

Episode #6 with Swish Goswami

The CEO & Co-Founder of Trufan

Julian Alvarez: All right, welcome back, everyone, to another episode of the Inventing the Future podcast, where our mission is to inspire and empower entrepreneurs to solve the world's biggest problems. I have an awesome guest with me today. Swish Goswami. And I actually met Swish through our last guest, Daniel. So I'm really excited to get to talk to him. He's an incredible entrepreneur. So, yeah. Swish, welcome to the show. Happy to have you on here.

Swish Goswami: Yes. Thank you for having me. Daniel spoke really highly of you and he thought you did a fantastic job with that last interview. So very excited to be on.

Julian: Awesome. I appreciate that. I have fun with him. And it's always a goal of improving and seeing how to get better. So just like in entrepreneurship. All right. So to get started here, I'll briefly introduce Swish and then we'll dive into his startup Trufan and kind of explore the problems faced there and what they're doing. And then, dive into some entrepreneurial lessons at the end. So, awesome! To get started, Swish is a 23-year-old Canadian entrepreneur, author, speaker, and investor. And he's 23, which is crazy. You're younger than me by one year and you're the youngest guest. So I thought I was a young one, but good to be on your side of youth. And yeah, so Swish is the CEO of Trufan, which is a social intelligence platform that helps brands of all sizes make smarter marketing decisions by using data. Trufan has made two acquisitions raise over 4.1 million to date and has clients like Samsung, Netflix, NBA, NFL and just a plethora of small to medium sized businesses. Apart from Trufan, Swish has three TEDx Talks, has secured publishing deals with companies like Kogan Page, and a sneaker deal with K-Swiss. He's also an advisor and investor in several popular social media companies. And he has a personal following of over 175,000 people. And he enjoys speaking around the world under North America's prestigious bureau Speakers Spotlight. For his entrepreneurial and philanthropic achievements, Swish has inducted into Plan Canada's Top 20 under 20 and Bay Street Bull's 30 under 30, recognized as Startup Canada's Young Entrepreneur of the Year, and awarded United Nations Outstanding Youth Leadership Award. Man, that is a lot to say. And so when I read a bio like that, my first question is always what drives you? Why do you do what you do? What is the manifestation of all of these incredible things? Where does that come from?

Swish: Sure. I've been a very competitive kid, I guess, growing up. I grew up in Singapore. And in Singapore, if people know they have a system of academic tracking there. Pretty much when

you're in preschool to kindergarten, even to grade one, you're immediately tracked into a particular stream, whether it's gifted or you're kind of in the, quote, average lane. And so I always wanted to just be a step ahead of people. I also had a brother who is very competitive as well and in a friendly way, we always compete with each other, whether with cricket or debate or even with studies. So that was one of the big early motivations, if you will, with just wanting to always think, what can I do with everything that I know and how can I live in a life hopefully that isn't average? And what I mean by that is I didn't want to live a life where, you know, I graduated at 22, got a job, got married at 30, had kids at 35, and then retired at 55 and just waited to die type thing. That wasn't the type of life that I want. If you want to live, it was more like I wanted to go after specific passions that I had. And the keyword being passion is not just passion. So whether that was within basketball or business or dance or politics or space, I wanted to look at all of these areas and I wanted to think, what can I do to make an impact in these areas. Some of which, by the way, I haven't touched yet. Obviously, others that I have been able to kind of get into that space, understand a little bit more and even do business within it.

Julian: Yeah, well, you're 23, so you have a lot of time to explore all of those different passions, as I'm sure you will. And yeah, I really like that because there's this quote that says, "If you don't claim extraordinary, then ordinary will claim you." So I feel the same way and just wanting to live a life that is not mediocre and just more than extraordinary. So, cool! Awesome! And on the entrepreneurial side, why did you decide to become an entrepreneur? Like you could have easily decided to get a high-paying job, more stability, and opted for an easier life. Maybe what you just said kind of relates to that. But, yeah, why entrepreneurship?

Swish: Yeah, I mean, to be fair, I thought that entrepreneurship was the harder path. I knew it was a harder path, but it was also the simpler path for me. Because, again, like when I was in college, I don't think I was very good at school anymore. I was really good at school and like junior high and then high school came and I started to get declined. Just kept my focus is all over the place, whether it was debating or being focused even on business. So even in college, like, I didn't feel like I was spending that much time thinking about textbooks and going to class. It was more of like thinking of ideas and trying to start them. And I had the opportunity after my second year to go to New York, worked at a VC called J.B. Fitzgerald under a basketball player named Trevor Booker. And in the process of doing that, I became roommates with a guy named Eliot who started this big Instagram account @Dunk. At the time we had about two million followers on Dunk. When I left Dunk, we had about 2.3 million followers. We also owned about 21 other accounts on Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, totaling up to about 11 million followers overall. So we built this basically modern-day media network and we were working with brands to promote their content to our audiences that were 18- to 24-year-olds in urban areas really

interested in basketball. But that experience of building Dunk out, especially on the business end with Eliot, helped me understand that, like, well, I could potentially be good at this. Like as long as I'm disciplined, I manage my routine, I manage my focus, I really manage my priorities, I feel like I could be pretty good at this. So I took the stab at coming up with my own idea, which was true then three years ago now. Decided to leave Dunk and work on Trufan full-time. And, you know, I haven't looked back ever since.

Julian: Yeah, I know. Man, it's impressive how being in proximity to a person like Eliot can really expand your horizon and change your direction completely.

Swish: Yup, 100%. He definitely helped in terms of opening my eyes up to influencer marketing, of what was happening within that industry. It was actually cool, because when I started working with Eliot, he was still working for Gary Vaynerchuk. He was his head of social and content. But even in the process of doing that, Eliot decided to leave Gary and decided to stop working there and decided to be full-time on Dunk. So it was cool because we were both figuring things out on our end. And then eventually decided to work full-time on Dunk together, which was an amazing experience. But definitely, an experience that gave me a lot and also gave me obviously the nugget to come up with Trufan and work on that.

Julian: Amazing! Awesome! And so let's dive into Trufan then. I think what you're doing is really interesting. But yeah, firstly, as a brief description, what is Trufan? What do you guys do and what's the mission behind it?

Swish: Yup. So we built an audience engagement platform. Essentially, we help brands or influencers generate segments and activate first and third-party data. So what we allow you to do is take a look at your Instagram and Twitter data. Filter that data sorted to find people that follow you that might be between the age of 18 to 24. In Toronto, between 50,000 to 100,000 followers that are verified. We can go that granular with your audience and allow you to filter your audience on Instagram and Twitter by criteria that you are interested in. On the first-party data side, we are to help generate first-party data for brands. So emails, phone numbers, and mailing addresses on your followers so that you could retarget them across other channels. We help you generate that data in a GDPR and CCPA compliant manner and then, you're able to segment and activate that data similar to third-party data. So at the end of the day, what we're trying to do is make data very affordable, make it accessible. We work with some of the biggest brands in the world, like Procter and Gamble, Netflix, Nike. We work with the NBA, the NFL. But

it's pretty awesome because we also work with a lot of small business owners as well. Over 10,000 free users now. Over 450 small businesses. It's something that we're really happy about because it just shows that our product can be used by both Fortune 500 companies, but also for the average small business owner that might not know too much about social media, but is interested in generating first-party data.

Julian: Yeah, and in fact, even for the small business owners, like what can make or break you is that marketing component. And so I think if you're able to get super granular in your niche and identify that target audience as a tool like this could really be the catalyst that a small business needs to get to that level.

Swish: Yeah, that's what we're hoping. And again, the actions that we're asking small businesses to take aren't crazy. We've also built a platform that isn't heavy on marketing or data jargon. So we built the platform specifically for marketing people, not necessarily for data scientists. So it's nice to be able to kind of build a platform where a marketer, a small business owner, a CEO, can come on and they can quickly get the insights they want. They can export it. They can activate it. And they can move on with their day. We don't care about users spending three or four hours on our platform every single day. We don't want that. We want users to be able to use our platform hopefully three or four hours a week, get what they want and move on with their day.

Julian: Yeah, man, that's huge. One thing that's impressive there like that you just mentioned and I read on your site is that before all this data was there, but it was mainly only accessible to data scientists. Right? They're the only ones that could kind of understand it and learn to work with it. So it seems that what Trufan has done is organize this data in such a way that it becomes much more accessible and friendly to deal with. So it's not just data scientists that can come and use and analyze this data, but it's, as you mentioned, executives, managers, or just marketers that can come in and actually leverage these valuable insights.

Swish: 100% and that was our goal from day one, really, is to make sure that we're not just building enterprise software that we're actually trying to cater to a pretty big emerging market of SMBs that are looking to be given tools that actually allow them to compete with bigger companies, especially now more than ever. Right? The COVID, everyone's at home. Digital activity on social media has gone incredibly up and a lot of brands are trying to figure out how can I compete? I don't have a retail location now that people can walk into, but I want to sell my

goods online. How do I find that tribe that really engages with my content that was really engaged with my content before but I was just unaware of it?

Julian: Yeah, I know. That's huge. The awareness can make all the difference. So let's take a step back here. I'm curious how you would describe the problem at large that you're trying to solve? And how many people have this problem? How often they've experienced the problem? I'm curious. Let's dive a little deeper into the problems face here.

Swish: Sure. So the problem that we articulated, especially in our last fundraising round to BCs were essentially we believe that the old channels through which grants collect customer data are dying. If you take a look at it, the third-party data market is deprecating in front of our eyes. Third-party cookies across Firefox, Chrome, and Safari are going away by the end of 2022. That's about thousands of billions of dollars right there that are going to be lost in data by the end of 2022. You also have the issue of ad blockers that are constantly rising up, especially among Gen Z and Millennials that do not want to see ads anymore. You have the issue of Apple's iOS update coming out, which is obviously going to take away about an 80-billion-dollar mobile ad tracking market overnight. And you also have the issue of GDPR and CCPA wreaking havoc on marketers that are looking to advertise with Instagram and Facebook. A key example, four years ago, you were able to advertise and find people based on their gender and age. Now, you're not able to do that anymore with Instagram and Facebook because of some of the privacy regulation that has popped up. So with all of this in mind, what we believe is that first-party data is going to be increasingly important. In other words, can brands not just rely on having five million followers, 5,000 followers, 50 million followers on Instagram to reach their audience? Can they actually build their own database of people that they can reach any time they want and wherever they want, whether it's over email, whether it's over text, whether it's over direct mail, whether it's over push notifications? You need to be able to have ownership of your data. That's essentially what we're trying to talk about, is building a platform that allows brands to get true ownership of their data. So they're not relying on Facebook or Instagram every time they want to reach their audience.

Julian: Hmm, I see. Yeah, because obviously the case, the way it is right now, Facebook and all these social platforms have just like huge data mines. And you, if you want to advertise, you have to pay them to specifically target. So what you're doing is democratizing data in this state so that the people that need that data can use them without having to use Facebook or having to pay them directly.

Swish: Yep. Nailed it. That's exactly it. We want to take that dependent's out and we want to be able to empower brands, empower influencers to really take ownership of their data. And by virtue of that, it means you can use that data whenever you want and you can use it wherever you want. That's the goal.

Julian: Interesting, very fascinating! And so how did you discover a problem like this? Like how do you stumble upon these insights and this problem and actually do something about it?

Swish: Yeah, I think it's the biggest lesson of entrepreneurship is that your problem and your solution will both iterate. And that's just something you have to be very open to. Right?

Julian: I see the lesson.

Swish: It will change over time. If you take a look at our first year of Trufan, our initial problem was that we felt that brands weren't engaging with their top fans. We felt like brands were paying influencers that tend to have big followers, fake engagement. And instead, brands should be working with their own community of people that actually buy their products and talk about them online. Maybe they don't have millions of followers, but a couple of thousand followers, if you group all those people together, could make a much bigger impact than paying one person with a million followers that doesn't care about your product. So that was our initial problem. And then, in our second year, a lot of brands were like, "Well, we love finding our top fans, but we want to find our competitor's top fans." So that became our second problem. Right? We want to be able to help brands not only take a look at their own data but take a look at their competitor data and understand and analyze that. And then, in our third year, we heard from brands again. Right? We heard from our customers that were scared about third-party data channels, deprecating like cookies, like obviously ad blockers being an issue, GDPR and CPPA, Apple's iOS update. We heard these problems from customers directly and we started to take a look at first-party data and realized if we wanted to stay competitive, we couldn't just be a third-party data solution. We had to get into first-party data, which is why in November we made our second acquisition to acquire Player. They specialize in first-party data generation and that's why we decided to really acquire them. Add that into our tech stack, our capabilities and move on from there.

Julian: Yeah, man, it's really interesting what happens when you start with one problem, but then you realize that there's like all this web of problems that are interconnected, that you either

discover while you're trying to solve this problem or they just come up, as they did in your case, as suggestions from your customers.

Swish: And what's really cool is this is all in the lens right now for the B2B product that we built out. Right? We're actually, and this is something I can't go into too much detail on but hopefully, if we do a podcast like this next year, same time, I'll be able to tell you that we listened to our customers again and we're building something that's more B2C focused now. The consumer product that we think is fundamentally going to change the way that people interact with the internet forever. So I'm going to drop it there. I know that was a big bomb to drop, but I'm going to leave it there. It's just, again, the main way that we find out where to go, especially on our product roadmap, is by listening to customers directly. That's the best way to figure out what is on their mind, what are they concerned with, and what other problems can I solve for them?

Julian: I love that. Yeah, I remember reading this quote from Brian Chesky's Airbnb story where he said that the product roadmap is often in the minds of your customers. So it's kind of like having to cover it. So how do you go about that? Like you have a customer and they have all these problems. How do you approach it? Like what questions you ask? How do you make sure you're constantly communicating and uncovering problems from them?

Swish: Yeah, it takes a big focus on customer success. So behind the product, the kind of department, if you will, within our company that we prioritize the most based on the resources and based on how many people are on that team is customer success. We have now a customer success team of about seven people out of a company of 31 overall. So pretty high ratio in terms of CS to the rest of the team. And within customer success, we encourage every single account manager to make sure that they're doing a monthly check-in with their customer, whether it's through email or even getting on a phone call. Just so that the enterprise customer knows that if they need anything, they don't have to be shy to ask that somebody is always going to be thinking about them and their interests and that they're not just reaching out when renewal is up. And we're trying to get their money again and that's why we're reaching out. So that's the number one way to do it, I think. It's just, create those touchpoints with your customers. PASAD, we do have a customer advisory board that convenes once a quarter. And that customer advisory board is made up of some of the biggest brands that we work with that pay us the most because they obviously have the biggest vested interest than in our success. And so we get a lot of really honest feedback from them on those calls flow which will last about one to two hours each.

Julian: Oh, that's helpful. Yeah, I think the interesting thing to note there is that you've created a system around customer success, right? And on one hand, you have the customer success where you're constantly communicating with them and not just communicating, as you mentioned when you want renewals, but also to make sure that things are working and that they're actually getting value from the product.

Swish: Yup, exactly.

Julian: As well as making sure you do that with the big customers and they're the ones that are probably have unique problems that matter in solving the most.

Swish: Yup, a 100%. And again, it's still a work in progress. I don't think we've perfected it by any means, but I think just having that foundation is so important because in the rest of your company, especially when new employees come in, they realize what the company really stands for, which is at least from what we believe is a very customer-centric approach to everything, whether it's marketing, product or sales. We try to have a very focused approach in terms of what does the customer want and how do we achieve that.

Julian: Yeah, I love that. One thing I want to expand on really quick is, you know, this is a business-to-business platform, right? You're specifically servicing the marketers or the small businesses or the big businesses that want to reach their audience. But I think there is an interesting ripple effect to note here. Like, let's say I'm a small business and I'm not reaching the people that I want often. And so what happens? I think like I'd love to get your perspective, but the way I see it is if I'm a small business and I'm struggling to sell my products, one, I'm suffering as a business, but two, my potential customer is failing to acquire value from not knowing that my product exists. And so there is like this ripple effect. I'm curious if you think of it in that way or how you would expand on that problem as it goes to not just the businesses, but the customers as well.

Swish: I think you've nailed it. I think the cool thing that we noticed is that when a customer succeeds, we succeed as well. Right? And that's great because our incentives are aligned now. As they continue to grow their channels, as they continue to sell to more customers, get more followers on Instagram or Twitter, they will use our tool more. So it is in our incentive not just to make sure they understand our platform, but to make sure they actually know how to use it to be able to drive results. We're very results-focused, right? Again, initially, I think in our first and

second year building the company, we were very focused on intelligence. Can we provide you insights that you otherwise couldn't find? But we let you go and figure out how to use those insights and utilize that in intelligence and action it out. Now, we take more of an intentional approach to really giving you the ability to action that data out and see results, whether it's more email sign-ups, more newsletter sign-ups, more app downloads, more followers on Instagram or Twitter, we can actually help you do that.

Julian: Amazing and so interesting. So, Swish let me ask you this, if Trufan was to achieve its ultimate destiny, like if they got to the point where it fulfilled its vision, what would the world look like?

Swish: Yeah. Again, without touching too much on the consumer side, I'll only stick with the business-to-business product for now. I think the world would look like a place that number one, brands wouldn't feel like they need to rely on Facebook and Instagram to be able to reach their audience. The NBA, for example, they have 50 million followers on Instagram and they're scared to death. What happens if Instagram shuts down or what happens if engagement rates on Instagram continue to fall like they have in the last few years, right? Five years ago, you made an Instagram post with an account of 50 million followers. You'd reach like two million people per post. Now you're reaching like 400,000 to 500,000 people per post. Right? Like you're reaching literally 10% of your life. No, not even 10%, actually, like literally 1% of your audience.

Julian: Is that because of saturation?

Swish: Saturation, how the algorithms work, maybe even GDPR and CCPA's world, right? The targeting abilities have gone down for Instagram and Facebook. That's number one. And then, I think number two is really allowing every small business to have a digital strategy that is based on data. Right now, a lot of small businesses are only now getting into social media more and more. Right? And tools like Shopify obviously are starting to adopt. Social media platforms are starting to really educate their customers on social media. But because of COVID, a lot of small businesses were like final too, "I'll start a Twitter account. I'll start an Instagram account." But they're doing stuff that's not based on data right now. They're just posting content for the sake of posting content. They're engaging with the odd person that might comment on their posts. My hope is that within five, 10, 15 years that we accomplish our goal on the B2B side, we're going

to help small businesses actually have a data driven approach to marketing, which I think will be really, really key.

Julian: That's so interesting, yeah. This is invaluable, man. So awesome! I think that's a great overview of Trufan. And Swish, I think you've done great with Trufan and you've obviously had a lot of successes. So I want to backtrack a little bit and actually go more into the psychology of entrepreneurship. So I'm curious like you started several companies now, but when you first started your first company, what were the fears, doubts, limitations, and limiting beliefs that pass through your mind? And how did you overcome them?

Swish: Yeah, I mean, I still have them now. It's not like they go away even after starting a few companies. I mean, I've started quite a few companies, most of which didn't work. I started a customer call spins company when I was 14 years old with a computer program called Junior Tiedemann. That actually worked pretty well. We won with Albertus Company the year we were nominated for the company of the year. And then in university, I tried to start a food-sharing service called FoodShare, where we could take leftover and excess food and give it to students that were suffering from malnutrition at universities, primarily. That did not work due to regulation issues. So we weren't able to get past building a prototype for the app. And then, I tried to start something called Millennial Council, where I was like, "Oh, I know a lot of debaters, I know a lot of policymakers. Why don't I connect the two? Policymakers are looking for a grassroots approach to understanding various issues affecting students, affecting young people. Why don't I build kind of a think tank, if you will, for young people that do not work because of communication issues, of having people in various time zones and being able to meet and actually work on projects and get them done and done on time. So through it, all these kind of failures, if you which I think that the doubts that I mainly had were twofold. Number one, am I the right person to really lead the team? That even comes up now. Sometimes we're like when we were five people, there were always times where I was like, "Oh, I think I'm the right person." Like, no one in this company really understands the vision like I do now. There were 31 people and we have some incredibly smart people on board, it's become like a weird feeling. It's like, am I even needed here? Like if I didn't show up to work like the company would still run. So like what sort of value am I brings to the company? And there are times obviously with fundraising where I remember my value. There are times obviously with board meetings. There are times, of course, the key hires, the key clients that we might close because of a relationship I had that I remember my value, but definitely imposter syndrome is one of those kinds of doubts that does pop up in my head even now. And I think the second is, just generally speaking, like a fear that I normally have is now that we do have about 31 people in the company, there's a lot of lives that are connected to Trufan. Right? And there are a lot of salaries that are dependent on Trufan. So

I'm always a little bit wary of just like what if I make the wrong decision in terms of our direction where we need to go, our product kind of cuts that I'm making, new people and hiring? Like, what if some of these decisions are going to eventually come back to bite me, but more importantly, bite my employees' butts. And that's just a scary situation. It was scary enough with COVID, obviously. We're like COVID head, I think we were a team of about 15, 16 people in March of last year. And it was tough like we were kind of scary to think like what is the impact to be on our revenue? Are we going to have to lay people off? Like these were questions that popped into my head, frequently. But we got through it, thankfully, because we just kind of rallied together as a team, trusted each other, moved on from there. But these doubts, again, still do occur. They still kind of go through my head once in a while.

Julian: Yeah, they definitely do and they always will. But hopefully, over time you learn to better manage them, get more comfortable. And since you started a lot of things and many of them quote-unquote failed, why did you keep on starting things if you had failed so much?

Swish: I just enjoyed that. Like I personally speaking, I think I'm really good now at starting something. I don't know how good I am at managing something, which is why the physical chapter with Trufan is like a big challenge for me. It's because I've never managed a team more than like ten people before Trufan. Again, now we've tripled that size and we're constantly growing. We're going to probably be about 40 people by the end of the year. And that's a whole new challenge. Right? Swish not just an entrepreneur that's raw, scrappy, running around kind of being a gunslinger, but more of like, Swish is a manager. Like can this person actually lead a company and create alignment within the company at all levels? So that's just a big challenge for me. But again, like, I feel like that early part of building something, it's just addicting. I love, like the early parts of coming up with a website, coming up with the logo, talking to your first customer, building out the first product like that, that grind that kind of three to four to five to six-month grind up. Like they are really early and raw stages of a company. It's just super fun. So, that was maybe the reason why I just kept doing it and I felt like it was fun and it got me excited, it got me motivated.

Julian: That's an invaluable lesson because I think many people that get into entrepreneurship or want to get into entrepreneurship do it because they want to be famous or rich or for some external reason. And they forgot to consider like how important the passion component actually is. So, yeah, I guess, from taking from what you said, it's easier to overcome failure when you enjoy the thing, what you're doing that leads to the failures.

Swish: Exactly. I mean, I think obviously, like, I'm not a fool. Like, I do think money is important. Like I'm doing what I do also because I think that there will be a payout at the end of the day. But again, especially when it comes to building a business like if you are in it just for your monthly salary. Oh, my God, you are going to quit so quickly. It's like being a lawyer, for example. Like, I don't get it when people go to law school, they don't actually want to be a lawyer because it's like the first, second, third year being a kind of associate at a big corporate law firm. It's not fun. Like it's just a lot of hours. I've had friends do it and my brother's friends do it. I look at them and I'm like, "Well if you don't want to be a lawyer, why are you doing this?" Like, go and do consulting. Go and do investment banking. Start a company. I don't know, do one of a million other things that might make you happy because eventually the kind of added 3-4k a month isn't going to make a difference to you if you're not happy. So that's just one thing to keep in mind. It's like, are you in it for the right reasons? And again, like, it's fine to think that maybe they'll be a big payout at the end of the day, but you actually have to be obsessed about the problem you're solving. Or at the very least, you have to be obsessed about the people you're working with in order to keep staying motivated.

Julian: Yeah, I agree. That reminds me of one of the best pieces of advice I've received as it relates to entrepreneurship is that if you're not willing to dedicate at least 10 years of your life towards solving the problem that you want to solve and whatever company you're starting or joining, then like, don't join because you need to obsess. It's the only way it's going to be sustainable because it's a shit fucking rollercoaster.

Swish: It's a rollercoaster. And like most companies don't sell within three or four or five years, right? So most companies actually fail, if anything, within the first year of starting, right? So I absolutely agree with you. If you're an entrepreneur, think about your idea, but just know that you might be locked in it for the next 10 to 15 years. So if you can't come to terms with that, it's probably not right for you.

Julian: Yeah, man, it's powerful. So one more psychology question here. I'm curious and you probably have a lot of examples of this. But I'd love to hear a time in your entrepreneurial journey where you felt like giving up or you were at your lowest point or you had an incredible challenge where nothing seemed to work. What went through your mind at that point when you wanted to give up and how did you process that? How do you overcome it?

Swish: Yeah, I mean, we had a lot of those moments. I've written articles, actually, but are first, second, and third year of building Trufan. So they're all on the Trufan medium page. The first one is called, "Beauty and Chaos." The second one's "Showing Up." And the third is called, "Navigating the Unknown." And in it, I talk very candidly about just some of the really big failures that we encountered. In our first year, we had a trademark violation literally four months into starting a company against our name. We had a couple of failed hires. Some of which were really close friends of mine, which would be really tough to deal with. And then, we also had some product delays where we wanted to get the product out in July of 2018. The product actually came out, our prototype or MVP, our first kind of version came out in November of 2018. So a pretty, pretty substantial delay there. In our second year, we had issues of just brand cohesion. Right? We acquired another company called Social Rank in New York. We didn't acquire any of their team members, but just kind of merging the Social Rank brand, their customers, their technology with our brand technology and customers was a really hard ordeal. And there were definitely moments where I was like, what am I doing? Things like, I am so tired. Like I'm so bogged down in the technical details around what's going on. That there were definitely moments where I was like, why don't I just walk away from this? And then on our third year, I mean, we had issues around just team management in general. Right? I think I've just learned over the last two years how to be a better manager, how to be a little bit more empathetic with our employees, how to listen to them, how to give them the benefit of the doubt, how to trust them. These are things that I definitely don't feel like I learned immediately. It took a lot of experience. It took a lot of bad moments, honestly, candidly, with employees to learn that. And I learned some of those lessons the hard way as well. So there were definitely moments where, like, I felt like, "Hmm." Like every time the company succeeds, it's a team effort. Every time the company doesn't do well, however, the backstabs with me. Like, why would I be CEO? Why would anyone want to be CEO? It's like the worst job in the world. If you get blamed for everything, but you can't take credit for anything. And so there are definitely moments like that that just popped up in my third year where I was like, this kind of sucks. Like, why am I the CEO? Like why can't I just be like, you know, a chief visionary officer or be someone like the Gymshark founder, Ben Francis, right? He hired a CEO and then he was able to focus on things that he actually wants to do that weren't related to team management or investors or anything like that. So there were definitely moments like that that popped up as well. But again, I got through all of those just by, again, remembering who I was working with, what problem I was working on, and why I even started Trufan. And again, the flexibility that Trufan has been able to give me in terms of where I work, who I work with, what projects I take on, what customers I work with, what experiences I've been able to have, it's invaluable. And I wouldn't trade it for anything else. So that's just one thing that I remember during those hard days of just how fortunate I am to even have problems like this. I just try to put things in perspective.

Julian: Yeah, that's beautiful. And the tough thing is that during those tough problems, during those tough times, it's hard to remember why you started or all of the problems and everything you get so caught up. But as soon as you're able to shift into thinking about how big the problem is, who are the people you're serving, both your team and your customers, and your vision at hand, everything kind of shifts in that moment.

Swish: It falls in place, oddly enough. Things fall in place at that time, which is great.

Julian: Yeah, incredible. Okay, cool! For this last segment here, we'll talk about some entrepreneurial lessons. And I think one I'd love to touch on specifically with you is networking. Because you're incredibly well connected and already have a following of over 175,000 people, which is impressive. But it's even more impressive given your age. So I'm curious from your perspective, why is networking important and how did you manage to build your network and your followers?

Swish: Sure. I mean, the network is important because, again, number one, it's really like your modern-day safety net, in my opinion. So if you're working and a full-time employee and that job goes away, if you have a strong network, it's very easy to fall back to your network and try to get another job, get an interview, get a recommendation from someone. So I think a network is just a safety net. Any time something wrong happens, whether it's within your company or whether it's you working as an employee, you can always fall back on the network to help protect you, to help you get you out of that situation. The second thing, though, in terms of how I built my network up, primarily in my first and second year of college, I actually built my network up primarily by interviewing people. So I started podcasting my first year of college. And in that podcast, I recorded it on GarageBand. I exported it to SoundCloud. I think I was literally the only podcast probably on SoundCloud because that platform literally has like it's either rap mixtapes or just a lot of ASMR. I feel like just starting a business podcast is probably the dumbest thing I could have done on SoundCloud. But again, people didn't ask me, like people were like, how many followers do you have? How many people listen to your podcast? Right? Like, you probably know this. People love talking about themselves. I am Exhibit A, so I played to that extensive. People love talking about themselves. They want an audience, they want to share their story. And I gave them that outlet. In my second year, I started interviewing people by writing articles as well. I wrote articles on LinkedIn. I joined the LinkedIn Campus Editor Program. That's when I really started to double down on LinkedIn. And that's again, the main platform where I've grown my community is LinkedIn. Because I've spent a lot of time really thinking about what can I do that's different from other people on LinkedIn. So instead of asking

for a job or posting a weird pyramid scheme, which is literally the content that I saw four or five years ago, I started to interview people and provide nuggets of value to students, primarily. College students, high school students that we're looking to get ahead in their professional career on LinkedIn. So that was my key audience I focused on initially. And then obviously, when I started Trufan I started to talk very honestly about the process of building Trufan on LinkedIn. Sharing weekly videos in our first year about what we're doing, what challenges we're facing, et cetera. Being very honest, being very vulnerable with my audience really helped me I think of LinkedIn.

Julian: Wow, it's incredible. Yeah. There is a lot of power to vulnerability because vulnerability is like the most relatable thing. If you can be vulnerable, especially for someone like you, that has a lot of success already, the vulnerability is what helps people grasp on to who you are and you help some relate. And that's what grasp people in to then want to keep listening to your content or reading it.

Swish: I 100% agree. Absolutely!

Julian: Yeah, awesome! So and one last question here on entrepreneurial lessons. So you've spoken at TEDx many times. You're the Young Entrepreneur of the Year. You got that award. And so I'm curious when it comes to your message, what do you usually tell young entrepreneurs that want to start something or want to get their start off of the ground? What advice do you have to them or what advice would you give your younger self in that case?

Swish: I mean, my younger self, I have no clue, man. Like, that's like four or five years ago. Like, I just keep going, maybe it would be the advice I'd give myself because there were definitely a lot of ideas when I was 18, 19. I feel like with some of them, like even starting a YouTube channel. I remember I wanted to do that when I was 18, but are so scared because I was like, what are other people going to think about me? I would just say, keep going. And again, one thing that's really helped me over the last few years is like I have a very close inner circle of people that I trust their opinion. I trust their judgment on whether I'm doing something right or wrong. But past that, I really just don't care. Like, I will do things as long as I'm not harming people. I feel fine to do things that are within my dreams, within my passions, regardless of what other people think. That might be a lesson in that itself. But maybe another lesson I would pass on really quickly is, starting a business now has never been easier than ever in any other time before. The barriers to entry to starting a company have gone down and

down and down over the last 20-25 years. Take good use of that. If you have an idea, go to prove it. And what I mean by that is if you have an idea for an app, go on EnVision.com and build a non-functional wireframe. It's what I did. I'm a humanities student that figured it out. Like you don't need to have a technical background to build a non-functional wireframe of, "Okay, if you put this button, this will happen." If you have a service idea go on door knock. Right? Again, if you can do on door knock because of COVID, get on Zoom calls. Reach out and interview people. And in the process of interviewing them, tell them about your idea and get tangible feedback from people on whether they think that idea is good or bad. I just think there are so many avenues to test an idea out that I just find it like when people are like, "Oh, I need money for the idea." Like money is something that you only need at a certain point. In order to get the idea off the ground and allow people to visually see it and allow people to get feedback, you do not need money for that. That's just one thing I would focus on is making sure that you try to do as much that's within your control initially to prove out an idea before you go, "I need to raise money. I need to get money," et cetera.

Julian: Yeah, it's a really important lesson because most people think you either need money or you need a code to build your initial product. But there is, MVP is a minimum viable product that can be pretty low fidelity. And you can literally test things out without having to code it or without knowing to invest massive amounts, especially with the tools that exist today. So I agree. Leverage that completely. And yeah, it really is the best time to start a company. The stats on that are in 1995. It took close to five million dollars for all the startup servers, code, everything. Today it costs less than \$5,000 and computers are faster, more accessible and people can access your product. And there are exponential technologies like AI that I'm sure you're leveraging that just enable new types of solutions.

Swish: Yeah, a 100%. Put things in perspective.

Julian: So you don't have any excuses.

Swish: You have no excuses. Put things in perspective, again. I'm sympathetic obviously to people that come from various socioeconomic backgrounds. But again, when it comes to entrepreneurship, the one thing I really like is that people don't care if you come from a rich family or poor family. If you have a good idea, it will stand the test of time. Right? At the end of the day, it's what actually is successful within entrepreneurship, like the ideas that give rise to the top have really nothing to do with your socioeconomic background. At the end of the day, it

really comes down to, is the idea of actually solving a problem that's big enough for people to get behind it. And I just find that to be super liberating to the means that anyone can come in. And it's a pretty fair playing field. Again, initially, maybe if you have a rich uncle, you can get a bit you can get ahead a bit faster. But at the end of the day, people can catch up too easily. If you don't have a good product and you just got money for the sake of getting money.

Julian: That is so, so wise. Yeah, that's why I always talk about the importance of the problem, the magnitude of the problem, and this MVP's our way to validate it and make sure that it's actually real. Because you don't want to assume the problem exists, you want to make sure it actually exists.

Swish: It's definitely.

Julian: Cool! Well, Swish, this was great. One last question for you. Like, where can people go to connect with you and learn more about Trufan?

Swish: Sure. If you're interested in Trufan, you can go to [Trufan.io](https://trufan.io). And then, if you're interested in connecting with me, LinkedIn is the main platform you can reach me at. Swish Goswami, I'm hopefully the only Swish in your network on LinkedIn. Feel free to reach out to me and say that you heard this podcast and I'm always interested in talking to people I've never met. It's very approachable. Feel free to send me a message.

Julian: Great. I appreciate that. And we'll all be sure to include that in the show notes. So awesome, guys. With that, I want to end by mentioning that you guys can follow us on the podcast, on social media, or visit our website, InventingtheFuture.ai. And we'll have extensive show notes there as well as a transcript of this episode. And we'll have video interviews on YouTube. So with that, we'll go ahead and wrap it up. Swish, thank you for coming on. It was awesome!

Swish: Thank you for having me. Thank you!

Julian: Absolutely. And yeah, thanks for listening, guys. Take care. And we'll catch you on the next episode.