

Ep #65: How to Survive Success with Dr. Timothy Benson



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Dr. David Phelps and Evan Harris

[Dentist Freedom Blueprint](http://www.DentistFreedomBlueprint.com) with Dr. David Phelps and Evan Harris

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You are listening to the *Dentist Freedom Blueprint* podcast, with David Phelps and Evan Harris. Navigating you through the uncharted waters of a turbulent economy with straight-forward advice to transform your practice into a self-sufficient cash machine, compound your net worth assets, and multiply, multiply, multiply your passive cash flow streams.

David: Hello everyone, this is Dr. David Phelps of the Freedom Founders mastermind community and the *Dentist Freedom Blueprint* podcast. Back with you today with a really fun, this is going to be a really fun interview, with a gentleman who has become a friend. He's definitely a mentor. Somebody that you're really going to enjoy because like all of us, he has a background, he has a story, a story of I would say definitely adversity.

The challenges that any of us face during life, early in life, mid-career, later life, it doesn't matter, those challenges are always there. But someone who from the environment he was brought up in overcame those challenges and today is helping some very empowered people, high-level athletes, and professionals dealing with what he calls surviving success. Without further ado, let me bring on my great friend, Dr. Timothy Benson. Tim, how are you doing today, sir?

Timothy: Fantastic, David. Thank you for having me on.

David: We're excited to have you today. Always excited to have you as well when you're going to be coming down to Dallas and being with our Freedom Founders mastermind group in a few weeks.

What I want to get into today a little bit is let's talk about your story because we both know that people really only

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hear us when they get to know us. You're a person that I've gotten to know and I appreciate you for the person you are. I know your character. I know your values. But people don't know your backstory.

Take us a back a little bit. I should also say, as you bring us up to speed, Dr. Tim is a Harvard graduate, clinical instructor in psychiatry. I got to sit with him on a—remember Tim, a couple years ago we were doing the group video recording with Jonathan in Houston?

Timothy: Yes.

David: We had that great group of people and I've got to tell our listeners, I was sitting right next to Dr. Tim Benson. So here's this Harvard-trained clinical psychiatrist. I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh. He's going to be analyzing everything I say and there's no way I can keep up with his vocabulary."

But you know, you're such an easy-to-know guy and you are very smart but you're also really down to earth. So anyway, enough of that. Tell us where you came from. How did this all happen to get you to where you are today, Tim?

Timothy: Dave, thanks again, I just want to say that it's always interesting because people get so caught up in credentials and all of that. I'm glad that you are bringing in the point that it's always important to get an understanding of someone's story and where they've come from because that is what really kind of shapes the journey and shapes one's perspective.

Part of my story is related to why I do what I do in terms of helping the people that I help. My backstory is that I

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would say that I'm from the Midwest originally. I grew up in Jefferson City, Missouri. I was the oldest of three and my mother was a single mother, working two and three jobs just so we could stay slightly above the poverty line.

She was my first model in terms of working hard and really when you put your mind to something that you should go for it. You should go all in. She was raising three boys and working these jobs but she also found some time to go to night school and obtain her MBA, her master's in business.

David: Wow.

Timothy: Again, that's the kind of model that I have derived my kind of pattern of life after. I went to college at Hampton University where I played football. Actually by the time I graduated I was considered one of the top scholar athletes in the country. Now I was riding high, thinking all was great. Then I went into medical school and that's where I got blindsided by life. The bottom fell out.

This is what I talk about, the notion of sometimes in life we think what got us there will keep us there, but that's just not the truth. It's kind of like when you get there, there's a whole level of competition. There's a whole level of challenges that are waiting to greet you.

This is why I do what I do because somehow we assume that because we've been successful in the past, that success is going to translate on the next level. For me, it didn't immediately. I always say that success can bring a tsunami that involves social, emotional challenges that you may not necessarily be prepared for.

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David: Tim, give an example. I want to really feel like I can visualize this. So your mom set the great tone of work ethic. I think you also said that she said, and you carry this with you today, it isn't where you but who you are that will make the difference. That was built into you. You had the work ethic. You not only were obviously a very good academic scholar through school but you were a gifted athlete.

Again, you had to work. It wasn't just given to you. But you worked because of what your mom put into you. So you were successful all the way through college. You get to medical school, are you saying that because you're rising to a level of other high achievers and in the past you were able to kind of work yourself and keep yourself above the basic level of say competition, but once you got to medical school, now you're in another level and now you had to turn up the heat? What was it that you felt?

Timothy: For me it was the fact that, one, for me it was an identity crisis because I no longer had football as a part of my life. One of the things that we don't recognize is that sometimes when you move forward, there are things that you lose in the process. For me, losing football which provided me a whole lot of structure was a big part of losing my identity. When I work with some athletes who are transitioning let's say out of professional athletics, how do you deal with that loss as well?

Also, a big challenge for me was I was no longer being perceived as special because I was now in a group who were all the top of the top. So this can become a challenge as well, how you are perceived and what does it mean now that things don't come as easy as they've

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come before. I had to deal with that. That was two of my major challenges.

It wasn't that I wasn't necessarily smart enough. I had in terms of the intellect what it took to really succeed but I was really kind of dealing with some of these other dilemmas that were challenging because I was on my way to becoming the first physician in my family.

David: Wow, yeah.

Timothy: So I really didn't necessarily have a model saying, okay, how do I ask these questions? One of the biggest challenges that we get, especially people on a high-achieving track is that sometimes what holds us back is our inability to ask the questions that we feel that we should know the answers to already.

David: That's a great point. I definitely can relate to that. I'm going to take that to the people that typically are on our podcast, our listeners are, Tim, like yourself, highly educated. Have gone through lots of hoops to get to a professional degree, a license, a professional career in medicine or dentistry or chiropractic.

I think there's a feeling that getting to that point where you graduate from all those years of school, you have the license now. You have the degree. You have the right to go practice. And society, as you've already alluded to, whether you're a very highly-skilled athlete or a highly-esteemed professional person, there's a little bit of an anointing that you are a special person. You've shown that you can achieve. I'm not taking away from all that hard work. It is hard work to get there. That's a given.

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But there's a feeling I think that when you get to that point, you have climbed to that peak of success. I know in your really great book that our members are going to be getting at our meeting next month, but your book, *Surviving Success: The Seven Critical Skills Needed to Thrive Under the Pressure of the Athletic, Academic, and Professional Spotlight*, you talk about getting each level of success is like a mountain peak. You're climbing a mountain, you get to the top of the peak. You think, "Man, I'm almost there. I need to get to the top of this peak. Man, I'm there." Then you take one look further and there's another range of mountains there.

Timothy: Exactly.

David: So the same thing happens in a professional career. That first mountain peak is you get that degree. I think too many people feel like, "I've made it. I'm there. I'm good. This is the promised land. I've got this great freedom lifestyle ahead of me." Then, Tim, what happens? What goes wrong?

Timothy: Again, there can be a tsunami because once you get there, I use the mountain peak as an analogy in the book and one of the things I talk about the mountain peak is that sometimes we climb this mountain peak then all of a sudden we realize that we didn't bring the oxygen that was needed to stay there at the top of the mountain peak.

Then you also realize that peak is just a part of a whole range. That means that there's things that consistently require further and further success. One of the biggest things that I've run into is that success can cause a level of conditioning that can create a level of complacency, conflict, and conservatism.

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Let's talk about the complacency. Again, it's resting on your laurels. I work with many people who have achieved quite a high level of status, whether they be academicians, whether they are athletes, whether they are other professions, CEOs, etc. But they feel like they are dying on the vine meaning that they have this great position but yet there's a level of isolation that happens and they don't feel that they're necessarily growing.

But it's easier to kind of rest on your laurels and just lean into the fact that you're getting respected at this certain position but inside there's this feeling of, "I could do so much more but sometimes I feel like I'm trapped or I've painted myself into a corner that I can't get out of because now there are more people who are relying on me."

David: Right.

Timothy: So when success initially starts as an individual journey but now, and the further you go, it becomes much more integrated. So other people's livelihoods are now dependent upon you continuing to do what you've done. Even if you feel like, okay, there's more that I want to do, there's more that I can do, but now I feel kind of trapped in this lane per se.

David: What you said really hit on me and I think a lot of our professionals feel the same way. You talked about that level of success and having people feel like they're isolated. I think that's so true. When people do feel isolated, because I think they feel like they're not understood, right? Maybe even your own family doesn't really understand what's going on inside your head. They look at you as, again, like everybody else, success. A leader. Someone who can do it all.

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Inside, there's all this turmoil and this angst because you're feeling like as you just said, Tim, well there's more I could be, should be, doing and maybe I don't really feel like I have it all together. I'm fearful of the future. I'm fearful that I can't provide the security or the lifestyle or even my own health might be declining because I'm under all this stress.

How do people get out of this? Again, people that are highly successful, have that work ethic, so they have become very self-reliant, become isolated. As you said, we typically don't go and seek help because we feel like if we seek help that it shows weakness.

Timothy: Yes.

David: Turn that around and talk about what people really should do and why that's not a sign of weakness.

Timothy: Let me go back to this level of isolation. What I tell people is that sometimes success can put you in a spotlight. When you think about the spotlight, the spotlight has three aspects to it. It has the light. It has the heat. It has the shadow. The light is all you see, all the great things. The heat is the pressure that comes from being in the spotlight and feeling isolated. The shadows are all those doubts and fears that come up as a result of being in this very visible and vulnerable position.

One of the key things is definitely asking for help. That was the game changer for me. When I speak to the group, I really go into the story about basically how I almost dropped out of medical school. Then what were the situations that really led for me coming back and not only performing well in medical school but also going to end up becoming on the clinical faculty of Harvard. How I

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went from my hood to Harvard and basically the gist of the story is I was in a position where I had to ask for help, and that made a world of difference.

David: So who did you find? Who did you find that could understand you? Having mentors or coaches is not something that was—especially in your athletic arena, that's something that I think everybody can relate to, whatever their athletic skill levels were. I mean going back into junior high, high school, college even, there's coaches, right? There's mentors there and we expect to be around those people because we know that they help us and provide us discipline and look at the blind spots in our skillsets that we need to improve. So why is it that so many people think that once they get into this professional arena that they no longer need help?

Timothy: The fact of the matter is is that when you become in a leadership position, everybody assumes that you know what to do and you know the answers. If you really truly buy into that, then you're going to be less apt to ask for help. Again, we understand that great leaders continue to grow.

What I really try to emphasize to people is that asking for help is not a sign of weakness but it actually is for the highest achievers becomes a competitive advantage. Because what you're able to do is you're able to partner for perspective. Sometimes we have to step outside of our own selves to be able to kind of figure out there are different vantage points that we could leverage in order to kind of move past because we can be our own worst enemies.

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Most of the work that I do is I help people get out of their own way basically. A part of it is really what I write in the book, one of the first skills is how do you handle the harsh truths of life? That's what really culls a lot of very capable people who are underperforming back. Some of the harsh truths that some people, whether they're afraid to ask for help.

One of the issues can be that "I want a guarantee. I want a guarantee that if I put this effort in or if I switch lanes that it is going to yield the results that I want to be." The fact of the matter is is that there are no absolute guarantees. All you can do in life is basically create the conditions that are most favorable for you to succeed. The best that we can do is kind of tip the scales in our favor, right?

David: Yeah. You said it so well in your book is "life isn't fair."

Timothy: Right, that's another one.

David: I mean, look how you grew up. You grew up essentially without a dad, your mother did it all. Was that fair? Was that fair, Tim? If your buddy at school had a two-parent family, household. I assume you didn't look at it that way for very long. I mean if you did it all. You take what you're given, right?

I'll just be honest and say that the rug got swept out from underneath me because I was one of those that thought as long as I worked hard, as long as I was a person of integrity, and did the right thing, that I should be able to pretty well control my life. Sounds reasonable when you're young.

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My whole thing with my daughter being sick, I mean, it just turned everything upside down. I could look back and say well heck, that wasn't fair. But what I learned, Tim, I'm sure that you would agree is that how you we react, and you said, setting up the conditions so that they're most favorable so you can adapt. You can get through those tough times. You can get through the adversity. That's the key. You can't do that alone. You can't do that solo, can you?

David: You can't. Another aspect of life is fair that I try to, especially some of the ivy league students that I work with, the fact of the matter is that there's always going to be someone who is smarter than you. There's always going to be someone who is better looking. Always going to have someone who is going to have better resources or come from better families. We get so caught up in kind of measuring our success based upon what other people are doing. What I try to emphasize to people is that look it's not about—so everybody has their own formula for success. Our goal is to find our unique formula for success.

What we should do is to compete but not compare. Because I work with a lot of people, whether they're in business, they're always measuring their success to others. The fact of the matter is, what is your journey? How do we combine your unique gifts, the resources, your experience in a way that makes you become the most effective person that you can become in terms of going for your dreams? So I always say compete but don't compare. That for a lot of people, especially some of my students that I work with, is an eye opener.

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David: Yeah, I think that's huge because I think we both see that there's people that once they do reach some level of quote "success" that they do look around and say, "Oh well then I should be living my life like this." A lot of times it's based on materialism, right? You know, where you live, where your kids go to school, and those kind of things.

Here's the question we really haven't talk about and I'm going to throw this one at you because I know you can answer it because you wrote the book about it. You alluded to it a second ago about success being the individual but when you're talking to the people that you work with, your clients, Tim, how do you help each person individually define their own success? What factors go into that so that they can stop comparing, stop contrasting with other people? How do you define success? What does that look like for people?

Timothy: When you think about success, if you look up kind of definitions or what people attribute to success, there are typically three aspects to it. There is achievement-related success. There is process-related success. Then there's state-related success.

Achievement means that I'm successful when I accomplish dot dot dot, whether it be financial accomplishments or titles or education, etc. Then you have this process-related success. That means I'm progressing in a certain direction successfully. Then the state-related success is really I believe a combination of both. You have the progress but you also have so many achievements that you can really be grateful for.

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So when I sit down and talk with people about success, I find out what it means to them. One of the pitfalls of success is having what I call limited definitions of success, they're based outside of what is truly your core values. One of the things I experienced in medical school, some people would drop out of medical school because that wasn't actually their dream. It was the dream of their parents.

David: Right.

Timothy: You know you can only go so far working on someone else's dream.

David: Exactly.

Timothy: Because you run out of gas. So a part of what I do is kind of help shape their definition of success so that it's in alignment with what they truly value. I firmly believe that for me a part of success is not only increasing your capacity to take advantage of opportunities that are afforded to you but even more important, being able to create opportunities for others, right?

David: Very good.

Timothy: That's true success for me. That's why, like especially for my athletes, I want to make sure they're broadening their perspective of who they are. Because again, if I'm just a football player, if I'm just a basketball player, okay, that helps you focus in on that particular job or activity but the fact of the matter is that my athletes are more than just athletes. They're fathers. They're community leaders. They're people of impact.

When you broaden that definition then you kind of open it up for people to really make a bigger impact in life. I

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would say, I would encourage people to define success in a way that excites them, engages them, and empowers them. Those three things.

David: That's good, Tim. I truly feel like I've lived a path of a lot of people that are just like me, just like us, in that early on in life we set our personal definition of success as one particular thing. For me, it was that achievement, it was getting the degrees. Getting the grades to get the degrees to get through school. But the mountain peaks that you described, I look at those, as you do too, as the next challenges.

Tim, looking back in my life, and I'm sure you do the same thing, is the struggle, the challenges, the adversity that every one of us is going to go through or will still go through at some point in life, that's part of what I think builds our character and what makes us appreciate the level of success that we do get to, each mountain peak that we get to.

I wouldn't be happy in life and I don't many people who would feel like, "I've achieved the pinnacle. I'm done." Are we ever really done if we're people that enjoy the path of life, Tim? Are we ever really done? I don't think we are.

Timothy: I would agree with that. No, we're not done. Again, because life is growth and growth is life, right?

David: Yeah.

Timothy: So when we stop growing or striving, then we start to kind of fizzle out. That's why a lot of people are unhappy because they get to certain levels where they become more—they're managing situations and that really becomes a hindrance to their own personal growth

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because they're continuing to put out fires or manage this and that. So that's why it's always important to continue to grow or to develop that personal growth in order for you to still have that vitality of life.

Because again, we all have that next level to get to. I don't care how high you've risen. I've spoken to a lot of very successful people. But those who are the most excited about life are excited about getting to that next level. Again, it's the challenge. People rise to the challenge.

Some people kind of shy away from adversity but I actually welcome adversity because challenges will teach you basically three things: what you need to know, what skills you need to develop, and it will also teach you what level of resolve you have. How serious are you about achieving that goal? Well you'll find out your level of commitment when those challenges appear because they always do.

David: Exactly. We talked a little bit, Tim, about having coaches and mentors in our life in different respects. What about a mastermind? I know you're a member of a number of masterminds.

Timothy: Yes.

David: How would you for the benefit of our listeners, some of whom maybe have never heard of a mastermind, never participated in one, how would you describe the benefits of a good mastermind? What makes a good mastermind for different individuals? How would you have them look for one?

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Timothy: A mastermind to me is when you have people from a variety of fields or they may still be in businesses but different businesses, etcetera, who are of like minds in terms of come together for the purpose of not only serving others but to become more impactful in their own businesses and their own lives.

When you get together with groups of people with this type of mindset, I believe magic happens. I've gleaned some ideas from people who were in other, let's say, industries or other businesses that have really taken my work to a whole other level. Again, it gave me a different perspective on how I can approach certain things.

Sometimes we get caught up in our own kind of system. We see things in a way that we've been trained to see them. Sometimes what you need to do is get yourself into an environment that really kind of opens up options for you. I believe that that's what really good masterminds do. They challenge you because I believe that, again, we all have this next level to get to. Sometimes we don't give ourselves credit for not only how far we've come because our stories can definitely shed light on someone else's life, help other people. But also other people's stories, just as we're talking right now, can help inspire us as well.

I know a lot of times we get in a work environment, I know I'm in the academic environment, where not everybody has the type of entrepreneurial spirit. So it's always refreshing to me to get into an environment where I feel like, "Okay, maybe not my thought process is not way outside the box." There are people who actually think like I think and they're there to support. Masterminds are pivotal in terms of the success I've had. I've always encouraged it for others.

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David: Excellent. All right, Tim, last thing I want you to leave with our listeners today, that is that you're also a husband and a father. You have two twin boys who are age two and a half. Your mother obviously left a great impact on you. What do you, Tim, how do you want to impact your sons? What do you want to instill in them somewhat similar to but maybe different or the same that your mother did for you? How do you see that?

Timothy: I'm going to tell you something, having children for me really brought things home for me. It was now about, I had to ask myself, "What kind of legacy did I want to leave?" It helped me to be a little bit more intentional about it.

The other day, one of the greatest things that happened to me was one of my sons picked up my book and he said, "Daddy." You know, it's interesting, I believe that me doing that book, I put a whole lot of work in it. Again, there's a whole other version of the book that's going to be released later this year. The fact of the matter is is that my son picking up that book, looking at the picture on that book and saying, "Daddy," I can rest assured that if I leave this earth anytime soon that they will be able to look and read this book and find out about who I truly was. The way that I thought, the impact that I desired to make. For me, that means the world to me.

Fatherhood and being a husband is truly important to me because I think it's the foundation of truly what true success is all about. It can be challenging sometimes in terms of trying to strive forward and work really hard and also balancing the family life. But the fact of the matter is is that for me family is the foundation. Family is the reason why I'm doing what I do. So I have to maintain that

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as one of my highest priorities despite the pull of all the demands that success requires.

David: Yeah, demands like people like David Phelps saying, “Hey, would you just fly over to Dallas, away from your family.” But I know it’s in the realm of the fact that you’re going to help so many other people. I appreciate it. I know that our members are really looking forward to getting a chance to hear you in person, to meet you, probably to ask you for some hallway evaluations.

Timothy: You know, David, it’s always fun because I used to be really shy about saying that I’m a psychiatrist because everybody would kind of shy away, especially at the little cocktail parties because they always felt that I was analyzing them. I said, “Look, I’m off duty. So you’re okay. Your secret is safe with me.”

David: Yeah but you know what, we can turn it right back on you. As dentists, we’re always checking out people’s teeth and they never know it. So get some whitening strips or something before you come.

Timothy: Thanks for the heads up.

David: We play it both ways, buddy. I’m just telling you. So much fun. Listen, appreciate your time today, Tim. You’re a very inspirational person. I have so much enjoyed getting to know you over the last several years. Thank you again for your time and for coming out next month to visit with us. People that want to get ahold of you or pick up one of your books, you’re a multi-book author, where could they go to contact you or to find your books?

Timothy: Sure, just go to drtimothybenson.com. That’s drtimothybenson.com.

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David: Excellent. All right, listen, thank you, Tim. You have a great day and we will talk soon.

Timothy: All right, thank you.

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