



**Genius Network Interview**

Joe Polish, President of Piranha Marketing, Interviews:

***Hugh Downs***

*TV Legend and Communication Expert*

***Mastering the Art of  
Effective Communication***



*Joe Polish*

Joe Polish's Tempe, Arizona office – headquarters for Piranha Marketing – is often referred to by marketing insiders as “action central” for much of the entrepreneurial world. Though he made his fortune in an almost invisible niche by telling carpet cleaners how to crush the competition and turn their small local businesses into money-churning machines, he is now among the most well-known, respected, “complete marketing geniuses” in the world.

Consulting clients from many different countries each happily pay up to \$20,000 a day just to hear his advise. His “boot camps” attract convention-sized audiences full of famous entrepreneurs and many of the “superstars” of marketing and advertising.

In a business environment bristling with false prophets and bad advice, Joe's unique mix of real-world experience and stunning financial success has earned him a spot among the most trusted experts alive. His one-of-a-kind recorded interview series, “The Genius Network” is a “Who's Who” of super-savvy marketing and advertising brilliance.

No one refuses an interview with Joe. He has the gift of gab and the insight of a business veteran who's earned his success. The “best in the biz” seek him out. He knows the good, the bad, and the ugly of what's working – and what's not working – on the Web, in infomercials, in direct response ads and direct mail, in niche marketing, in personal coaching and in every critical area of the entrepreneurial landscape.

The business world is moving faster than ever before. Staying close to the action means paying attention to Joe Polish and Piranha Marketing.



**Joe:** Hello, this is Joe Polish, president of Piranha Marketing and founder of the Genius Network Interview Series. You're about to hear one of my Genius Network interviews. I just want to thank you for taking the time to listen to this and I hope you find it very useful.

If you want to find out more information about some of the interviews and resources that can help you in your business, you can go to [www.JoePolish.com](http://www.JoePolish.com) and we have a Joe Polish Recommends section, with all kinds of resources and vendors and services and products that we recommend that could help you in your business. Also, for more useful interviews and a whole list of other people that I've interviewed, you can go to [www.GeniusNetwork.com](http://www.GeniusNetwork.com).

Thanks, and enjoy the interview.

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**Joe:** Hi, this is Joe Polish doing very awesome Genius Network interview that I'm so looking forward to. I've got Mr. Hugh Downs. Hugh, thank you so much for taking the time. We're going to do an interview here. I'm going to ask you about your life.

If you don't know who Hugh Downs is, you've probably been living in a closet for the last however many years. But nonetheless, I'm going to go through a couple highlights.

He's a longtime anchor of ABC's television primetime news magazine "20/20," which I was on, on the very last year, and you did that for many years. I'll ask you about that.

He's one of the most familiar figures in television history. Up until 2004, he was on television over 15,000 hours. I think Regis Philbin has kind of now surpassed how much time on television?

**Hugh:** Yeah. I should explain that the Guinness Book of World Records still stands if you use the words "primetime commercial television," because Regis Philbin and 2 others I can mention, through syndication or locally, were on longer than I was. But I still have the record for the most on



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network commercial television.

**Joe:** That's great! You've been doing this for 66 years.

**Hugh:** Well, yeah. I'm still doing it, but not regularly now. I'm staying away from regular work.

**Joe:** Wow! I'll point out a couple more things for our viewers. So yeah, got the world record. You started in radio and went on to television as a reporter, newscaster, interviewer, narrator, all kinds of stuff.

Received many awards, including 6 Emmy's. Such as *Broadcaster of the Year* and the *National Media Award for Excellence* in long-term healthcare reporting.

Hugh also helped launch the NBC Tonight Show in 1957 and anchored the Today Show from 1962 to 1971. I was just 3 years old when you stopped doing that.

Authored many books. He's an avid sailor and accomplished pilot. We were just talking on the drive up here that you're going to go back and get your renewal of your pilot's license at 87 years old.

**Hugh:** Just to stay current!

**Joe:** Unbelievable! In 1999, Arizona State University upgraded its communications department into a school, now bearing the name of the *Hugh Downs School of Human Communication*, of which he is a frequent visitor and lecturer at the university.

He and his wife Ruth are happily married, and as of February 2008, they've been married for 64 years and live in Arizona. They have 2 children, Hugh Raymond and Deirdre Lynn; 2 grandchildren, Leah Downs Harb and Carmen Black; and now 2 great-grandsons and a great-granddaughter. You have this book that you wrote, your most recent one, *Letter To A Great-Grandson*.



*A generalist is somebody who comes to know less and less about more and more until he knows nothing about everything.*

**Hugh:** I had fun with that one. That really was a letter to him, but it was made into a book. I left it as a letter. I didn't clean it up or anything. It's just a very personal book.

**Joe:** You can get a copy of that from *Amazon*. You can track it down.  
Well, Hugh, there's so many things you've done. I wouldn't even know where to begin. What are some highlights of who you are that you'd like to point out, that I didn't mention?

**Hugh:** I do confess to being a generalist. I'm interested in a lot of things.  
It's a little like what Alexander Wilcott once said. He said, "I'm interested in everything except incest and folk dancing." That's kind of where I am, really. I'm interested in everything.

My wife calls me a generalist, but she defines a generalist as somebody who comes to know less and less about more and more until he knows nothing about everything. I said I think that's about where I am!

**Joe:** There's one area where you're just a complete expert, which is in communication.

**Hugh:** I have focused on that. That's true.

**Joe:** If you had to identify your core expertise out of all the things you know? And yeah, you do know a tremendous amount. When I was researching you, it's amazing how expansive your knowledge base is.

**Hugh:** I've been fascinated by communication, really, because it's what it's all about in human relationships. There's no doubt about that. It's useful if you have communication techniques. No matter what you choose as a walk of life, engineering or law or whatever, knowing communication is important, and that's why I'm kind of proud to be connected with that school.



*If you're out to do it all for yourself, you're going to fail.*

**Joe:** What makes a good communicator – or a great communicator?

**Hugh:** I think establishing a rapport with another human being in a way that is honest and as powerful as you can make it. It sounds corny, but if it's the least bit self-serving that you have, that's good, because if you're out to do it all for yourself, you're going to fail. First of all, you won't communicate right. And secondly, you won't establish relationships that you want. So you have to be open to that and vulnerable and still get across whatever you want to get across in an honest way.

**Joe:** I remember reading something you had said. I don't know how many years ago this was, but you said, "My customer," I guess – I don't know if this is your exact words – but "is the audience. It's not the networks, it's the actual audience." At the time, you said that even went against what some people believed in, but you always felt the person you were catering to was the viewer, the listener.

**Hugh:** Exactly! My first allegiance was to the person tuned in. Then after that, to the product or the network or whatever.

I did have an argument with an agency guy one time. He said, "Well you don't know where the bread's buttered." I said, "The bread would not be buttered for me at all if I lost face, if the people didn't believe that I believed what I was saying." So I adopted that as a means of operation.

**Joe:** You've done news reporting and journalism for, God, years; 66 years. You started in radio. How does journalism and news reporting today compare to where it was 20, 30 years ago?

**Hugh:** There are some differences, really, and not all of them are good. I think, first of all, technically it's improved vastly, as you know.

From the standpoint of how it operates, I think it's deteriorated to this extent. Competition got so fierce, finally, that in order to get better



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ratings, better circulation for print and what not, you had to kind of lean toward going toward that arena audience that tunes in for blood and dirt. You can get fast ratings that way, but you won't last as well as if you take a longer view.

I think that it's important to recognize the fact that we went a little downhill that way when we got so competitive. When I started 20/20, in 1978, you had to have a share in the low 40's or mid 40's to be respectable.

By the time I left 21 years later, a share in the low 20's was more than respectable. When I left 20/20, we had a share of 21, and the competition had 17 and 11.

**Joe:** What does that even mean, a share?

**Hugh:** A share means the percentage of people tuned in, who have their television sets on, that are tuned to you. If half of them are, you've got a 50 share.

**Joe:** So, 21% when you ended.

**Hugh:** That's right. So 21%, the reason we had so little at the end was that pie got sliced so much thinner and thinner. Originally, when I first went into television, there were 3 television networks. No, there were 2 television networks. ABC wasn't quite on the air yet, and a couple of independents. That was your choice of 5 channels, maybe, in a community.

Look at the choice we've got now with cable and everything. So, the pie does get sliced thinner, and that's one of the big differences in the media today.

**Joe:** Where do you get your information from? I know you've read a tremendous amount of books. You've written 11 or 12 books.

**Hugh:** I've finished 11 books now. I get a lot of news information from television. I must say CNN has been a pretty good source. I'll tell you something later about that, because it made some changes after Turner no





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longer owned it.

But that and local newspapers and the *New York Times*, I try to keep up with. That's about the way.

I have found out, though, that the world goes on, even if I've missed a day of following what the journalists say. It doesn't make a big difference on the way the world is.

**Joe:** Do you watch a lot of TV?

**Hugh:** Not a lot, no. I try to catch some news. I just don't have time to watch television like I did once, so I can't really judge what the television fare generally is anymore. But I try to keep up with the news in some ways.

**Joe:** What do you recommend for people? We are in a current age where there's more data inputs and we're so over-communicated with. Most people, I don't know if it's just my perspective, but it seems to me 10 years ago people were nowhere near as stressed, or at least crazy-busy, as they are today. I think it's simply because of the Internet and communication. What are recommendations that you have for people to stay tuned in but not go nuts with trying to pay attention to so many?

**Hugh:** I know. Obviously one of the things that has caused the polarization in our community now is the fact that so much is available that if a person gravitates only toward that ideology or that source that he wants to believe in, then he kind of misses out on the perspective. That can happen at both ends of the spectrum.

My advice would be to anybody that really wants to know what's going on is to broaden the scope of what you take in, and then make judgments. I think smart people do that, to a large extent.

So, even though it is, as you said, overwhelming, I used to think there was such a thing as information overload. I really don't think that now. All you've got to do is watch an early teenager working a computer, and maybe listening to the music at the same time. The





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information isn't overloading him. It can overload you a little later on.

If you get lost in that labyrinth and don't make judgments and decisions, then you get overwhelmed. But people who have anything on the ball are not going to be overwhelmed by it.

**Joe:** I'm trying to think who you actually were talking to about it. You said that you think one of the most crucial things of keeping your mind sharp was just having a lot of different interests in a lot of different areas.

**Hugh:** I think that's true. I admire people who are single-purposed. A brain surgeon who is really good and devotes all his attention to that, that's commendable. But that makes him more vulnerable.

If you've got a lot of interests, and I've seen people in my business, in television, who when they were forcibly retired or elected to, they got bored and they didn't know what to do with themselves. I can't imagine being bored. If there was a 40-hour day and I had nothing else to do but sit and think or read, I can't imagine being bored.

So it's important, I think, to keep active mentally. The brain is like a muscle. That's a cliché observation, but if you don't use it, it's going to kind of atrophy.

**Joe:** You've done a tremendous amount of work with just helping older people, however you define it, live better lives, understand their purpose. What would be some of your tips and recommendations as people get older to keep themselves totally mentally sharp?

Here you are, 87 years old. I live here in Arizona, so when I went to pick you up today, I was getting there a little early. Called and your wife said, "Well, he'll be back here at 9:30." You have appointments this afternoon.

You stay very active. You're clearly a very sharp individual and you're physically in fantastic shape, at least it appears that way to me. What are some tips and recommendations that you would have that would be significant life changes?



*I was too dumb to realize why I felt bad.*

**Hugh:** A realization that you can mitigate hazards. You can influence your longevity and your comfort and everything by habits that you clean up.

When I was 25 years old. I thought it was a normal adult human condition to feel bad. I really did.

I remembered when I was 15, I felt good all the time. If somebody had said, when I was 25 and didn't feel good, "When you're 45 and 65 and 75 and even 85, you will feel about like you do when you were 15," I would not have believed them.

But I was too dumb to realize why I felt bad at 25. I was smoking 2 packs of cigarettes a day. I had a diet that would've not been good for a hog, really. I wasn't getting enough sleep and I drank too much.

I got that all cleaned up and in short order, through the help of my wife. With a decent regimen, I realized you can influence, very heavily, how your well-being is, how you feel, how long you're going to make it.

So I would advise that. Let nobody adopt the idea that they're going to die young because an ancestor died young. That's not necessarily true.

You can do things to make things better. If people realize that, they start doing them.

**Joe:** You said a really important thing, which is you adopted a regiment that just turned it all around. What was the happiest time of your life or your career?

**Hugh:** Oh. Well probably at points in 20/20, not just because it was the last, but it was because it was where I belonged, really.

I once said to somebody, a newspaper interviewer, I said, "I've done everything there is to do in my end of my business except play-by-play sports." Then I realized, as soon as I said it, that wasn't true, because in 1939, I broadcast a boxing match on the radio, blow by blow. Mercifully, no recording of that still exists because it was pretty awful, I imagine. But I've done even play-by-play sports.



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I imagine, being a generalist, I belonged on 20/20. I felt that was where I was most comfortable because it was news, but it wasn't headline news and little snatches that you had to go on from one to another. You could get in-depth in a thing and do a news feature. I loved doing that. Lots of high points there.

**Joe:** All the time that you've spent doing news reporting, do you think it's gotten better, worse, or is it just kind of the same?

**Hugh:** Some of it's pretty good, but I think in some ways it has slipped because of the competition. As I mentioned, the competition got a little fiercer than it ought to be.

Then you ask yourself, "How will we mitigate that? Do you want the government really running that?"

No! Free enterprise is still the best way, but a proper regulation of free enterprise. And I would like to see the FCC a little less supinely weak than they've been on some points. But I think a proper supervision of what's going on, and then allow the free enterprise aspects to flourish, because that's what keeps capitalism alive.

**Joe:** Thoughts on capitalism? I love capitalism! My good friend Dan Sullivan says, "The problem with capitalism is that it was named by its enemies."

**Hugh:** I know. It sounds like a bad word.

**Joe:** Exactly!

**Hugh:** The funny thing is, capitalism is the basis of the best governments that have ever existed on the planet. But laissez faire capitalism is in danger of racking itself to pieces by lack of supervision. Then greed will take over, and if you get increasingly – this is simplistic – but if you get increasingly small number of extremely wealthy people and increasing big number of very poor, you're headed for a revolution of some kind, which



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is not good.

I think what made America great was we had antitrust legislation. We had all the things in place that would keep capitalism healthy, even for the wealthy.

I can't blame that the CEO makes a lot more money than his average worker; 300, 400 times as much. That's okay. He may be worth that. But 30,000 times as much? That has existed in the United States.

For a guy to make 30,000 times as much as his worker that is doing the work for him isn't right. I think that was pointed out by Warren Buffett, at one point.

**Joe:** Considering what's going on in the economy right now at the time that we're doing this interview, what are your thoughts in terms of what people can do? I think ultimately we're most responsible for our own situation; not relying on the government, not relying on other people to come and take care of us. What are some recommendations, in terms of mindset and attitudes and behaviors, that people, that you think if they adopted them, would give them the highest possibility of succeeding in this wonderful country that we live in?

**Hugh:** I wish I had a formula for that. It's like saying, "Don't worry." How can you tell somebody not to worry?

But if it can be done – some self-help books point to this, I think – if it can be done, then you can adopt a view that will be useful to you and really moving you toward taking responsibility for your own actions and all of these things. It may light a little fire that you can nurture into a bonfire, and it would save your life and make life a lot more comfortable for you.

As I say, I don't have a formula for that. But people who want to do it and want to badly enough will probably do it.

**Joe:** Let me ask you, what are some of the people, maybe some books, maybe some insights that were significant to you in your life, that really helped



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direct the course of your actions?

**Hugh:** That's interesting. One of the most interesting, I think, was reading 2 sources of stoicism. That was Marcus Aurelius An Epictetus. From it, I learned some things I would never have believed. I was in my mid 20's when I read the first of those.

I woke up to the fact you don't have to hate anybody. You may deplore and hate something they've done that is wrong, but you don't hate the person because somebody once said – I read this someplace, too – “Hate is a weapon we wield by the blade.” You just hurt yourself if you hate.

So getting away from hate is important. But since we don't hate anything that we don't fear, people who are afraid of certain things will come to hate people who are associated with those things.

Education is a big factor in eliminating that, so I'm all behind good educational policies. Otherwise, that was one of the things that changed my life was to learn that you don't have to hate anybody.

**Joe:** I don't know if I say it right, Epictitus or Epictetus.

**Hugh:** Epictetus.

**Joe:** The Art of Living, I think, is one of the most amazing books that I have ever read in my entire life. Real thin little book.

My buddy Dr. Edward Holloway, he's a great psychiatrist who wrote a book called Crazy Busy, that's one of the books he actually recommends for people today just to kind of calm down.

You said something once. I don't know, it's one of your friends. He said, “There's the difference between being stressed and being distressed.”

**Hugh:** I got that from Hans Selye, who's a Canadian physician. But I thought it made a lot of sense.



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is.*

Stress is not bad. Distress is. Again, the muscle analogy. If you stress a muscle by exercising, you're going to build that muscle. If you overdo it and tear the muscle, that's distress.

You shouldn't do that psychologically, either. The distress is a bad thing to have to suffer.

There are ways around that. There are experts that know a lot more about that field than I do, but I think there's a big difference between stress and distress.

**Joe:** I think it's profound because, yeah, it could be a great asset or it could be your worst enemy. It could destroy your life.

Let's talk about relationships and such. You now have a great family. How many years you've been married?

**Hugh:** In February of 2009, it'll be 65 years since we got married.

**Joe:** Then the obvious question is tips, suggestions. What's the secret, if there is one?

**Hugh:** The secret is probably over 90% luck because when we met, we were very young. We didn't know each other. People who fall in love don't know each other. You come to know each other if you establish a relationship.

Being totally mysterious about each other, I could've been an abuser, she could have been a snake. As it turned out, I found she had something more important than her beauty and attractiveness, which was character – she has a lot of character. She thinks I have a lot of it, so let's not disabuse her.

That allowed us to grow together and to get over some things. Early in marriage, we had some stormy times. In the very early moments, you do. But we determined to stay together. We finally got to a point where we could ventilate irritation without rancor.

**Joe:** Ventilate irritation without rancor.





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**Hugh:** That's really important, because if you don't ventilate irritation, it's going to build up. That's awful. If you do it with rancor, then you're going to tear something that you don't want to have to repair later.

But we got to a point, early on, where we either one of us could say something to the other one like, "Well, you idiot, if you hadn't put the potholders in the microwave," or whatever, and it all is kind of funny. Even if we criticize each other, we wind up laughing. I think laughing is very important in a marriage.

**Joe:** I think laughing in general. When I look at people that are sitting across from each other having dinner and they're not saying anything to each other, they have these sour looks on their faces, I think you can gauge the quality of a relationship by how often they laugh together.

**Hugh:** I think you're right. You're right. Somebody did a study at ASU about marriage couples and what percentage of time they spent talking about the children's education, about finance, and what percentage of the time they spent in laughter. It came out to close to 1%.

My wife and I, when we got that result – we did a speech on it – we looked at each other and said, "We must do about 18% of our married time as laughing; laughing at each other, with each other and everything." I think that's important.

**Joe:** Who's funnier, you or her?

**Hugh:** That's a good question. She might answer differently from me. I don't know. I like to think I have something of a sense of humor, but she's got a great sense of humor.

**Joe:** Actually, I think you've got a great sense of humor. So mentors, people that you've looked up to in life. Who were some of those people to you?





*He had a way of explaining things that impressed me.*

**Hugh:** Oddly, a lot of people that I read and some no longer living, obviously, or weren't even when I was born. But in the family, my dad was a great inspiration to me because he kept us through the Depression without ever going hungry.

The Great Depression was great. It was very big. So I didn't suffer any trauma like that, because even when the banks all closed in 1932, I was 11 years old and my mother called us in and said, "I've got bad news." I thought maybe some cherished relative had died or something.

She said, "The banks have closed, and you're probably not going to see your money again." I had \$11 in an account that I thought they were going to make me spend on school supplies or something. I couldn't care less. I went out and played.

So here I was cushioned against the awfulness of what the Depression was going to be. As I say, I never went hungry, but we didn't have any frills.

My dad's attitude toward that was interesting. He had a way of explaining things that impressed me. This is maybe worth mentioning.

I asked him questions like the old tree falls in the forest, is there a sound? He'd say, "Well" – he was very scientifically minded – he said, "You define sound. If sound is just the expansion and refraction of the wave train of air and there's no ears to hear it, then there's a sound."

"If sound is that kind of train going on an ear drum and an auditory nerve, and there's nobody there of that nature to hear it, then there is no sound." I thought that was very simple.

Another one that he disabused me of was what happens really if the irresistible force meets the immovable object. He said, "This is a non-problem." He said, "If there exists an irresistible force, that precludes any immovable object and vice versa. So it's a non-problem."

It was solved like that for him. I thought isn't that amazing things that puzzle other people endlessly, and he just had it solved.

**Joe:** Is he the one that created your interest in science?



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**Hugh:** Yes, he is, indeed. When I was 5 years old, and I remember this, I asked him how far away the moon was. I remember that he said it was 238,000 miles away.

At 5 years old, I didn't know what 238,000 miles was. But I was so flattered to be given an adult answer to a question of mine that that triggered an interest of science in me, because many fathers would have said, "Well, we'd have to stand on the kitchen stool to reach it," or something. He gave me an honest, scientific answer as if I was grown up enough to understand it, and that was very worthwhile to me.

**Joe:** Do you think that people, the way they talk to children, like their kids, is bad?

**Hugh:** Often. Often it's not good. You've got to give honest answers.

For example, I remember in both my parents' case, when I was in the first grade in school, I remember kids that were in school that had some weird ideas about sex. I thought, "What's the matter? Where do they get these weird ideas?"

**Joe:** Let's hear about these weird ideas. No, I'm kidding.

**Hugh:** My parents would never explain more than they needed to, but if I asked a question, they'd give me an honest answer, me and my brothers. The result was we never thought it was a big deal.

There's never any time later on, talk about the birds and the bees, because that's nonsense. You've got to bring a child along as needed and leave it at that. That's what my parents did, and that's what my wife and I did for our kids, and those kids did for their kids.

**Joe:** You have a great-grandson. What's your parenting advice for people out there?



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**Hugh:** Parenting advice would be, first of all, you've got to want children and love them. Once you do that, then it's on-the-job training, because there are books that help you steer away from some awful pitfalls, but otherwise you learn as you go because you've got to do what's best.

If you're motivated by what's best for the child, you'll do the right things, I think. That's my best advice.

**Joe:** Okay, great. In terms of reading and education, what has been and what do you feel today are some of the most significant things that people could invest their time and attention on, that would really benefit them in terms of their knowledge, in terms of their behavior?

**Hugh:** One thing that helped me a lot, Joe, is "Great Books," which came out originally in Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan at St. Johns came out with a great books list. It was just called "The Great Books." Later, it was *Britannica* that put it out and had the good taste to say, "Great Books of the Western World," because there's an awful lot of Eastern stuff that isn't even translated yet.

Incidentally, I was very flattered because I had read the Great Books, starting in 1944. I was going to do it in 7 years, and it took me 14 years because I read other things, too.

**Joe:** Twice as long.

**Hugh:** Yeah. That was better than a college education, the Great Books, now the *Great Books of the Western World*, which are available. You can get them electronically and everything.

Reading through that was very worthwhile to me to get a look at the great minds, antiquity and on up into modern times. I probably got more benefit from that than any other kind of reading course I could think of, and still had time to read other things.

**Joe:** Wow! You have interviewed Presidents, you've interviewed so many



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different people. I'd love to hear your philosophies on the Founding Fathers that started this country, and what are some of the principles that guided them. I'd love to hear your perspective on that.

**Hugh:** Doesn't that get more impressive? The more time goes by, the more I examine it against the troubles that the nation has from time to time.

What inspired them to be able to do, one of the things I think was a cooperation between youth and age. At the time, you had fiery minds, from 19 and early 20's, forming the principles of the United States, working with a guy who was over 80 when the Constitution was adopted, Benjamin Franklin. They had respect for each other.

That began to go because there was a tendency for the young to call the old "old fogies" and for the old to say, "The young are just wet behind the ears and they don't know what they're doing." But they had that cooperation, and they somehow managed to put together principles that not only were right for humanity, I think, in a long-term democracy, but were destined to be capable of enduring.

If we can run our country that way, we will endure. So that we get rid of the idea that the might of America is in it's military or it's wealth, but rather in the principles on which it was founded and to a large extent operates, that's hope for a democracy that can go on more or less indefinitely.

**Joe:** Gotcha! Okay, let's talk about some life challenges, some obstacles. What are some of the biggest challenges that you've had to deal with in your life, because I'd love to hear how you overcame difficulties?

**Hugh:** What would the biggest challenge be? Well, for one thing I had to overcome, and I don't think I ever did, a lethargy. Who was the writer who said, "The most frightening thing in the world is a piece of blank paper in your typewriter"?

**Joe:** I don't know.



*I could  
have done  
a lot  
more for  
humanity,  
maybe.*

**Hugh:** It was Hemmingway, or I don't know who it was. But I suffered an awful lot of that, and I got some help from people who gave me tips.

If you're going to write something and you're stuck, start writing anything, no matter how nonsensical. If you've got something then to correct or to work on, it begins to unfold and you begin to roll. But if you sit there staring at the blank paper, you're going to be there day after tomorrow doing the same thing, putting it off.

**Joe:** I had a copywriter actually teach me to just write "Fe, fi, fo, fum. Fe, fi, fo, fum."

**Hugh:** No matter how nonsensical, then you can correct it and attract a run. That's one tip. That was a challenge to me.

Maybe I've had a challenge about laziness. I've always kind of shortcutted, and I don't know why.

**Joe:** I find it hard to believe you'd be lazy.

**Hugh:** Well, sometimes I think of myself as kind of lazy.

**Joe:** Do you feel accomplished?

**Hugh:** Accomplished?

**Joe:** Yeah. Do you feel like what you've done in your life is really a lot.

**Hugh:** No. I could have done a lot more for humanity, maybe. But I do think I was lucky in having a successful life, as far as raising a family and making a living.

Accomplished, you could expand that. I would like to go into space. I undoubtedly probably won't now.



*I wound  
up in  
infantry.*

**Joe:** There is a possibility. Richard Branson, who's got the Virgin Galactic thing, I'm actually going to be at the very first launch of the one he's doing.

**Hugh:** Oh, that's good. Yeah, you could get into space.

**Joe:** I would like to take you, if you're up for it.

**Hugh:** That's very good!

**Joe:** You fly. You do fly planes, so you'd like to go into space. What attracted you to flying?

**Hugh:** I'll tell you what it was. Before Pearl Harbor was hit, I was taking flying lessons. I had about 8 hours in Detroit, and I was about to solo. Then World War II came along and I went into the military.

I didn't go into the air. It was the Army Air Corps before the Air Force was formed. I wound up in infantry.

But after I got out of the army and had established a family, I didn't have the time or the money to go back to training. But in 1962, the Today Show came up – it wasn't even my idea – with a feature to show what it takes to get a private pilot's license. So we said, "Well, we'll pick a young pilot and get him."

One of the writers said, "Why don't you take the lessons and then we'll show how and identify with the viewer a little more." I thought it was a good idea.

So I went as a broadcast project, and I got hooked on it because once I became a pilot, I really began to garner some ratings and try to do something worthwhile. I don't have an impressive number of hours, but I do have a weird assortment of ratings. In addition to single engine land, I have multi-engine sea plane, boat and float; glider; glider tow; hot air balloon. I'm a balloon pilot.



*It's kind  
of a limb  
to be out  
on, really...*

**Joe:** Really?

**Hugh:** Yeah. I don't spend much time. I don't own a balloon. But I've gotten those ratings, and I really enjoyed it. So it came about as a broadcast project, as a lot of things that I got interested in were I owe it to broadcasting.

**Joe:** That seemed to be your school that you created. All the years of doing it, you maintained such a stellar reputation. You are a very respected guy. I'm sure you've said a few things that got you in trouble here and there, but for the most part the public, they completely look up to you. How did you maintain this reputation?

**Hugh:** It's kind of a limb to be out on, really, but I don't know that I deserve that much of a reputation. It's hard to tell.

Something you said reminded me of somebody, a man who had a reputation of having great judgment, was interviewed late in life, and I said, "How did you get this great judgment?" He said, "Through experience." The guy said, "How did you get the experience?" He said, "Through bad judgment."

I feel that partly my allegiance to the audience tuned in as a broadcaster. I was striving to have the public be sure that I was leveling with them. Maybe that reflects back and they think that that makes me a better person.

Getting back to your idea about being fulfilled, in some ways I am fulfilled, I think, in my life, but I would love to expand it. As I say, there's things I'd yet like to do, like write the great American novel, which I'm pretty sure I won't.

**Joe:** There is a possibility. I believe if you put your mind to it, you'd at least get close.

**Hugh:** To me, the favorite novel I ever read was Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome*





*They  
said,  
“The lift  
of an  
eyebrow  
is a  
comment.”*

Dove. I don't know how many people have read that or saw the CBS version for a television series. That was really well done. It was about the American West and it was done as literature and not as a dime novel western stuff.

**Joe:** In all the times that you were interviewing different people, how did you handle situations where you were just opposed to someone's opinion or just didn't consider them a nice person or flat out evil? How were you still able to communicate with them and document stuff for your listeners and, at the same time, not jump across the table and want to smack somebody?

**Hugh:** No, I never felt like losing my temper. But there were some people where what they had to say was so disrespectful, in my mind. I can tell you one of them.

Many years ago, I interviewed George Wallace. He said something that was so outrageous that I knew our listeners would know how awful it was. So why should I pile on? I just looked at him for a while and then I looked into the camera and didn't say anything.

Later, NBC crossed me on that. They said, "You know, that was a comment." I said, "No, I didn't say anything."

They said, "The lift of an eyebrow is a comment." That was their attitude.

**Joe:** Interesting.

**Hugh:** I said, "Well, I'll lift my eyebrow when I think something is really ridiculous," a preposterously racist statement like that. In doing interviews generally, it took me a long time to realize how simple interviewing is.

Do you know what it is? If you and I didn't know each other at all, from a load of coal, and we're suddenly in a studio, and there are 25-million people tuned in now and I don't know anything about you, I could do an interview with you.



*I don't  
need to  
know your  
expertise  
in order to  
interview  
you.*

Here's how simple it is. I would start by saying, "Who are you and why am I talking to you?" Now you presumably know the answer to that.

Then I would run down a list of words – who, what, where, when, why, how, how much – listening to your answers and getting the next question from your answers. You could build an interview without knowing anything about the person to start with. I think that's a remarkably simple thing.

**Joe:** Let's break this down again, because I think this would be so valuable to our listeners. Being in the marketing business and communications, which you're an expert in, which I think any effective marketing is simply just effective communication, that's a process that you just described there.

So, if someone has to sit down and talk to somebody, you could be watched on television or it just simply could be you want to get to know someone, let's go through that again. How did you break it down?

**Hugh:** On a television interview, the 'who,' you wouldn't do that for reasons of politeness. I would presumably know who you are and be able to say something gracious about you, like you said about me at the beginning. So, you eliminate that.

But once you've got that, the others are all you need, really. You don't need to know the subject. If you're an expert on something, I don't need to know your expertise in order to interview you.

**Joe:** Exactly!

**Hugh:** To give you an example of how that happened one time, NBC had a thing called "The Wisdom Series." They had interviewed Sean O'Casey, the poet Robert Frost, and everything.

In each case, they would get somebody in the same field to interview them, and they were bad interviews, really. They were coming up to Frank Lloyd Wright, and somebody, a Chicago producer at NBC, made the suggestion because they said, "Find a young architect to



*He said,  
“Is there  
a God?”*

interview Frank Lloyd Wright.” He said, “Let’s not use an architect. Why not use an interviewer instead?”

So they asked me to do it. I really enjoyed that. Wright only did 2 television interviews – one with Mike Wallace and one with me.

**Joe:** Wow!

**Hugh:** That’s in the archives. But I remember that I didn’t know architecture, so I asked the naive questions that you need to ask so that he can give his answers. It supports my idea you can do an interview without really knowing anything about the subject.

**Joe:** My experience, and in many cases, it served me well not to know anything about the person I’m interviewing because I’m simply asking questions that I’m curious about. I think of, “Would my audience, would my listeners, would my viewers want to hear this?” I simply just ask questions that I think would be interesting.

**Hugh:** That’s smart. You know the astronomer Harlow Shapley was a guest on the old Tonight Show when Jack Parr had it. Parr asked a wonderful question. He said, “You’re an astronomer and you’ve turned telescopes on all direction of the sky.” He said, “Is there a God?”

Shapley then spent the next 4 or 5 minutes explaining his theology, whatever it was. I don’t remember exactly. But I thought that was a wonderful question to ask. Instead of asking about prisms for breaking down light or distances to galaxies or whatever, he asked a question that was really right-on for the audience. I thought it was good.

**Joe:** Wow! You’re a pretty social guy. Do you consider yourself an introvert? An extrovert? Have you ever thought about that?

**Hugh:** Slightly introverted, I think. I’ve only known one real extrovert in my life, and that was Ethel Merman. Remember, she was a big star. Most people



*Anything  
that you  
fear and  
don't face  
controls  
you.*

in show biz who appear to be extrovert are really introverts who are throwing up some armor that's extroversion, and they're hiding on introverted thing.

**Joe:** That's an interesting point.

**Hugh:** But not Ethel Merman. There was a television special we were both on for some charity, and at break time we were talking about stage fright. She said, "I've never understood that. What is stage fright?"

I said, "Well, if you're there on stage and people may have paid to get in, and it's scary!" She said, "What's scary? Are you afraid the audience is going to storm the stage and do you bodily harm?"

I said, "No." She said, "Well then what's to be afraid of?" I believe her. I think she was a true extrovert.

**Joe:** Absolutely! To even say something like that. I remember the first time I actually did any public speaking. It was nerve-wracking! I was sweating bullets.

**Hugh:** Me, too.

**Joe:** But I did it, because my philosophy is anything that you fear and don't face controls you. Anything that you fear but you take steps, you control.

**Hugh:** That is so wise! That's absolutely true! If you are afraid of something, dive into it and confront it because you're not going to do yourself any good by just hiding all the time.

**Joe:** Absolutely. I think part of accomplishment is getting out of your comfort zone, going out there and doing things. One of the gauges are, if I'm a little afraid of it, I kind of know that I'm moving in the right direction because it's pushing me up against my self-imposed limitations, and I always want to break through.



*I've  
always  
been a  
little but  
nervous.*

**Hugh:** That's good advice.

**Joe:** One thing I want to ask you, did you ever get nervous sitting down with the President or talking to someone?

**Hugh:** I've always been a little bit nervous. You don't want to be too nervous. It derails you. But if you're utterly unnervous, you're not likely to do as good a job as if you had a little adrenaline going to help you be alert.

So yes, I've been a little nervous. And maybe more with some than with others.

Toward the end, the last few decades, really, I haven't been nervous either about being on air or who I'm talking to. But I may feel alert and respectful talking to a President or somebody like that.

**Joe:** How do you deal with difficult people?

**Hugh:** Oh, this is interesting. One time we had another awful guy on. He had red, white, and blue shoes on. He was farther right than anything you can imagine.

In this interview live on the Today Show, I said something about poor people. I don't know what it was. He said, "There are no poor people in America."

I said, "There are no poor people in America?" He said, "No. There're a few Arawak Indians and Eskimos that are too lazy to work."

I thought, "Oh boy. How do I deal with this?" I didn't. I thanked him and dismissed him and went to a commercial.

**Joe:** Oh that's funny! Did you kick him out?

**Hugh:** I didn't really want to have anything to do with the guy. I had to get rid of him. I had some words with the person who had booked him, as you can guess. But that very seldom happened.



*“They’ve  
set me up  
for some  
kind of  
April Fool  
joke.”*

**Joe:** What is some memorable stuff that’s happened on the air, either extraordinarily insanely crazy or embarrassing, that you think are just always have stuck in your mind?

**Hugh:** One that was embarrassing because you can’t joke your way out of a religious thing. It was a charming story, really, of a group of Kalmyk Buddhists who had fled the banks of the Don River under Stalin, and they fled to Germany at the time Hitler was rising, which wasn’t a great place to flee to. They then fled from there and made it to New Jersey, and they put up a temple that had been there ever since.

The story was they were going to move the stones of the temple back to the banks of the Don, because it was now safe to do. A charming story, really.

So this was live on the Today Show. They sent up a priest and a translator. They get there in the morning.

Dig this. I ask the first question. Did a little lay-up. I asked the first question and the priest smiled at me and nodded and everything.

I looked at the translator. I thought, “Maybe I didn’t ask that.” So I re-asked the question a little more clearly, and I got smiles and nods, and that was all.

I went to another question, the same thing happened. Then I put out my knowledge of Kalmyk Buddhism, which took about 11 seconds, and asked another question. I got nothing.

Finally, I was sweating and thinking, “Is this April 1<sup>st</sup> and they’ve set me up for some kind of April Fool joke?” Finally, I had to dismiss them, and I went to a commercial.

I said, “What was going on?” Do you know what did that? The translator, in the middle of the night, was taken ill and he didn’t want to disappoint us, so he sent his brother, who didn’t speak both languages. Had a complete language barrier on a live network program.

That made me sweat, because it was a religious thing you can’t joke your way out of. But, I just had to terminate it.



*"I'm not  
Protestant,  
I'm a  
Buddhist!"*

**Joe:** When you have to terminate something like that, what do you do with the time?

**Hugh:** I hid behind the time. I couldn't go to the next commercial and then figure out what to do and maybe discuss it if necessary later. Because I found out what it was, I could explain to the audience why that happened and maintain some shred of dignity.

We used to have those 5-minute periods where the local people come on. About 80 stations dumped out. We still had to fill the time for those stations that didn't do something locally.

We used to have fun with that because they didn't show in Washington or New York, so our bosses weren't watching. One time, Barbara Walters and I were talking. She called me a WASP.

I said, "You know what 'WASP' means?" She said, "Yeah. A white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant."

I said, "Well, I'm not white, first of all, because nobody is." I said, "Secondly, I'm not Anglo Saxon; I'm Celtic." I said, "Third, I'm not Protestant; I'm a Buddhist."

I said, "Why did I say that? I'm going to get hate mail or something."

**Joe:** And you did.

**Hugh:** I did get a little weird mail for a time. That was the kind of thing we liked to do with those 5-minute things, on network time.

**Joe:** I imagine having to tap dance is an art and a science.

**Hugh:** Filling a minute or a minute and a quarter is a lot tougher than filling 5 minutes, because 5 minutes you can develop some kind of a thing. But if you've got a minute a quarter to discuss...

When television satellites came up, I forget the guy in the Congress





*I thought,  
“Now I’ve  
just ended  
my  
career.”*

that voted in favor of making them commercial, and he swung a vote, instead of making them purely government. It was a wise decision.

Somebody asked me what was NBC’s attitude toward that, because NBC was owned by RCA. At that time, General Sarnoff was still in charge.

I remember saying on the air, because I had such a short time to deal with this, I said, “I don’t know what NBC or RCA’s attitude is.” I said, “It doesn’t matter to me because they have no influence on what my attitude is.” I thought, “Now I’ve just ended my career.” I got a phone call from Sarnoff’s office that he wanted to compliment me on saying that because he was trying to prove that he wasn’t dictating the policies that go on in his broadcasting network.

**Joe:** That’s funny!

**Hugh:** Isn’t that interesting?

**Joe:** Yeah, that’s great.

**Hugh:** But I had to establish the fact that I wasn’t under the influence of any big corporation.

**Joe:** I imagine people, in reporting, are constantly – I don’t know if “bribe” is the word – people trying to influence them what their agenda is. How do you deal with that?

**Hugh:** I think so. Some weird things came out of that. One time way back in the early 60’s, Boeing wanted to buy time. At that time, Today was really watched by Washington, the Congress and everything, and the White House.

Lyndon Johnson used to call up after a thing to compliment some guest or to raise hell why we had had somebody on. He did that a lot.

So Boeing, we had this big thing for doing Boeing commercials,



*Spin is a  
very useful  
thing to  
politicians.*

and they suddenly quit. They suddenly bombed out and they weren't going to do it.

We found out the reason was they didn't want to be accused of going on the Today Show to influence the legislation that might affect them. We lost the account because of that, which was kind of flattering to their idea of what our influence might have been.

But you're right. There is a lot of influence, although never has a network said to me, "We want you to soft-pedal this or promote this." They never have said that. I'll give them that credit. I don't think they've done it to any of the major newscasters in the network.

**Joe:** The whole term "spin." How would you define spin? What does that actually mean?

**Hugh:** Isn't that a marvelous thing? It's to put a complexion on something.

A good example of spin might be if you had a stadium for 20,000 people, and only 5,000 showed up. Then you can put your cameras where the 5,000 show up, and you've got a big crowd. If you showed a virtually empty stadium, that is spinning it in a different direction.

So you can take a fact and give it as a fact, but you can do it in a way, either verbally or visually, that puts spin on it. That's a very useful thing to politicians.

**Joe:** Absolutely! Now you know the term "don't believe what you read, don't believe the news." To what extent should someone believe or not believe the news?

**Hugh:** To a great extent, in the details. In the main thing, if somebody says there was a train wreck in Georgia this morning, that's either true or not true. But if you start taking into account spin and those other things, then you shouldn't just believe everything as it's presented because it might be presented in a way that pretends to be objective and is not.



*He missed  
the story!*

**Joe:** Did you find yourself a lot, in your career, watching the news or watching television and thinking, “This is complete BS!” Did that happen a lot?

**Hugh:** Yeah. I admired CNN, the way Turner got that going and stuck with it for a long time. Lately, they’ve come back a lot. But once right after Turner was gone, they did some things that I thought were way off-base.

I’ll give you an example. At the 2004 election, before that occurred, right before, I was having breakfast. This anchor said, “When we come back, we have a feature on the new voting machines.” So I thought, “Well I’m going to stay for that, because we know from voting machines 4 years ago.”

They came back and they threw it to this guy, I forget who it was, who was standing in front of a voting machine, and he said, “These new machines,” and he talked about how user-friendly they were, how they were going to help. I thought, “Come on, get to the story.”

He finally wound up and threw it back to the anchor. I said, “He missed the story,” because the story was not how wonderful they are. The story is how awful they are, how potentially dangerous for electoral fraud and everything. I thought, “Why would CNN lose out on that?”

They’ve corrected a lot of that now, but that was a matter of spin that I thought was awful! That was an example of it. People who didn’t know might just accept that as voting machines are wonderful.

**Joe:** What makes good television versus what makes bad television? You’ve been in news reporting. You really kind of understand the whole communication viewpoint.

**Hugh:** Good television has to be engaging, and then useful to the person tuned in, where it’s going to help his life in some way, and as truthful as possible. So, it isn’t just pie in the sky.

One of the things I was kind of proud to be associated with, about 9 years ago I had ruined my knees and I had my knees replaced, both. I’m ashamed that I don’t have a Heisman trophy to show for ruined knees, but



*It was one of the best things I ever did, because I still get letters from people who say they saw that.*

it was just a series of dumb accidents that caused it.

I said to Barbara Walters, right before I went to the hospital to do that, I said, “Don’t lie and say I’m on vacation. Just say I’m away.”

That conversation was overheard by the executive producer, who said, “Why don’t you go public with that and show what’s involved in knee surgery?” They talked me into it. It was one of the best things I ever did because I still get letters from people who say that they saw that, what we covered, and had the courage then to go ahead and change their life because they got their knees fixed, people who were afraid to do it. I felt really good about doing that.

**Joe:** It’s interesting to think that as much time that you’ve been on television, the millions of people that have listened to your words and heard you, how much influence you actually have as an individual in that environment.

**Hugh:** On occasion, there was real influence that I’m very happy and very proud of, even though I had to be talked into that one. I wasn’t going to go public with it, but I’m glad I did now. Almost everybody I talked to went ahead with it.

The reason I went ahead with it was I knew my knees were ruined, and I thought, “Do I really want that surgery?” Then I saw, on a cable channel, a guy who had had that surgery, both knees replaced at the same time, went back to his occupation, which was rodeo work. I thought, “If he can do it, I can do it.”

**Joe:** No doubt!

**Hugh:** And I did. After that replacement, in 13 days I was back on the air in the studio. I figured if I could sit and watch television for an hour, I could sit and do television for an hour. In a few weeks, I was walking, with a cane and whatnot. In about 7 months, I could run up stairs, which I hadn’t done for 12 years before because my knees were so bad. Isn’t that amazing?

So I knew it was a good thing for people to do, if they needed it.



*Let's talk  
about  
business  
ethics.*

Then if I met anybody who had compromised results and didn't like what they got, I would say, "Did you do the exercise regiment that they told you?"

They said, "Well, I was supposed to, but it was too inconvenient or too painful," or something. Then they get a leg that they can't quite straighten and they can't bend very far. So it's very important, if you're going to do knee replacement, to do the exercises they tell you. I still do those exercises.

**Joe:** Well there you go! Let's talk about business ethics, because I'd like to get your perspectives on this. I went on 20/20 the very last year, I think the last month that you worked there with Barbara Walters.

**Hugh:** It was in October.

**Joe:** Yeah, October '99. Barbara Walters did the story and, at the time, Arnold Diaz, the investigative reporter, and we did a story on how to basically not get ripped off by a professional carpet and upholstery cleaning company using bait-and-switch advertising. They ended up putting EthicalServices.com on the ABC website.

It created this idea that I had that if I could link consumers to service businesses that want to provide a criteria of ethics – guaranteeing their work, carrying proper insurance, employing people and not having them do any sort of high-pressure selling to make a livable wage, agreeing never to use any dishonest or misleading advertising – that it would be a great way for consumers to find those people. As a marketer for what I do for a living, the #1 question in consumers' minds is, "Who can I trust?"

So, I always want to do everything I can to teach my clients to convey trust and, obviously, to live that.

Dan Sullivan, my good friend, he says, "Money earned ethically is a byproduct of value creation." So I always think about when you're out there being an entrepreneur, when you're out there doing things, create value, and you get paid for the value you create. If you don't create value



*People  
want to  
know,  
“Can I  
trust this  
person or  
not?”*

for other people, then you’re not really providing a service. You’re taking advantage of people.

That has everything to do with character. It’s not a gimmick, it’s not a technique. It’s literally how you conduct yourself and how you treat other people.

So I wanted to get your thoughts, because you had to face that on a daily basis. Your own character representing the different media, but it was you. It was your face that was out there and trying to serve the audience. What are your thoughts on business ethics, communication, that sort of thing?

**Hugh:** Joe, there is such a need for what you then provided, because of communication that was untrustworthy. It might be an honest company that you could trust, but how do you know? I tried to do that in my personal career, but you codified it in a way that was so much needed. That’s why it was very successful, I think, because people want to know, “Can I trust this person or not?”

I don’t know. It’s admirable, how you did codify it and turn it into something that can become a reality on a very wide scale. I’ve tried to do it on a personal scale, I think, just by making sure that people understood that I meant what I said and that I wouldn’t associate myself with something that was shady or wrong.

I had a funny experience on that one time. There was a sponsor on the Tonight Show, the old Tonight Show, that made a linoleum-like floor covering. It wasn’t right, really, because nails would come up through it and stuff.

I said, “I won’t do this anymore.” They said, “You’re in breach of contract because you’re supposed to do the commercials.” I said, “No, I won’t have anything to do with it.”

But the net result was I was more in demand afterward than I would’ve been if I had gone ahead and done it. But I couldn’t live with that and say the things they wanted me to say about it. So, I made that attempt to do it. But it never occurred to me to put it together in a way like





you did, and make it into a really widespread entity.

**Joe:** One of my goals is to transform the way that Americans actually buy and locate service companies, because you've got all these wonderful companies, but they simply don't know how to get the message out. Then you've got all these consumers that want things and they just want to find the right company. If I could help develop a system where people can find people they can trust and people that are trustworthy and are willing to put their butts on the line because people have the ability to report on them, I think it will just provide a tremendous service.

**Hugh:** That is marvelous!

**Joe:** It's what I wanted too because I thought, "You know, if I need to use a painter, if I need to use anyone, and I simply could figure out a way to find them and eliminate the possibility of getting ripped off or dealing with the company, how good of a value would that be to me." Then I thought, "You know, that'd be a good value to everyone."

**Hugh:** Tell me something. Do you think in the world of finance now, with Bernie Madoff and this kind of thing, would there be a way of investors finding out about whether somebody's got a Ponzi scheme going? Is that going to happen?

**Joe:** I think so. I recently read a survey where 98% of high net worth individuals, when asked would they would refer their current financial advisor/planner, out of 100%, 98% said they would not.

**Hugh:** They would not.

**Joe:** They would not. I don't know if it applies to all across the board with financial planners, but for high net worth individuals. If you sit and think about it, how much distrust do people have?





So I think, ultimately, it comes down to literally asking the people and creating a vehicle of communication where they can give feedback. I think there could be an [EthicalServices.com](http://EthicalServices.com) version for every sort of business, but it would require not the person who's the marketer or whoever's saying, "We're the best," but actually asking the real people.

**Hugh:** Whether they trust them.

**Joe:** Exactly! Creating a vehicle for that.

I think, ultimately, when it comes to sharing valuable things with consumers and how they make decisions, one new thing that is happening with technology, with the Internet. There's a guy I interviewed named Rod Beckstrom, and he's one of the coauthors of a book called *The Spider and the Starfish*. The analogy is that if you cut off the head of a spider, the spider dies. If you cut off the arm of a starfish, the starfish will grow another arm. Certain species of starfish, if you chop the starfish into pieces, it'll grow an entirely new starfish.

So, the point was a centralized organism versus a decentralized organism. So the concept was things like Wikipedia; someone types in "Hugh Downs," they can find information. I know it's not always accurate, but with anyone.

Right now, as we sit here and do this interview, there's literally tens of thousands of people not getting paid, working on building this starfish called Wikipedia. Google has Aspects, or Craigslist.

One of the things he said is that Al Queda is actually a starfish. You kill Bin Laden or you kill some of the people...

**Hugh:** That's not going to end them.

**Joe:** It doesn't end it. 12-step groups are actually a starfish. There was a catalyst named Bill W. and Dr. Bob that, in the 1930's, found a solution to people dealing with alcoholism. Prior to that, people were either institutionalized or died or just suffered from this condition of addiction,



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but that was a starfish.

I think what is happening today, if you look at a lot of the things that technology gives us in opportunity or certain movements, they just expand. It can work in both ways. It could be a very negative starfish or it could be a very positive.

So, I think with the current events of what’s happening, as long as there’s a catalyst that creates positive change, it just grows. I think it will grow not from a CEO in the future. I think it will be large groups of people. I hope that’s a positive thing that comes out of it.

**Hugh:** That makes a lot of sense.

**Joe:** That’s what I want Ethical Services to be. I want it to be a starfish, so it’s not like me saying, “Here’s what Joe Polish or my company thinks is ethical.” It’s like, “Here’s a criteria,” and the consumers build on that criteria. Then the consumers own it.

**Hugh:** That shows a faith in human nature that the fascist mind doesn’t have. A fascist mind believes humans are intrinsically evil and they need to be governed by some dictator or something.

Human nature is wonderful. In the news business we say, “Good news is no news.” I guess there’s a reason for that, because if you’ve got a charming news story, it’s really not much news unless it’s unusual or tragic or something.

We tend to think that humans, because of that, are bad because it focuses on the bad deeds of certain people. But if there hadn’t been a countervailing force since before history began, of cooperation and empathy and everything, we’d still be in caves, eating raw meat.

**Joe:** Absolutely!

**Hugh:** So humans are basically good, and we’ve got to deal with the part of them that isn’t so good. But you’ve got to have faith in it, and I think that’s what



*Let's talk  
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and  
animals.*

you displayed with the starfish idea. If you believe that, then there's a lot of hope for humanity if you build things on that instead of building them on the fascist approach.

**Joe:** Absolutely! It's about evolving versus devolving. By the way, let me ask you about that, because I wrote something down here where you talk about the anti-evolution mindset that you currently believe is infecting our culture. Could you talk about, first off, what is that?

**Hugh:** First, I thought it was just a function of the fundamentalist religious view. It goes much deeper than that.

Forget religion for a moment. There is something in some humans that is viscerally opposed to being related to any other species of animal. Let's talk about humans and animals.

They don't want to say that we're animals. We are. We may be a unique animal in intellect and some other ways, and I think a very significant animal in the universe.

For the first time, the reigns of evolution are in our hands now. We have control. Every other species on this planet is here by our sufferance now and can be extinguished, if we allow that to happen.

To me, it's as though the universe is not only gone into the idea of finding out about itself but manipulating itself, because we can manipulate the environment. This is an awesome responsibility.

But we are still animals. I think there are people who are so upset at the idea of being related to any of the great apes that they've got to reject Darwin, because that would just be an awful thought to them.

The religious right has tended to adopt that view. They think it's not Biblical and whatnot.

It's a very potent force that you have to deal with. It's part of an anti-science, anti-intellectual movement that is a reality. I think it can be done in.

But, there's a lot of movement against the use of the human mind. It's kind of a know-nothing, neo-luddite approach to life, that they think



*That's  
apples  
and  
oranges.*

will make humans more comfortable. But it really will keep us in the dark, if we do that. We've got to respect science and follow a scientific method which doesn't preclude religious faith at all. That's apples and oranges. The anti-evolution movement is the spear point of that awful idea that is a fear of being related to other animals.

**Joe:** Interesting. Do you believe in karma?

**Hugh:** Not in the strict sense. I think there's a lot to a lot of those things that have Hindu roots and everything, but I don't subscribe to karma in the sense that in some afterlife you're going to have built up credit things or debit. I don't think that, but I think there's a lot to be said for some of the philosophy that's come out of the East that way.

**Joe:** The reason I ask is not even really necessarily a very deep spiritual level; more so you always strike me as someone that just is a friendly, nice, caring person. One of my favorite sayings I heard years ago is, "Be nice to the people you meet on the way up because they're going to be the same people you meet on the way down."

**Hugh:** Isn't that true!

**Joe:** I think it's just a good way to conduct your life, because frankly we don't always make good decisions. We make mistakes as human beings. We screw up at times. And to go out and try to make your way through life by stepping on people, being rude, people that don't say thank you to waiters and they look down at people, I think people like that are jerks. There's no reason for it.

You've just conducted yourself, it seems – again, this is the Joe Polish perspective of Hugh Downs – the public perceives you this way, and I'm really kind of wanting to find out, as we wrap up here, maybe what are some philosophies on how you've lived life and how you do that? I think a lot of people would like to leave their life with people liking



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them, meeting them, growing, evolving.

**Hugh:** One of the things I learned, Joe, and it has worked for me, I can't say 'never,' but in the last decades of my career I never competed with anybody. I'll compete with my own past record or something. I found when I didn't compete, if I was helpful, say they were going to do a feature on a scuba diver. I'm a scuba diver and I used to teach scuba diving in the 50's. I've done some diving things on 20/20 and so forth.

I can't remember who it was now, wanted to do a diving thing. They said, "Will that kind of compete with what you're...?" I said, "No, it won't." My inclination was to help this person and have him make a good showing.

I found, a long time ago, that if I'm helpful to people, they're going to be helpful to me. That's the only way I'm going to rise, and not trying to climb on them and get someplace.

So, that has worked for me, and maybe it would work for just about everybody. Abandon the idea of competition, except against your own record.

**Joe:** First off, I think that's great advice. Secondly, what I take out of that, what I instantly thought of when you said that is comparing yourself to others. That's the surefire way to be miserable because there's always going to be someone who has it better, and there's always going to be someone who has it worse.

**Hugh:** It's like yacht owners. He finally gets 100-foot yacht, and now he's moored behind a guy that has 125-foot yacht, and he's miserable.

**Joe:** Isn't that hysterical? First off, there are so many more things I could ask you, I'd love to ask you, but I want to wrap up here.

To the listeners, most of them being entrepreneurs and business owners, a lot of them dealing with enormous struggle, but they're big risk-takers and they're out there just trying to do stuff. Anyone that would



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even take the time to educate themselves, watch our interview, things like that, are genuinely interested in learning.

There's been a school of communication that has been named after you, and you're out there doing a lot. What words of advice would you give to business owners and to people of America, just to go out and have a better life and do good things? Parting words, I would say.

**Hugh:** I would say one thing would be that they should pay attention to what you have set up in the way of making sure that if they're an honestly-run business, that the public knows that they're an honestly-run business. Through what you've set up, that has now become possible. They should support that kind of a view.

That's kind of topmost in my mind. The other thing would just be to not lose patience, because some things take time. You can drive ahead, but don't get into such high gear that you're going to flail yourself to pieces.

I don't know. I don't have any concise advice on that, except that one point, which I think is important to be sure the public knows that they have a way of knowing whether you're worth it or not.

**Joe:** Right! Great! Also what I want to do, I probably should have done this in the very beginning of the interview, is acknowledge Brian Kurtz and Margie Abrams and Marty Edelston, all the wonderful people at Boardroom, Inc. which have been my friends for over a decade. They're the ones that really introduced me to you and we made the connection.

First off, I just want to really sincerely thank you. You're such a busy guy, even with all the things you're doing, and you took the time to come down to the studio and do this.

**Hugh:** It really was a pleasure.

**Joe:** Thank you! I hope, in the future, we can do it again. If there's anything related that Hugh Downs does when we publish this video interview, I will





*Eat  
Your*

*Competition  
Alive!*

put it on our website at GeniusNetwork.com and keep you abreast of all of the cool things that Hugh is doing. Any famous last words?

**Hugh:** Outside of the guy who said, “In closing, I would like to say goodbye,” which is something seldom said by somebody who starts with ‘in closing.’

**Joe:** Right. Exactly.

**Hugh:** I’ve enjoyed it very much! I don’t have anything to add.

**Joe:** Alright. Thank you so much!

**Hugh:** Thank you, Joe.

**Joe:** I appreciate it!

BOOKS: Fifty To Forever by Hugh Downs  
Letter To A Great Grandson by Hugh Downs

