

110. Embracing Authentic Writing w/ Medium's CEO Tony Stubblebine

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Dan Dissinger: On today's episode of Writing Remix, we welcome CEO of Medium. com, Tony Stubblebine.

All right, everyone. Welcome to another episode. I'm your host, Dan Dissinger of Writing Remix. And today, really exciting episode. Um, we are right in the beginning of the 2025, I guess, season of the podcast.

And this episode, I feel like is. Truly, one of the ones that I'm excited about so much because I use Medium to teach on. I've been talking about it for the last four years. And, um, when they reached out, I was super excited. Actually, I couldn't believe it. I thought, you know, I was like, is this real? But I'm so happy to have

Thank you so much, Tony, for coming on and taking the time to talk to me.

Tony Stubblebine: Oh, it's a pleasure for me. You're one of our power users. So uh, it's a special day for me to get to meet you and talk to you.

Dan Dissinger: Well, th [00:01:00] thank you so much. That, that means a lot. I am like, I'm like, oh, a power user. I, I love that. Yeah. And my students are enjoying it, and we'll get into it as well.

But, um, why don't you let the audience know a little bit about yourself, um, a little bit of how you got here, and then, um, we'll jump right in.

Tony Stubblebine: I mean, I'm a software engineer originally, so for me it's just wild to be able to talk to people about writing. Like, I always find that writing is kind of magical, and the people who do it well are so impressive to me.

Meanwhile, I had just been a math guy, and it took me a long time to become, like, an okay an okay writer and only in certain situations. But, um, I, one thing is if you're a software engineer, sometimes you'll get sucked into a certain kind of genre of the tech and startup world. And the genre that I've been in for the last 25 years has been all [00:02:00] forms of internet publishing.

So I've gotten to be around writers of all, all shapes from books to, uh, I was part of the launch team of Twitter, so like kind of the opposite of a book, uh, very short thoughts. And, um, and just like, uh, and over the last 10 years had been a partner to Medium, um, was one of the first users and then built a business, uh, in partnership with them.

And then when the CEO of Medium decided to step down, I made the case that I could be the replacement CEO. the last two and a half years, I've been, um, kind of bringing that, the love I had for the platform to, you know, the day to day running of it, trying to make it, you know, everything I think it can be.

Dan Dissinger: Wow. I mean, there's so much already there, but I'm, I'm curious about this. You said something that I really [00:03:00] found interesting and is that You feel writing is magical and and I attach to that so much because of my journey as a writer I mean, I think you said that you you still you didn't feel like you were a good writer or like that Right, and I think a lot of people feel that way.

I feel that way still this day I mean like writing can be very scary. I feel like it's one of those things What is it in terms of magical when you use that word that you feel? is, writing is, like, in terms of magical, because that, that's how I see it, and, um, you said it, and I was like, wow, I feel the same way.

Tony Stubblebine: There's a part of it that I really focused on and got okay at, and just, and getting okay at that helped me understand how much more there is beyond it. So all I tried to do is figure out how to write clearly. Especially, I write a lot of non fiction, tutorial, how to, that kind of stuff. And there is like, [00:04:00] honestly, there is a whole world of, um, skills that are required to do that well.

And having gotten to okay at that, I now is, I'm more aware of Well, how do you create, um, a fiction, a world, you know, that doesn't already exist? How do you write in a literary way? How do you write in a way that connects with people's emotions? It's kind of like, um, it's a practice with unlimited, uh, mastery.

There's no such thing as having mastered. It's like, there's always another level for you, for you to go. And just, I think being around people that are Like, that are so good at it, sometimes it, like, I definitely, I, I feel absolutely in awe of a lot of them, even just my, you know, my co workers, right? Like, a lot of them are, uh, are shockingly good writers for, like, the role that they have.

Like our head of HR just finished an MFA in creative writing, [00:05:00] right? Like you wouldn't, and that's just because we work at a writing company. So we're surrounded by people that are passionate about writing. Um, and then, you know, the greater world also is just filled with people to admire.

Dan Dissinger: So, in terms of being, you're right now, you're the CEO of Medium, um, a great writing platform, online platform, it's been around for a good amount of time, it's, you know, one of the, I would say the original, one of the original, like, larger platforms to write on, and, um, what is it about Medium that do you think people connect to as writers or as readers?

Because I'm, you know, I'm on there, I write on there, I teach on there, Um, and it's really, I mean, truthfully, just personally, I think it's one, it's very simple to read. I love like kind of how it looks. It makes it very easy to kind of engage with. Um, and then there's a lot of options in terms of like how to create [00:06:00] your writing.

So I'm, I'm curious, what do you think it is that people connect to it? And like, what is it that you feel you're bringing to it as now the CEO?

Tony Stubblebine: Yeah. I think that question of what's worth bringing to it and really what's worth bringing to the world is, is almost like the most important question. Cause I want medium to bring something new to the world that isn't already there.

And, uh, so what, what do people connect with? They connect with authenticity because the rest of the internet is just flooded Spam, manipulation, hustle, you know, there's just a lot of things that aren't quite authentic. I think there's something Went wrong on the Internet that took us in the direction of, um, you know, of faking it, right?

And it's like, uh, trying to professionalize every writer and trying to turn every [00:07:00] person into a full time creator kind of creates this, like, in order to do that well, you have to master the game. And so we mostly hear from people who are wired to want to master the game rather than just share something authentic.

And when, um, when I took over with Medium, my number one goal was to build different rules for distribution, different rules for who gets read, and make it much, much easier for anyone to come in and find an audience, even if they, um, even if they didn't know And The details of SEO or how to make something go viral or how to build an audience and I guess the simplest way that I usually

say it is like the people that are that I most want to hear from are too busy living to spend all their day building audiences, right?

Um, and I just like, I love that medium is a place that anyone can [00:08:00] come and, and be heard.

Dan Dissinger: I guess like as a podcaster, like to, like, I'm so involved in that idea of like building audience, right? Building audiences, such a. Big part of it. It's something that I'm always Having to pull my way myself away from I guess as well because you get you get obsessed with the numbers Right, like staring at them or the stats and everything.

I love that you said like it's more about authenticity And I think it's interesting where you're saying like something went wrong with the internet but also you said earlier that you were around like on the launch team Twitter where

Tony Stubblebine: Oh, what went wrong with the internet? I should be pointing the finger at myself.

No,

Dan Dissinger: I mean, I would say at the beginnings, I love Twitter. Now. I don't know what's happening. You know, it's like one of those things, but I, what keeps a medium in that [00:09:00] authentic space? You feel like, what is it that keeps it? So people don't feel like they're chasing that. Like, uh, that's really important, right?

Because, well, yeah, I think that's the question. Like, what do you think it does? Like, how do we keep people in that space?

Tony Stubblebine: Well, I'm really lucky to, like, the person I took over from saw that, like, he had been the founder of Twitter, and, um, he just put his finger on its incentives, and maybe this is, like, a little too business wonky, but, like, where the money comes from defines what product you end up building, and so most of the internet is built around Selling ads.

And so that means all of the incentives for the businesses are around attention. You know, it says called an attention economy for a reason. And the things that grab people's attention are kind of by nature. Um, you know, uh, disruptive, you know, they get, they're not [00:10:00] necessarily true or helpful, but they, they incite emotions that I think are just not healthy.

And, um. So, uh, Medium's founder, Evan Williams, he flipped us from an ad based business model to a subscription business model. And that just means that we're much more aligned, you know, our customer is the reader and we need the reader at the end of the day to say, I was happy to have paid to read that.

And that's so much different from clickbait, right? Um, like, clickbait is like, you can't help yourself but click on it. That's why it's called clickbait, right? And it's, and, I think people sort of forget the, that bait is short for bait and switch. You clicked on it hoping for an answer and you never got it, right?

And that's why you get to the end and, yeah, you spent time on that piece. But you weren't satisfied at the end. And, and, and honestly, I think that's good for the advertiser. [00:11:00] It's like, once you're on the page and you lost interest in the content, they're like, what else is there to look for or look at then, then the ads.

And that's just kind of the, the warped incentives of, um, of an ad based model. And when. I first started writing on Medium once there was a subscription model. I understood immediately, like, my writing is the product. There is nothing beyond my writing. Someone has to be either happy with this or not. Um, and honestly, that just drew out the best writing for me.

And I saw it draw out the best writing from everyone else. Like, rather than Hacking some system, like you actually can sit down and focus on, um, you know, how can I delight whoever is going to read this, whether it's, you know, five people or 5, 000

Dan Dissinger: people. So you feel like that there's a certain type of writing that people are drawn to on Medium?

Or do you think like Medium is a space where it's like it welcomes [00:12:00] pretty much almost all Across all genres, I think you're seeing like a lot of people just being able to write what they've, something meaningful, right? There's like a whole idea in, in composition rhetoric of like going from the product driven writing to meaningful writing.

And like how this idea is like, are students doing meaningful projects or are they doing projects that just have to get done? Right? Like, so, is, do you feel like there's a space for that, or like, Medium is kind of cultivating a meaningful writing space, or meaningful writing project space?

Tony Stubblebine: Is that, um, kind of the difference between an intrinsic motivation and an extrinsic motivation?

You're kind of, you're writing what your boss wants to write, or you're writing what's in your heart? Mm. Is that, is that what the debate that you're referring to? Is that what that's about?

Dan Dissinger: Yeah, I would guess so, yeah, because I would see in the classroom, I would be, I feel like, I guess the teacher is like the boss, right?

Like, and you write, the boss is the audience, right? And then, and what we're trying, like, the idea is to try to switch [00:13:00] that and go. We're not your audience. There is an audience and you're part of it as well. What kind of piece is most meaningful to you? Or what's the project that's meaningful? And that doesn't necessarily, they get the best grade on it.

It was, that even doesn't even tap into, like, isn't part of it. So I'm wondering, do you feel Medium is a place, uh, is a place where that can, where that occurs or people are tapping into that?

Tony Stubblebine: Yeah, 100%. I think it's really important for you. Every writer, even just to understand the difference, like, uh, because all of us, even if we don't think of ourselves as writers, we'll write for our job, you know, we'll have to write a memo.

I mean, I write business memos all the time, and they're not exactly coming from the heart. It's just the job requires it. So I write it. But also then separately, what is most meaningful to you? And I mean, that could be a creative effort, but it could just be, um, here's some [00:14:00] information that I'm sitting on that I really want to explain to people.

Um, where people get lost here is this like feeling of, Oh, I have to make a living writing. I think that that really trips people up because then they start to write things that maybe they're not. You know, like best position to write about. Um, and so what I think people who go down that path don't understand is there's this whole category of people that are just always going to whoop them.

I'm sorry. Right. It's like the, that, like, if, if you wanted to hire a journalist. to cover running mediums, right? They would do a great job, like they would write something I'm sure like deep and meaningful about medium as a business and they would get like some of it right. But if I decided to write about what it's like

to write, run medium, I would just Be so much better because I know what I'm talking about [00:15:00] and it's coming from my heart and it's authentic.

And so I think what really does well on medium is personal experience and that could be personal experience that like in your life, but honestly, a lot of it is professional experience, right? Like the, an amateur writing, an amateur writer sharing their professional knowledge. Is basically the most valuable thing on the internet right now, because no one else is doing that and no one else can come close to being as insightful about it like people like a huge chunk of mediums, subscriber bases, people who are trying to learn something and so you're trying to learn how to write like it would be an honor, and it is an honor for people to learn from you, Dan, right?

Um, and, um, because that's your profession. And same as a, as a, as a CEO and entrepreneur, I like to learn from other entrepreneurs [00:16:00] directly from them, right? Like just to be able kind of the way that people are always looking for mentorship, right? You want to be mentored by someone who's been there before you.

That's what like the, that's what a lot of blogging and writing online ends up being about is someone who's done it before you. Um, uh, showing you the path so that you can do it yourself. And that's, I mean, that's super authentic writing. That's very intrinsically motivated.

Dan Dissinger: So you've, I like that. Like, it's more people are coming in to learn and anyone can mentor.

Like, do you feel, Hmm, I like that. I have students that now, like, you know, we've been using media. I've been using medium, a few of my colleagues that I saw have been using it. I think I've been using it from, uh, in terms of in the classroom for way longer and in a much more. Public fashion, I think it's been a little different than the way other people have some of my students [00:17:00] now I think are a little more weary there It's funny, as time has gone on, they go unlisted more than like in the beginning students were super excited to kind of go I have something to say and I want people to hear it and I think as Generationally, it seems like it's changed sometimes a little bit but sometimes as the class goes on they'll go I really want people to know this or if someone comes across it Do you think like do you feel like people that there are other ways in which people can use medium?

Like that in terms of creating spaces. Like, bigger spaces of teaching or bigger spaces of community than, than just like in, in just the singular person that is on there.

Tony Stubblebine: I think the secret of using, of writing online as a portfolio, that's what I'm hearing part of this, is that People only notice your best work.

They never see your worst work. And there's this, um, there's actual safety to it. [00:18:00] Like, no one's hunting down the stuff, the, the, um, uh, the stuff that no one, you know, there's a reason no one read it. Like, it just, it'll never be read for the most part. And, and so to approach a portfolio is kind of a portfolio strategy about life is I might go low.

put out as much of my work as possible into the public sphere and see what opportunities that generates for me. And some of my work will just fall flat. And like, honestly, like, I'm the CEO of Medium. I've written 700 things here, right? Nobody talks to me about the bad ideas. No one's like, did you see what that guy said in 2017?

No, that stuff never comes up, right? And, um, but by writing that much, I just ended up creating all these opportunities for myself, and it could be, like, I'm often thinking about professional opportunities, but it could just be an opportunity to have an interesting discussion [00:19:00] with someone. Uh, and, um, and I think I'm still a big believer in working in public or sharing as much of your work as possible to the public, because it does, it opens up doors, especially when you're young.

Um, like there is, You know, I mean, you probably, you know, way more than me, but my understanding is it's hard to get a foothold in the job market these days. Right. And, um, and so just some, some way to differentiate yourself. Uh, I took a, I skipped a bunch of steps in my own career just by being a good writer.

Uh, and I didn't, you know, I mean, as we started at the beginning, it took a lot of effort, right? So the first step for me of being a good writer was just building the muscle of writing.

Dan Dissinger: Right. Excellent. Yeah. I mean, that's something I tell my students all the time. It's like, your writing is about doing it, right?

Like, Kerouac, like, [00:20:00] one of my favorite authors is Jack Kerouac. It's like the scholarship center of my life at this point. It's been like that forever.

And Burroughs, William Burroughs said of, said about Kerouac in an interview, kind of basically, they asked him about him being a writer. He's like, well, He was a writer because he wrote, and that was it.

Like Kerouac was a writer because he wrote. Um, that was the only, that's the thing that makes him a writer. And I try to like, am, I try to keep that in mind because a lot of times I feel like, especially when I'm writing scholarship or something that's a little more quote unquote academic or something, I'm like, oh no, I'm not doing this correctly.

But, you know, and I'm trying to tell myself it's, Like you said, authenticity is important. With Kerouac, authenticity was important, like the word and how a person says it. And I always tell my students that too. I'm like, You, when you write, that you're a writer. Like, what you practice. And Bell Hooks said the same thing.

There's a difference between theory and practice and being a practitioner. And if [00:21:00] you practice the thing you want to do, then you are. That's what you're doing. And um, they, you know, sometimes a student, a lot of students, they'll, they really get into that because they start to see That they can create something, um, that represents something of themselves too.

So like, there's an interesting aspect of writing that I feel like you're even talking about. It's like there are opportunities when you write. And at the same time, you're also building the muscle of writing, but you're, and you're also building the muscle of yourself, like, so there's like a lot of stuff happening because you're building an identity and understanding yourself too, like, it's, writing is very self reflective, right?

Tony Stubblebine: Um, you know who you should have on after me, uh, is, uh, Kendrick Lamar. That this is like a funny connection, though, but for me to bring up, but I literally just saw an interview with him leading up to the Super Bowl. This is like him and Timothee Chalamet riding around in a car and he said [00:22:00] exactly what you're saying.

He said the thing that they focus on is keep the pen moving. He was really specific about. It's not that everything is good. It's that just like not like staying in touch with. Kind of the muscle of, of creating is where the good stuff comes from eventually, right? And then he said this other thing that's pretty similar to what you just said, which is, um, uh, doing that much writing really forced him to come to understand himself.

Like, because a lot of it he doesn't have an audience for, right? You know, if your pen is always moving, he's the only audience, and so he's gotta constantly be judging what he just wrote, like, does this feel true to me, right? And I'm like, what a, what a wild, um, career, right? Like, that, just to have those two characteristics of like, always [00:23:00] creating and always, um, examining yourself, but without the pressure of all of it having to be successful.

Because I think that's really, like, When people say writing is hard, they're really talking about the pressure to, to do it well is hard. And so when you're in that mode, if I'm on deadline or like, I have to write this, even if I don't know what I'm talking about, or, um, the, you know, the final drafts for me are often the hardest, right?

That, or if you try to make your first draft, the final draft, that's, The kiss of death for me. That's not happening. Yeah. Um, so I just, I thought, I don't know if that's a, uh, an interview worth linking to or going out to find. Cause it's just, it's the social proof of people kind of opening up their actual writing processes is so, um, helpful.

And I mean, how many other, like if we, we could just. Trade examples I [00:24:00] bet for an hour of other people we know like Stephen King has that process.

Dan Dissinger: Oh, yeah

Tony Stubblebine: right, I

Dan Dissinger: mean Even just even just to go back even to all the even the the whole beat era like they wrote Con there's never, I mean, it was like obsessiveness and I always thought like if they lived into the point of digital media like this and especially podcasting and social media, they would have taken over all of those spaces because they would have been like, you mean I could just turn a microphone on and talk forever and put it out there, right?

They would have caught, they would have been, it would have been nonstop. And I think that was. That, and it was such a short lived period of work from like the mid to early 40s into the late 50s like that they They're still finding books that Kerouac wrote. They're, they're there, but I think like, yeah, it's never ending, but I think like what is something that I feel like [00:25:00] people in terms of doing good writing, quote unquote, they get scared that of the process.

Cause you do have to go through a lot of things that may be quote unquote bad. I mean Stephen King put out books and they're published that aren't good and he knows they're not and but he did it to get to the good book and I think that's okay and I think a lot of times especially now there's like a sense of we want The best thing, it's gotta be perfect, there isn't, and I deal with that all the time, perfection and imposter syndrome of trying to figure out, like, this isn't gonna be right or whatever, but, but again, like, a part of me always blames academia for that because there's a pressure in academia to, like, be academic and, like, to get it right or to, you know, argue someone's point down until, like, they cry or something, where, like, I don't want to do that, like, I just want to add something, you know, that's, like, This

Tony Stubblebine: doesn't sound fun at all to me.

Dan Dissinger: It's, it never really is in these episodes where we talk [00:26:00] about it on this podcast. There's people I went to my, do my PhD with, but I think that's the point. Like what's interesting is with medium and, and even podcasting as a community, there's a lot of people out there who are. Um, it's a friendly community and I was, I was going to ask that, like, do you feel like medium as a space?

Because online spaces are, can be very scary, right? Like, especially something like social media, that's a very volatile place in terms of like sharing. Cause I've, even in terms of like after Chappell Roan did her, um, a Grammy speech about healthcare. The comment sections of posts were horrible and it was just like all she did was she said something that she wanted to say had to be said and people were destroying her for that.

Do you feel Medium is a much friendlier space or a safer place in many ways for people to share their ideas?

Tony Stubblebine: I don't want to [00:27:00] oversell it, but I think definitely. All right, that it's impossible to be perfectly healthy, but does the order of magnitude more work than other social platforms about keeping hate and divisiveness?

out or limited, right? Because I mean, those things, that's like perfect example of the attention economy is those things grab attention, but no one's happy to have paid to experience them. Right. And, um, and as a result, people are just taught, it gives space to talk about other things. I think that's, what's really important about having, uh, trust and safety rules is it.

It gives space for other conversation, right? Like we don't have to have every culture war debate on medium. Um, and if we, by not having it, we give space to talk about things that actually matter to people. Um, and like, we feel strongly about that just from [00:28:00] a values perspective, but it's also just good business.

You know, like, like, do you, I mean, name any culture war thing. That's like, do you, are you, do you want to pay to hear from the other side?

Dan Dissinger: No,

Tony Stubblebine: no, not at all. Bad business. Right. Um, and I think what, especially what happens on the other platforms is a lot of times because Kind of divisiveness is so emotional.

No one bothers to think deeply about it So they're just they're they're actually kind of lazy takes that fall us apart really quickly And so if you if we push that to the side we give a space for people to give Really deep takes and you know to me that's a lot more important actually like finding some common common ground or common Understanding so it's not possible on the rest of the internet right now.

Dan Dissinger: Mm hmm. I mean this Something that I feel when I teach in class like and we're doing our or our [00:29:00] classes now It's interesting to watch students go from their first post not know how to like deal with like, you know Putting anything up and then as soon as their second third and then their first projects go Live on, you know, listed or not, they really are like, Oh, I can do other, like, it's not about, there's no word count.

There's no nothing. And I think that relaxes them and allows them to explore things. Something that I do love, like format wise, though, I'm meeting with meeting, which is interesting is like keeps the paragraphs tight. And I'm always trying to get students to go, please, like tighten those up. And it shows them like they could see it.

It's more visual. And they're like, Oh, wow, that's a really long paragraph. Like, uh, but I feel like there's an ease to get them and I want them to see that they can be part of the conversation and I'm always asking like, because you have to then as a teacher, if you don't have a tool to do that, it's almost like you have to like trick them into [00:30:00] doing that.

And this, like, I was like, I don't want to do that anymore. Like, I don't want to play pretend, you know.

Tony Stubblebine: Right. I mean, some people really rise to an audience. I think that's the, um, that feedback loop is so important that, um, you know, you're performing at some level for someone and it It, um, once you're past the fear, once you understand how feasible it is to do that, um, it is the motivation, right?

Like, good writing changes people. It entertains them, it deepens their understanding, it's a chance for you to pass some wisdom that you've picked up, you know, on to someone else, so it gets, uh, um, and then even if no one reads it. There's just something inherently healthy about having written it down, right?

Um, you know, it's like sometimes they say the best way to learn is to teach, right? It's kind of like that. Like, if you write it for someone else, You, you have to learn it well enough to teach, and so [00:31:00] you walk away smarter, and with your own ideas and knowledge, like, articulated. Um, uh, you know, I guess we're kind of circling around, if you can just take the pressure out of it.

Writing is so cool. Yeah, the pressure though sucks, honestly, right? Like, obviously, right? The pressure we put on ourselves, the pressure from academia or your grades or like the public or your boss or whatever. Sure, like that part is hard, but we can like kind of put some of that to the side and just be in that space of I'm writing to write.

This is honestly nothing I'd rather be doing.

Dan Dissinger: Do you feel like now with like the oncoming of like, you know, with all the AI writing things and chat GPT, now DeepSeek, which is like, I don't even like the name of the, that scared the hell out of me when I saw the name of, of that, that there's still, um, a desire for what you said in the beginning of this [00:32:00] idea of, you know, writers wanting to be authentic or is that, do you feel there's a fear of these chat, Like chat GPT and deep sea kind of like re inscribing more or reinforcing more product driven work to kind of just becoming like almost like a content arms race, where it's just like, how much can you pump out?

Tony Stubblebine: I think content arms race is true, like that is happening, and we're swamped by more and more content, and you know, it's always on guard for stuff that isn't authentic and trying to keep that out because people don't want it. Writing is about human connection, you just can't get past that. Like for

the writer, there's something about your life experience that you're trying to articulate and pass on, right?

And there is like. An AI writer didn't live your life, so what's it, it can't do that, right? And same, you know, as a reader, we're trying to, [00:33:00] uh, learn something, um, learn something. I mean, not even knowledge, but just like, you know, fiction too. Like, we see the world differently based on the fiction we read and the poetry we read.

Um, and. Like, I'm not, like, I'm not a robot, so I don't need to learn the wisdom of what life is like as a robot, right? I need to learn the wisdom of what life is like from another human being. And so that human connection is, I think, more precious in this AI era. It just is kind of threatened by being swamped by, by it, and a big part of Medium's job is, is helping, helping it stay human, helping it be a human place.

I think we've done a pretty good job, although sometimes it'll just bleed through, and it'll be a mess, and it'll be AI trash all over the comments, and we're like, everyone's unhappy, and, you know, us as much as anyone. [00:34:00] Um, but, I think for the most part, Medium has really stayed one of the most human Uh, uh, platforms on the internet.

Dan Dissinger: Oh, so there are like things that are in like part of it that are trying to detect, or is it just like, it's not like the honor system. Like it's kind of like trying to figure, cause I know with me when I publish a podcast, even on pod bean, there's a, I have to go, is any of this AI and I have to check it.

I don't know. I always check. Of course it's not, but like, because there isn't, but. I'm wondering what would happen if there was, if they can detect it or not, or if this is just honor system work.

Tony Stubblebine: We, mostly it, what we focus on is not what gets published, but what gets read. So we think we have a lot of control over that.

And, um, most of what gets read on Medium gets read by other humans who curate it before the rest, everyone else. So it's sort of like. To what degree are you able to catch your students doing [00:35:00] AI generated writing, right? So, if I'm following you, then, then I'm kind of dependent on your ability. But, I mean, the reality is, like, most humans spot it pretty quickly.

It's just, this isn't real. The, um, this isn't, yeah, it's just not real. Um. And so that, that is the secret sauce for us of, of keeping the AI out of the, out of the

recommendation feeds is because it's all getting curated. By humans first, and there's definitely a lot of AI that gets posted to Medium, just doesn't get read.

Dan Dissinger: Interesting, excellent. So, if you mind, I would love to know, like, what do you read? Like, what do you read? Like, personally, not, even on Medium, like, I'm curious, like, cause we've been talking a lot about Some really deep, amazing stuff. And I feel like there's things that you're reading that I feel like you and I kind of share in many different ways.

Like, but because I always feel like to be a good writer or to have that human [00:36:00] connection or to develop work, that's like vulnerable and courageous. Like there are things that people read to kind of. Have to like be in a community of courage, especially even, you know, authors that they read and I'm curious to the types of things that you might gravitate towards or the stuff that you might be reading.

Tony Stubblebine: Um, I'm reading a lot of, let's just say, I'm a little bit boring. I like, I read a lot of practical stuff. Um, and, uh, so a lot of analysis about the, the future, especially tech future and where is AI going and, uh, you know, where are various businesses going? I think, um, for me, one of the interesting angles on.

The new political administration here is actually underneath that, I think there's a coalition, right? And some of that coalition is very culture focused. I think a lot of it is really motivated by money, right? And so I've been trying to understand the political landscape here by [00:37:00] understanding what's happening with the money.

A lot of that writing is happening on Medium. Um, I read about my job, which is product design. Building software and running a business and managing a business, like something trivial, like how to run a board meeting. We actually. This is less trivial but really esoteric. At one point we had to do a pretty complicated financial restructuring with our investors.

And the playbook that I used to do that, like something I had never seen, like this, I'm not a financial guru in any way. I'm a programmer and a publisher maybe. And, um, the playbook we used was just a blog post that had been written on Medium in 2013 by a venture capital, by an investor, a startup investor.

And Like, for me, it was life changing. For the whole company, it was life changing. But probably only 20 people need to read it a year. It's like, great

example of an amateur writer and the [00:38:00] value of professional experience. If he hadn't written it, I wouldn't have known how to, how to, how to do it. I keep saying about culture war.

It's like, it's funny because I really think about medium as kind of anti partisan, which is really curious. I think people are on medium driven by intellectual pursuit, but there's this like world of people in the Uh, kind of conversation about media that try to frame everything as partisan. So, like, we'll just, like, get people saying, calling us one way or the other.

We get called more one way than the other. But I've personally been attacked as being partisan in basically both directions. And so it's funny to me is one of my favorite, um, uh, writers on Medium is this trans writer just basically making. The trans case or fighting again, you know, against the anti trans case and, um, what I like about it is she's just a really, [00:39:00] really, really good and thorough arguer, you know, it's just like you read one of her pieces and, um, And you're like, this is, um, uh, this is a great argument.

I'm like, so impressed with the rhetorical ability here. And not just the rhetorical, but like the research that's been collected and framed. And so I just, you know, I'll appreciate just good writing, um, in that world. I, I'm just, I'm going on. I could go on. This could be two hours of what do I read? Um, I like exercise science.

I wish I exercised more. I wish I was in better shape. But since I'm not, uh, always exercising, I'm reading about it. And so, um, uh, kind of the number one, um, uh, 1, 500 meter runner in the world. He didn't win the gold, but he's still, I think, [00:40:00] considered to be the best. This innovation in how he trained has been covered in a lot of places.

Um, but the best coverage of it. was a coach and former professional runner who's seen it in both ways and like in both that she's practiced that innovation and then she's coached people and she gave this like great rundown of the pros and cons of it like how often do you get to hear how professional athletes really train in depth right and so i like i love that esoteric stuff is great um i'll stop there that's like a collection of things that um Uh, that I read.

A read.

Dan Dissinger: That's awesome. It's funny, the last thing you said too about the exercise science. Like, I had a student two semesters ago or a semester ago all their projects was about running and their last project, they did a whole

interview and survey about how to develop better running skills and then like [00:41:00] The, the approaches to it, it was, and I remember reading it.

I was like, Oh my God, I was like, this is so in depth and, and amazing. And they, you know, able to do all the stuff that they wanted to do is very meaningful to them. They thought it would be boring, but I'm like, I'm not, you know, your audience is runners, like you don't write for them. You're a part of it right for you.

And, and then you can really start to see how they, you know, tap into that and find their niche to kind of like get into what they want to be experts at, or have skills. Galactic or, you know, scientific contribution for, you know,

Tony Stubblebine: can we just jump on that word experts? So I have this long history in media of understanding how resistant people are to labeling themselves as an expert, even though as an editor and publisher.

I have just a simple rule of thumb, by definition, you're an expert in your own life. I mean, come on, no, there is no greater expert in you, right? And that's the green light to write [00:42:00] anything from your life, right? Like, maybe you're taking advice from someone you think is an expert, but then you actually, you know, for sure, did it work or not for someone like you?

So I wish more people could kind of own that word. But I also know once you start saying, Hey, this is a place for experts to write. 99.9 percent of people that you would want to hear from just like immediately shut down. Right. So sometimes we'll say it's a place to share your expertise. Um, but really just Your personal experience, either from your life or from your profession, is always valuable.

There's always some angle on it, like, the more personal the better. The more personal, the more it actually increases the expertise of what you're writing. That, um, Uh, I think people should lean into that.

Dan Dissinger: Yeah, I mean, a lot of the stuff we, I've read, especially, like, even, sometimes, like, students think that, like, especially with [00:43:00] Transcendentalist writers like Emerson and Thoreau and things like that, it's like, Oh, well, those are canonized writers and stuff like that, you know, but, like, no one was listening to them when they were writing in the beginning, like, they were the rebels, but, like, we, like, academia decided that like, oh, these are the rights, but then they ask students to then write about them in this very bland,

kind of boring way because that's training and quote, unquote, how to train them to do it.

Right. And I'm like, well, we can do this. Like you can be more personal. Like they were personal, they were invested in what they were saying. They were energized. I mean, this is why they did it. They couldn't help it. I'm like, so it's interesting to kind of. Get them to that point. And it's interesting for me as a writer to try to get myself to that point sometimes being like, I have something to say and I want to say it like me and I want to make sure and sometimes I have to convince myself that that's okay.

Like it's okay to do it this way. You know, and it's very difficult. Writing [00:44:00] is like one of those things.

Tony Stubblebine: Can I promote, uh, one of my own pieces because this is this, this like what's authentic, right?

Dan Dissinger: Absolutely. We'll put this in the show. This

Tony Stubblebine: is, I'm, this is, uh, half joking, right? But I'll just, I'll describe it to you.

Um, yeah, the most popular thing I ever wrote on Medium Cut. Uh, I think 2. 6 million views, like super, super wildly viral all over the internet. There's a piece about productivity, basically. The average thing I rate on Medium is for the Medium community, and it's going to get somewhere between 50 views. Big, big audience.

Um, But one weekend, I was at home, and I have my garage kind of, it's half office and half home gym, and I've got these horse stall mats that are underneath all the exercise equipment, and they were just getting grody, and like, I could not, for the life of me, clean them. And so I took, I, as a project, I pulled all of these things out of the garage and like really went to town on cleaning [00:45:00] them.

And it was like the hardest day of my life because the horse stall maps, if you've never seen them, are like 90 pounds and floppy and like impossible to move around. And after all of that work, nothing that looked gross to me came off. It was just like permanently stained. Nothing worked for me. And I just like had to kind of share this experience somewhere.

And I shared it. And a bunch of people who have home gyms, like a bunch being five, and one person who has, who works with horses, uh, chimed in, and the person who worked with horses was like, there's actually a special equipment, uh, uh, clip. Uh, for moving horse on maps. So if you do it again, buy this clip, right?

And so, you know, we have this pressure sometimes to write popular stuff, but sometimes it's just like, sometimes it's just as valid, maybe most of the time, just as valid to say like, Hey, today I want to connect [00:46:00] to people who have the same hobby of mine and, um, And, uh, and share something that's only going to be valuable to three people.

Um, I, that's the, I, I keep hearing that kind of like, that pressure to be successful gets in the way of the, I think the more important, like, muscle to build, which is how to write. Authentically, right. And it's hard, especially so many people on the medium platform are really looking at what I write as like a model for how they can be successful.

And that was like, almost like the anti post for them of just, okay, this, you're, you're probably not expecting me to talk about cleaning forestal mats today, but this is like, let me demonstrate that. Hey, like, You know, writing online is a chance to write about the big things, but also, like, the literal smallest, most mundane things in your life.[00:47:00]

Dan Dissinger: That's like, I mean, that's great advice and that's an amazing story. I'm, I, I mean, as we're winding down because like, that's such a great place to kind of like start doing that because like, I'm, It makes me think about what I want to do and hoping that people are hearing this, you know, and really understanding like the call to be themselves, like to, that's, that's the call, right?

Are there things that, um, You're excited about in terms of medium that you can share that might be coming up or things that are in terms of, you know, looking forward, looking into the future that like, you know, medium is doing,

Tony Stubblebine: I think the phrase that we keep coming back to is it's meant to be a social publishing experience, right?

Like the difference between writing for your diary and write and writing online is that there's Um, human connection. That's what you're [00:48:00] shooting for. And I think that's what we don't like about the rest of the Internet is you're not writing for human connection. You're writing for hustle or attention.

And more and more medium just gets more social so that there's a way to connect to people. And the key to that for us is publications. You know, your, your students are writing for your publication, but there's thousands of publications on medium that are really meant to draw in all types of writers. And somewhere there's.

Um, a place for everyone, like essentially like a, a tiny community of people that you can count on wanting to read what you're trying to publish, right? That, to me, that's the, the key to a social publishing experience is that you can, um, you, you, you can write with the confidence that You're going to be able to connect with people that are interested in, you know, whatever thing you have to say, whether it's big or small.

Dan Dissinger: Wow. Well, Tony, thank you so much. I mean, this has been an amazing conversation. I do feel like we [00:49:00] can keep going. I mean, um, so, but. I have so many things to think about and I hope we can do this again as well and do another, you know, follow up as well and, um, and I would love, and I'm definitely going to share this with my students, so hopefully they're listening to this right now

Tony Stubblebine: because I want them to understand some homework now.

Yeah,

Dan Dissinger: assign some homework. That's what we do, right? Um, but I have a whole thing I'm going to be talking about on that. But like, I, I feel like there's so much to be learned in terms of just jumping in. And I think you did a great job of talking about that. Jump in, be yourself, you know, share. There's someone out there that's looking for, you know, for something.

And, um, but. Thank you so much for coming on. Thank you very much for opening up and talking. This has been great.

Tony Stubblebine: I loved it. If, I mean, if I can be on again, we'll do it. I like, so great to talk writing. Hopefully it was helpful. [00:50:00] And thank you for having me.

Dan Dissinger: Absolutely. Absolutely. Thank you so much. And everyone, please write, um, post comments, hit the like, subscribe to the, you know, writing remix on where they're on Instagram or across all social media.

And then, um, share this with someone that is a writer or someone that. That's hoping that's looking to jump in and start writing right away and, um, post all the information in the show notes. And thank you so much.