something that's a little bit outside of your comfort zone. Is that getting — maybe negotiate when you are checking out at Target. Say, "Can I get a 10% off?" And actually, you try that and see what happens. Everyone who listen to this, go out, ask for 10% off at Target. I promise you, I don't promise you, but actually, I'm sure that the answer you will hear is different from what you think it is but try that a little bit and then see what the possibilities are there. Then expand it, expand it, expand it.

[0:27:20.6] JG: Love that. The place where people can find you online Jia is Fearbuster.com, is that right?

[0:27:26.8] JJ: Yup.

[0:27:27.5] JG: The book is *Rejection Proof*, if you struggle with fear of rejection as I do and most of the people in the world, do as Jia did and still does on occasion, I highly recommend it. It's hilarious, it's just his story of enduring rejection after rejection, hearing some surprising yeses and actually reading some really great scientific studies and I love that part about you Jia where you help us understand why this works and why it's not just a bunch of funny stories but there's some really interesting research behind rejection therapy and the importance of building up some resilience so that you can persevere and achieve your goals.

My friend, it's been a pleasure, thanks for your time.

[0:28:12.2] JJ: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:28:14.4] AT: I end this episode with two difficult questions. First, how do you view your writing differently now in light of what Jia taught us about rejection? Second, what are you going to do with your fear of rejection?

We'd like to know the answer of those questions and you can post them on this episode on Goinstwriter.com or by leaving a review on our podcast inside of iTunes. I'm Andy Traub and on behalf of Jeff Goins, thanks for spending some time with us today.

Now, go build your portfolio.

[END]