[MUSIC]

**CHASE JARVIS**: I believe that it’s our job as adults to unlearn a lot of those constraints that school and career counselors and parents and often people who meant really well for us, you know, that they placed on us so that we can reach our true potential.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Hi, everyone. Welcome to Behind the Tech. I'm your host, Kevin Scott, Chief Technology Officer for Microsoft.

In this podcast, we're going to get behind the tech. We'll talk with some of the people who have made our modern tech world possible and understand what motivated them to create what they did. So, join me to maybe learn a little bit about the history of computing and get a few behind-the-scenes insights into what's happening today. Stick around.

[MUSIC]

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** Hello, and welcome to Behind the Tech. I’m Christina Warren, senior cloud advocate at Microsoft.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** And I’m Kevin Scott.

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** Our guest on the show today is Chase Jarvis. Chase is an award-winning artist. He’s the founder of Creative Live and author of the new national bestseller, “Creative Calling.”

Now, I know that a lot of our listeners tune into the show to hear about all things tech, but we believe that creativity is at the heart of every great tech innovation, and that parallels exist in the creative process, whether you’re a software developer, business leader, or an artist, like Chase.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah. I think Chase has a really good take on this that hopefully we’ll get a chance to chat about here in a minute. But I am a very, very strong believer that all forms of creativity are similar in many, many ways. I spend a lot of my own time doing creative things like making furniture or, you know, learning how to use my machines in my machine shop.

And, like, I’m really convinced that it helps make me better at making technical decisions, writing code, and like, I’ve always believed that coding is a creative undertaking.

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** Yeah, no, I totally agree. I think creativity and coding go hand in hand. But let’s go ahead and get into our conversation with Chase.

[MUSIC]

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Our guest today is Chase Jarvis. Chase is an award-winning artist, author, entrepreneur, and photographer. His expansive work ranges from shooting advertising campaigns for companies like Nike and Red Bull, to collaborating with icons like Lady Gaga.

He’s the founder and CEO of Creative Live, where more than 10 million students learn photography, video, design, music, and business from the world’s top creators and entrepreneurs. His new book, “Creative Calling,” launched this spring – debuted an instant national bestseller. Welcome to the show, Chase.

**CHASE JARVIS:** Thank you Kevin, I appreciate it.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, so, I really, really want to get into Creative Live and your book. And, like, I am a customer of Creative Live, actually.

**CHASE JARVIS:** Love to hear that. Love to hear it.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** But, so, first, maybe we can start with your background, like, were you always a creative person? Like, what was your childhood like?

**CHASE JARVIS:** Well, that’s a great place to start off. First, I do want to say thank you so much for behind the technology, you as a technologist for embracing that creative side. So many people, and this goes back to – it relates to your question about my history. So many people understand creativity as art. While art is a great example of creativity, I always want to talk about creativity with a capital C. That includes, you know, creativity underpins the solution to every problem we will ever know.

Writing code is incredibly creative, as is this conversation we’re having here. We’re co-creating this conversation right now and either one of us could take this in an exciting different direction. To me, that’s part of what makes creativity so sort of, A, misunderstood, but B, vital. It’s like, you know, great lives, great products, great experiences. You know, they’re not found. I’m what they call a “founder.” I didn’t find anything, I built Creative Live from the ground up with hundreds of other committed people.

So, I think I want to first establish that, you know, creativity with a capital C is what we’re all talking about here.

As it relates to my childhood, I think I did have a very creative childhood. In part, I was an only child, and my parents would say things like, “Okay, here’s a block of wood, you know, go play in the back yard by yourself for a few hours and entertain yourself and cultivate curiosity and storytelling” and all the things that we know kids do so well.

And, you know, part of my ethos and why I wrote “Creative Calling” and founded Creative Live was to help people understand that that creativity that we’re able to connect with as young people is actually the same vital driving force as adults. Yet, we have found ways to, in large part, write it out of our day to day because we were coached by either a career counselor, teacher or a parent or a spouse that for some reason it wasn’t practical.

My fundamental principle is that it’s actually the most practical thing there is on the planet and we do it all every day. And if we just acknowledge it as such, we could drive it to our advantage in a way that few people actually get to do. So, let’s create a more accessible, creative world. My childhood was very much that. My parents, I was raised very middle, lower middle class. My dad was a cop, my mom was a secretary at a biotech company.

And that didn’t stop me from trying to express who I was, until I started, you know, bumping into all those teachers and the school system and so many of the things that, sometimes for good reason, you know, provide constraints.

I believe that it’s our job as adults to unlearn a lot of those constraints that school and career counselors and parents and often people who meant really well for us, you know, that they placed on us so that we can reach our true potential.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** I so agree with that sentiment and push. Like, one of the things I’d love to get your opinion on is it, oftentimes, people look at the end product of creativity. So, like, a work of art, a photograph, a recording, like, a software system, a business, a book – whatever it might be.

And the creative process that helped create that thing isn’t visible. And, like, we think it’s mysterious and hard and inaccessible and it’s one of the things that I love about Creative Live. So, I’m an amateur photographer and I’ve taken a whole bunch of classes on Creative Live to try to get my photographic technique better. And, like, I didn’t feel like I was being intimidated by the process of, like, looking at a great photographer and saying, “Oh, like, I don’t understand this. I can’t do this.” Like, I was just sort of curious, like, how on God’s earth do these folks do what they’re doing? Like, I want to know. I want to understand and, like, Creative Live and, like, so many resources that we have available to us now help with that.

So, like, how, like, how do you think about that, like, this sort of, like, the process of creativity?

**CHASE JARVIS:** Well, I love that you asked the process question, because I think at its foundation, that’s one of the reasons that it’s wildly misunderstood. And I think this is a good place for me to interject. I basically end my book, “Creative Calling,” and as sort of the principles that underpin my life, there are three core principles. The first one is that every person is creative by nature – limitless possibility. Again, just the example that you and I are co-creating this conversation right now that you create every morning, you wake up, you decide. There’s this idea of autonomy and opportunity that we all decide what we’re going to do with our time.

Principle two, which relates to your question directly, that creativity is a habit, not a skill. It’s a process. It’s a practice.

It’s just like a muscle that we develop. And if I were to ask you, how would you – you know, if you want to develop bigger biceps, what would you do? You would work those biceps out. So, creativity is the same thing. It’s this act of repeating creating or repeating a biceps curl that’s going to make you stronger. Now, there are skills that can help you create prettier things, but creativity, itself, is a habit. It’s a process.

Now, the third thing which I think is the – this is where hopefully the – your brain is going to wake up now if you’re a listener right now, the process that we go through in creating anything, whether it’s a photo, a computer program, a business, many of the examples that you gave, the process that we go through in creating anything, the muscles that we use, those are the exact same muscles that we use to create our lives.

Creating a life is just creativity at a bigger scale. And so for the listener who’s sitting there right now and there’s a distance between where you are and where you want to be in your life, if you just look at it as a creative process, as a process where you’re putting one foot in front of another over and over, hopefully you know, you might be 10,000 hours away from mastering your life, but you’re only one decision, and that is the decision to try – to begin the process of creating with intention the life that you want.

So, it’s crazy that you’re going to go home tonight and you’re going to decide what to cook for dinner, that’s a creative process. And the same things that are at play there, what am I going to do? What ingredients am I going to put in? How long am I going to take to do it? Where am I going to do it? All of those things are the same ingredients that we have in creating our life. So, again, everyone’s creative. Two, creativity is a habit. And three, the process that we go through in creating anything is how we actually create our lives.

To me, that – just the triumvirate of those things is – it ought to embolden everyone listening with this opportunity that, you know, we don’t stumble into this world. You’re not a quirk in the tide, that by – with a little bit of intention, just like you could create a meal for your family, that you can create this life that you might feel distanced from right now that is inspiring, enriching, and this is one precious thing that we get. So, let’s make it a masterpiece.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, so true, like, not just beautiful sentiment, like, I actually believe the truth of what you’re saying. I do want to focus a little bit on this idea of creativity as habit because, like, that really, really strongly resonates with me.

So, as we’re having this conversation right now, I’m about to take some time over the next couple of weeks to just spend two weeks of my time learning. What I intend to learn are adding a set of things to my creative arsenal. It’s almost like working out the creative muscle. So, I’ve got someone who’s going to come to my shop and teach me how to use my TIG welder better.

**CHASE JARVIS:** There you go, amazing.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** I tell people I’m doing this and they’re, like, “What does TIG welding have to do with being CTO of Microsoft?” And I really do believe this thing that you said, that, you know, adding that skill to my arsenal and then using it, like, I have a project. Like, I’m not just going to learn the skill in a vacuum, I’ve already designed this steel and walnut bench that I’m going to make.

**CHASE JARVIS:** Amazing.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** And so, it’s going to be so much fun. And I’m going to then have this creative experience that’s going to not just be fun, but I think it’s going to help me be more creative in general.

**CHASE JARVIS:** This is – let’s use science for a second. The science on creativity is really clear, that creating anything helps you create everything. And so, truthfully, like, you learning to weld and expressing what it’s like to try and put two or more things in your world that previously weren’t put together to try and put those ideas together in real time, your brain is literally, you know, it’s – neuroplasticity is not new probably to your audience. That means your brain has the capability of learning new things and creating new pathways and connecting things that used to not be connected. Like, that is the act of creating at its most fundamental level.

And that is a transferrable skill. That experience of creating, you know, the walnut and steel piece – was it steel? Is that right? Walnut and steel?

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yes.

**CHASE JARVIS:** That, like, the act of conceiving, of planning, of activating those neural pathways, that’s the same set of muscles that is going to help you solve the problem in the boardroom that’s going to help you unlock the next chapter of technology for Microsoft. And, you know, this idea that somehow we as humans are divorced from this process, that we either have it or not.

You know, the really sad thing, I’ll tell you a short story about my childhood. So, you asked, did I – believe I was creative, I did until second grade. And I walked in my second-grade classroom. It was the student-teacher conference night, and they paired it with the ice cream social. So, you could show up after school, you know, your parent or guardian would have 10 minutes with the teacher while the kids are supervised eating ice cream in the gymnasium or whatever.

And I happened to go looking for my mom in my second-grade classroom, Miss Kelly, and I happened to walk in. There were some other student – there were some other folks waiting in line. And I walked in there just in time to hear my teacher, Miss Kelly, tell my mom that I was so much better at sports than I was at art.

Now, I had just come off of my – I made my first film in the summer between first and second grade, I had a magic show, I had a stand-up comedy act. I thought of myself as artistic. And to hear that from my teacher was just – it was, like, “Hmm.” And you know, maybe some empathetic listeners out there and saying, “Oh, poor young Chase.” But what poor young Chase did was just adapt. I did whatever my second-grade teacher said. “Hmm, I’m good at sports, that’s how I’m going to get revered and respected and patted on the back as a good little boy.”

And so, I ran headlong into sports. Sure enough, it served me well. I went on to be successful in sports, I went to college on a soccer scholarship, played on an Olympic development team, but I turned my back on creativity because my second-grade teacher said I wasn’t good at it. How sort of sad. And it was only through a – if you read the book, I chronicle the story pretty carefully about my grandfather actually died and I was given his cameras. And this was a catalyst for me to sort of dig back into it.

But, you know, if you look at your initial question or comment about the relationship between trying new things and how it could possibly affect your ability to be a better CTO, like, the science is really clear. It’s messy, because right now there’s someone who’s listening to this who subscribes to your show because they think of themselves as a technologist and thinks that creativity is sort of a nice to have.

But if you look around and just to be direct, I have deconstructed the lives of hundreds and hundreds of the most creative, successful people in the world that have been on my podcast, that reach on Creative Live, that are now my friends. These are billionaires, entrepreneurs, genius creators, you know, everything in between. And there is a correlation – they all understand that the opportunity to learn new skills, to put yourself around people who, you know, build you up rather than knock you down, this idea that spending time pursuing things that interest you for which you have curiosity, that these are force multipliers to everything in your life.

And, ultimately, sort of a concept that I’ve taken away from these hundreds of conversations are that choosing creativity in your life is, ultimately, refusing to betray your potential.

Choosing creativity is refusing to betray your potential. And it seems like with your project, deciding that you’re actively going to invest in learning and experimentation and building that – your creative biceps by actually learning to weld and doing hobbies that seem irreverent relative to your professional life, that’s actually where the best stuff in life really is.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, I – yeah, (laughter) strongly, strongly agree with that. And, you know, it’s sort of interesting, like, when your teacher told you – or was telling your mom that you were so much better at sports than art, like, I think this is another thing people get confused about all the time. So, she may have had in her head that like you weren’t good at some, like, like, technical skill in art.

**CHASE JARVIS:** Painting, right. Shading.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** And so, like –

**CHASE JARVIS:** I’m eight.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** – that has nothing to do whether or not you’re creative.

**CHASE JARVIS:** For sure.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** So, like, you could learn skills, you can accumulate them, like, this loop that you were describing where, you know, curiosity and investing in yourself, you know, is sort of at the core of creativity, like, you can learn anything. Like, I’m really convinced of this. Especially with kids, like, I hate this idea that you are – that, like, we tell children that they’re not good at something.

**CHASE JARVIS:** For sure. I mean, let’s walk into any second-grade classroom, since I used grade two as my example and Miss Kelly shut me down. Walk into any first-, second-grade classroom, go up to the front of the room and say, “Who wants to come up to the front and draw me a picture?” How many hands go up? Every hand.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Every hand?

**CHASE JARVIS:** Every hand goes up. And then you ask the same question as a sixth grader and then a ninth grader and then a senior.

And the number of hands that go up sort of systematically goes down. Now, I feel like we are on the cusp of a complete transformation and a reawakening, largely in part – you know, the work that you do to put tools in the hands of people and to remove the gates from, you know, popular culture. You used to have to know a bunch of gallerists to hang your art in a public space or you used to have to get the permission of a photo editor, a magazine editor to write. Now, because of the internet, you know, we’re largely on the – on the early part of the back side of the democratization of all of these tools where they’re free, cheap, or widely accessible.

And look what’s happening? The creator economy – I mean, 40% of Americans have a side hustle where they may money beyond their actual 9:00-5:00. That’s 70 million working Americans have a side hustle. And that’s one of the fastest-growing parts of the economy. I think it’s the fastest.

So, this idea that for somehow not entrepreneurial, not creative, when you look at the economic creative class, to use Richard Florida’s term, it’s a transformational size of the economy. And then if you look one level below that, what’s beneath that – the human beings that are actually doing that work. That’s you, that’s me, and that’s that would-be doubter who’s saying, “Hmm, I don’t think of myself as creative because, you know, it wasn’t sort of fostered in me.” What if we could turn that frown upside down? What if we could change that belief that that person who does not see themselves as creative?

I just think the power there is acknowledging our own creativity is the human superpower, it’s part of what differentiates us from every other species on the planet.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** So, let’s maybe talk a little bit about the process of being creative. Like, one of the things I think people get hung up on is fear of critique or fear of failing. Like, I remember I went to a Ralph Gibson workshop on photography. Ralph is, like, one of the – one of the, you know, most famous photographers of the, you know, sort of mid late 20th century.

And you know, I have no business on paper being at this workshop with him. Like, I didn’t go to art school, I’m not a professional photographer, like, my photographs haven’t been in any galleries, like, there’s nothing by any sort of traditional measures that would say that my, like, my photographic skill or my work would merit, you know, like me being able to, you know, sit down and learn with someone like Ralph Gibson with a group of other, you know, aspirant photographers.

You know, and so like that’s one weird thing, like, the “I am not worthy” you know mindset that sometimes people have. And then the other is, like, I was a little bit anxious about going to this thing because, like, you know, what is this person who is like a really eminent photographer going to think of my work? And is he going to think it’s all garbage and, you know, am I going to be embarrassed.

And, you know, like, the thing that I’ve just sort of learned is my process of becoming a computer scientist and, like, a tech person over the years is, like, that I’ve had to get over this imposter syndrome that I always have and, like, and be willing to make myself vulnerable to situations where I’m pushing myself beyond my limits.

And whenever I do that, like, I learn something and I’m able to do more afterwards using what I’ve learned. And so, I don’t know whether you see that pattern with other folks.

**CHASE JARVIS:** Oh, what you just described is – it’s beautiful when you actually are able to transcend that fear even for a moment, because you do it once and you’re, like, wait, all the best stuff in life is on the other side of fear. And whether that’s fear of being judged, fear of not being enough, fear of someone laughing at your creation or your first stab at something, on the other side of all of that is where the best stuff is.

And, again, I go back to this concept of just imagine if you could set aside your ego even temporarily in order to try something new, to try that thing that lights you up.

Like, that is, to me, the human superpower, when you enmesh some passion, a little curiosity, a little opportunity and the temporary suspension of fear to do something that you are enthusiastic about, that’s, you know, if you don’t love your job or you’re tired all the time, what you’re really tired of doing is things that don’t inspire you. And as soon as you can direct your attention and your experience – and to be clear, again, you are in charge. You might have bills; you might have all of the things that are typical trappings and excuses that I hear people make that are all very real. There’s privilege involved. There’s opportunity costs. There’s opportunity period with a capital O – all those things are hurdles.

But if you take even for a small moment and even once a week and then once a day and then once an hour you start learning into overcoming or transcending or just borrowing – pretending for long enough that those fears and trappings don’t exist, that is the ticket to being able to live the dream that how you spend your time, what you work on, who you work with – it’s actually, again, it might be 10,000 hours away if you actually to get to do those things professionally or for a living or even if you just want them to be an enriching hobby, but you’re only one decision away from deciding to try.

And, to me, that is exciting. When I hear you say you’re going to go to this class with Ralph, the – you know, the book that you mentioned early in the intro and that I wrote is essentially it is a Trojan horse. You know, it’s a book about creativity.

Yes, it will help you supercharge all your creative endeavors, whether you want to, again, make a workbench, a computer program, a business, or a meal or whatever. But the Trojan horse is that this is sort of this key to unlocking your human potential. And it’s intimidating, like, where do I even start? So, I’ve tried to make it brutally simple. The book is divided into four parts and the acronym is very simple. It’s a creative process, and you can apply this to anything. You can apply it to dinner; you can apply it to your life.

I-D-E-A, idea. I stands for “imagine:” D, for “design;” E, “execute;” and then A, “amplify.” This is just a very simple four-step process for anything creative. And I’ll just walk you through one example.

Imagine is we have lost our ability to imagine what’s possible. We’re told by our career counselor. We’re told by our parents. “Okay, you’re going to do one of these four jobs. You’re going to be a doctor, a lawyer, a – you know, whatever makes your parents proud.” That’s not imagining what’s possible for this one precious life.

You know, and to be fair, it’s confusing because this comes as information, comes from people who we care about and who care about us very much. And so, you know, to go against these – the messages that we get from popular culture to be rich and fit and all these things, look, we’ve lost our ability to imagine what we want for us.

So, how do you start – how do you rekindle that? You just start to play in your mind, imagine what – if you could write a script, what would it look like? So, imagine.

The second step, and this is true, again, with dinner or your life. Imagine what you want to eat. Design a plan to get what you want to eat. That’s – I’ve got to go to the grocery store, I’ve got to spend $18 on, you know, I’ve got to get some chicken, I’ve got to get some pasta – whatever the thing is.

So, you’re designing a plan to get there. If I go to the store and I allow enough time, I’m going to be able to cook a different, new, exciting meal and I found a recipe, whatever.

Imagine, design the plan. Execute the thing. Right? Do the thing. Do the process. Make the bench, go to the photography seminar, make a new picture. And then the thing that is missing from 99% of the people’s equation out there is this idea that I call “amplify.” It’s the “A” in the IDEA framework. That is show other people. Talk about it. Because in doing so, in verbalizing it and saying, “Hey, I made a new meal, it’s a little bit of an experiment. Join me at the table, tell me if it’s too spicey or you don’t like olives.” Like, in engaging, that is inherently human. And you get feedback on your process. You get to develop an awareness of are you hurt by that feedback? Are you inspired by that feedback? Does it make you want to do more or less?

But most importantly, when you put it out there in the world, it’s acknowledgement that you are creative. So, if this little people that are, say, technologists that listen to your podcast are victims to what I shared earlier, that cultural sort of narrowing of creativity with a capital C, if you just apply that four-step process to anything, I think it’s a good step in getting you where to go – where you want to go.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah. And, like, I really do think that last bit around amplifying, like, showing your work, like, it’s also helps create connection.

**CHASE JARVIS:** For sure.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Like, so many of the best conversations that I have ever had come from meeting people I otherwise wouldn’t have met because I showed them something that I’ve made. They’re, like, “Oh.”

**CHASE JARVIS:** There’s vulnerability in there, there’s an authenticity. And for people that are scared or don’t have skills, great, how do you get any skill? You practice.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yes.

**CHASE JARVIS:** And whether you’re practicing singing or guitar or, again, there’s any number of things that we’ve named, like, that’s actually a bonding experience when you sit down with other people who have shared interests. And you don’t have to actually sit down, you know, whether we’re still emerging from the pandemic here or whether you live in, you know, Muskogee, Illinois or in the middle of what you don’t consider to be a creative hotbed, you can actually connect with people, use Creative Live as an example. There’s a community of 10 million people there who are creating and learning. And if you start to do that together, that is an empowering feeling.

As you’ve shared just moments ago, like, that vulnerability in sharing and connecting around these ideas that you have about, you know, what you can do, make, be, or become, like, that – we’re social animals. Whether you’re an introvert or an extrovert, this is, you know, this is something that will light you up.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, and honestly, I think – so, I’m an introvert, like, super-duper, capital I introvert. And I think maybe for introverts, like, it’s one of the more valuable things that you can do because it’s like a super structured way for you to connect with other people. It’s like, you know, it’s a built-in ice breaker.

**CHASE JARVIS:** Yep.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Like, here’s this thing, I made a bench, I made a mechanical doohickey, I wrote a piece of software that I’m making open source. I, you know, I’ve done this thing and like I’m just going to put it out there into the world. And then the conversation can be around that thing. And so, like, you just know what you’re walking into.

**CHASE JARVIS:** Yeah, and it is. It’s an invitation to connect with just a little bit of distance when necessary. I’m married to an extreme introvert and I am relatively extroverted, myself. And so, observing, you know, I approached that – like, her introvertedness as a little bit of a learning for how the different sort of introvert or extrovert or ambivert might look at the creative process or might look at feedback.

And what I learned, you know, we’ve been married for more than 20 years now, so this is that it truly is accessible to everyone and creativity is this invitation to connect around shared ideas, shared experiences. And now, with the internet being, you know, connecting us and providing a vehicle, a set of pipes for connection, like, that is – that serves any personality type. It serves the opportunity for you to have mentors that are – would historically have been way out of your league.

You know, you talked about getting together with Ralph, well, if you couldn’t sign up on the internet, you know, you probably wouldn’t have been there. You know, that’s why Creative Live was so disruptive, because people used to spend $3,000-$5,000, fly across the country to New York, stay in a hotel for three days to try and learn with some master.

Now, you can not just take a class with them, you can correspond with them in real time and ask them questions. And to me, that’s just – that’s glorious. And for those who are listening to this right now and this idea is new to you, this is what you’re missing. And for those who are practiced, this is your ticket to pursuing, you know, your dreams for this one precious life.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah. It’s – I think Creative Live is a really amazing community. One of – the first class that I took on Creative Live was from a photographer named Joey L. Joey is this very, super-talented, young documentary portrait photographer. So, like, you know, I think he’s shot advertising and, like, a bunch of, you know, a bunch of commercial work, but he uses that as a way to fund these explorations that he does. Like, he’ll go to Africa, he will go to India, like, he goes into these communities and he tries to capture something about these communities that are reflective–

**CHASE JARVIS:** He’s very cause driven. Right.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah.

**CHASE JARVIS:** He uses the money that he makes from commercial to make other great art that unlocks, you know, our awareness about indigenous people and conflict. You know, I think that’s a great way for people who are introverted or are, you know, are looking for an example of where to get started. Like, how can you learn from someone like Joey L.? How can you start to apply your skills and experience and whatever you’ve done for your life? You have a gift. Whatever is in your childhood, that thing that lit you up when you were eight or 10 or 15 or 20, whether it was guitar or a computer.

Like, you – those are available to you right now, today. You can stop listening to this podcast, you can drive to a store, you can look something up online, you could join a free class, you could – you know, there’s so many ways to activate. I just think that that’s so refreshing, so empowering. And this idea that we’re a quirk in the tide, we can sort of shelve that – what I think is antiquated, understandably, because so many people feel like that. That’s, you know, that’s what a school system and a work system is, you know, designed to do.

There’s no malevolent dictator making us feel that, but that’s, you know, a mass culture and society is – that’s part of how it manages people, right? You have to put them in a system, otherwise it’s too much for the system to handle. And yet, you don’t have to succumb to that.

And it takes a little bit of awakening – just a tad bit of awareness, and then the application of this process – this creative process – imagine, design, execute, and amplify, toward anything, and I promise, if you do this, you know, one or two or three times, the first time it’s a little painful, I’m not going to lie. It’s sort of like Bikram yoga or I think it’s just hot yoga now because the guy Bikram is a real jerk, so they took his namesake away from him. But hot yoga, like, the first time you do it, it kicks your butt. And if you – if you’re willing to sign up for five sessions, the second time you’re like, it sucked a little bit less, but I can see the benefits. The third time, like, wow, I’ve never felt better. Fourth and fifth, you’re excited.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah.

**CHASE JARVIS:** And the same is true with going to the gym or creating. The first time you sit down to try and write a song after you haven’t written one since you were 14, painful.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, and it’s certainly true for code, like, coding is this thing where it takes everyone a while to get good at it.

And, like, this is the thing, you know, I tell people all the time, you shouldn’t let the fact that your first attempts are painful or not quite as successful or as easy as you would like them to be to deter you from continuing to try. I mean, it’s like – like a virtuoso concert pianist, like, I think sometimes we have this romantic idea that these virtuosi are just sort of born with, you know, the ability to, you know, play, you know, a Liszt piano concert or Chopin ballad, you know, it – and it’s just not true.

Like, they practice, they start off, they’re crap in the beginning because they have nothing in their fingers and, like, don’t understand anything about music theory, composition, and they just spend an enormous amount of time building all of the understanding and skill and repertoire so that they can perform at a very high level. And, like, it’s the only path to getting to the high level. Like, it’s–

**CHASE JARVIS:** But this is available.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** It is.

**CHASE JARVIS:** It’s available to everyone in any discipline that you choose. And people – you know, the example I always get is, like, well, if you’re five-foot-four, it’s really hard to play in the NBA. Well, first of all, people have done it. I’m not saying I’d recommend it, but my guess is that you might be in love with basketball generally and there’s lots of things to do around basketball if you’re five-foot-four besides start on the – you know, on the Utah Jazz or, you know, the Knicks or the, you know, the Bulls or whatever. There’s lots of things to do and by exploring that, you know, you’re going to uncover things about yourself and things about your passions and area of interest.

I think it’s important to make another point, which is, you know, you talked earlier about, you know, I didn’t feel qualified to be in that class with Ralph and these other people and data know – you know, look at this – I think this idea that I might not belong or that creativity is for everybody else.

I want to be crystal clear. You do not need a new set of friends. You do not have to wear a beret and move to Paris and smoke the cigarettes and be – that is not what creative is. That is this romantic and I think perversely romantic view of what creativity is. None of those things are true. You can be creative right now in this moment with what you have. And, in fact, that’s the only way – only place to start. Start right now, where you can with what you have and go from there. And I believe that if you start walking, you know, in the book, I talk about this sort of a calling, a curiosity, and then you put yourself on this path where you know, nothing is a waste of time, even a road where you find out that something doesn’t interest you, like, that’s actually a discovery in and of itself.

And, you know, there’s this toggling back and forth between lessons in creativity and our personal exploration and expression and lessons in life.

They’re basically one in the same. So, you don’t need a new set of friends. Even if you don’t feel welcome, it’s probably you more than it is the community. And if it’s the community that it really is turning you off, then find a different community. But the most important thing and the thing that I feel like we do a disservice to ourselves is to not start. The list of reasons why is long. And if you’re – if you do anything or take anything away from our conversation here, dear listener, it’s just start. No one feels ready. Everyone starts before – you know, just, if you deconstruct the work of the most successful, happy, fulfilled people, it’s that they would say, “Just start.”

I’ve done the research. I’ve interviewed hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people. And there’s, you know, a handful of common threads. One is just start. Just begin.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah. I – that is certainly consistent with what I’ve seen in my cohort of peers and the people that I’ve had the privilege of working with.

You know, and I guess the other thing, too, like, I’ll just sort of agree with you on – the – it is way more important to, like, have the curiosity and the creative impulse and to get started than it is to, like, have a skill or a tool. If you have this creative impulse and this curiosity, you can always earn the skills and you can earn better tools so that you can make more complicated things like, you know, different things. Like, I won’t even call them more interesting things, but you know, you can –

**CHASE JARVIS:** More advanced or –

**KEVIN SCOTT:** You’d don’t have to wait to get started until you have the skill or the good tool. Like, if you’re waiting for that, you’ll never get started.

**CHASE JARVIS:** So true. And if you’re waiting to be happy and fulfilled and rich and set before you take on this creative endeavor, you’re going to be waiting forever as well. It’s actually the other way around. The science is really clear here. You know, I heard it – it was my own experience, I heard it from everybody I interviewed, all of my podcast guests on Creative Live, it’s the opposite. If you decide that you’re creative, if you call yourself a creator and you start to apply these principles, those are the things that unlock happiness, connection, fulfillment. It’s not the other way around. If you wait for happiness, fulfillment, contentment, connection in order to start this thing, whatever that thing is for you – and everybody has a thing. If you wait, you’re going to be waiting forever.

And there’s, you know, the number-one regret for the dead – or the dying is that they pursued the dreams that everybody else had for them rather than their own.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah.

**CHASE JARVIS:** So, if on your death bed you – the thought of regret is terrifying for you, as it is for me, this is the unambiguous, virtually universal agreement is to pursue the things that you want and anything in pursuing what you want is a creative endeavor. Again, coding, building a business, a restaurant, like, any of those things. And so why wait? Those things, that pursuit in and of itself, is the initial vehicle to jumpstart your curiosity, your creativity, your positivity, your emotional connection with your capacity as a human being, which again, the thing that differentiates us from all the other species on the planet is our ability to combine unlikely things that would not have been combined for it weren’t – for it not being us.

And the last point there is you do not have to – like, it’s not like you’re going to create a symphony that’s a masterpiece or nothing. That is not true. No one has experienced that, even the most talented, gifted geniuses of our time, they had to – you know, they had to create some things that weren’t genius level long before they could ever, you know, truly – for, you know, be known for the things that you – the reasons that you know them.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, so, so, so true. And, like, a thing that I think a lot of people forget, because we sometimes get too enamored of the end product of fully mature genius and just sort of assume that, like, it was easy to get there, like, there weren’t all of these intermediate steps or that it was, like, we – you know, we try to pretend that it wasn’t hard for the, you know, for the person that’s, you know, whether it’s an athletic performance or like it’s all – it’s all hard work. (Laughter.)

**CHASE JARVIS:** It is, and it doesn’t – the cool thing, this is why I get so passionate about helping direct people toward things they care about, because if you could fail or struggle at something that sucks, that isn’t an expression of you, why would you – you know, the thought of sucking at something that you don’t even care about versus like pursuing something, having a chance to pursue something that you care about – and this is not – again, this is not about quitting your job. You know, some of the happiest, you know, most balanced, fulfilled people have an amazing job that provides them resources, time, space to do the thing that they want to do on their side. This is not just about, again, quitting your job and moving to a cabin in the woods to write poetry – although, that may be someone’s jam. It’s not required.

Again, you can do 99% of the things that we’re talking about on this show where you are right now – the thing that matters is that you start. In an imperfect, awkward way, you just start playing. And there are things in your past that when you do them, I don’t care if it’s hitting baseballs into a field or you know, the Easy Bake Oven that you had when you were nine, like, pursue that for a little bit.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yes.

**CHASE JARVIS:** And the cool thing is that because this is a habit, not a skill, you start to realize that this is available to everyone. And I literally mean everyone.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, I – some of my favorite stories are, you know, like Aaron Copland composing *Fanfare for a Common Man* and, like, you know, a bunch of his works while he was on the train to his job as an insurance executive or, you know, John Grisham I think was a lawyer, you know, while he was writing his first novels.

And, like, the thing is, like, you’re not trying to optimize for easy; you’re trying to optimize for fulfilled.

**CHASE JARVIS:** Yes. And that’s a whiff for most people culturally, right? This idea of, again, you have to be successful, all these other things before you feel fulfilled. It’s the other way around. Pursue things that are meaningful to you, create meaning in your life, put yourself – if you’re the average of the five people you spend the most time with, put yourself around people that lift you up that are interested in the same things you are or challenge your ideas. And, you know, that vehicle creates the success downstream that it’s not the other way around.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah. So, we’re – we’ve got time for a couple more questions. We talked a little bit earlier in the conversation about how technology is changing the creative landscape. You know, we talked a little bit about how it helps people to, you know, do the “amplify” part of idea that you can sort of put yourself out there and connect with other people. Like, it lets you build a platform like Creative Live. Like, what other ways do you think technology is changing the way that people can express their creativity?

**CHASE JARVIS:** Tools. Community. Like, just two completely – access. Right? Three ways that technology is completely transforming this world. You know, tools for free or cheap, you have access – I mean, you know, our phones. They’re not phones anymore, they’re cameras, first and foremost, recording devices, communication devices to share work, connect with others. You know, this access to the world’s top experts at Creative Live, where you can have access to 2,000 classes from people like Brene Brown, Richard Branson, Damon John from Shark Tank, Tim Ferris, Sherry Riley – you want to learn about money, you want to learn about creativity, about design, about photography, like that’s crazy.

So, if you think about technology in those terms, you know, it’s not even kidding, it’s literally transformational, the opportunity to have that. The access, again, we’ve talked about that, how, you know, these – the spaces to share your work, to be a distribution platform on your own used to be reserved for the, you know, they had gatekeepers behind them, and now you can start a blog and start writing in five minutes.

You can, you know, share your photos on Instagram for free in five minutes. You can, you know, there are so many vehicles. And the community part is hard to overstate. Like, I wrote a quarter of my book is about community. That’s really the whole “amplify” section of the book is about putting yourselves around people that build you up, creating a set of, you know, fans and followers and people who like your work or want to connect with you and what you’re doing are similar minded or working in areas of interest. Like, all those things are, you know, completely new as of the last 10 years and enabled by, for example, the work that you do, Kevin, at Microsoft.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Awesome. Well, I want to thank you so much for taking time to chat with us today. Everybody should go buy a copy of “Creative Calling.” I am – I am very much looking forward to reading the book, myself. I just want to say I’m deeply appreciative of the work that you’re doing, because I think nurturing this and encouraging this creative impulse in people is just such an extraordinarily important and good thing to do.

**CHASE JARVIS:** Oh, it’s just a beautiful light in my life and I’m one of the few who has discovered their calling and I can’t overstate how joyful – and it’s not – not that easy. It’s like it’s not easy building a community or platform that serves, you know, millions and millions of people. You know that from your job at Microsoft. But is it fulfilling? Is it – does it feel good? It feels incredible. And, again, I’m part of the process. I’m connected with people all over the planet who, you know, are similar minded and believe that, you know, we are not a quirk in the tide, and we have autonomy and opportunity, and we can cultivate that and chase what we’re all after, which is, you know, love and connection and fulfillment, whether that’s personal or professional.

So, thank you so much for having me on the show. I love the work that you’re doing at Microsoft. It’s been incredible – you know, having been born and raised in Seattle and Microsoft has always been in my back yard, it’s been fun to see what I would consider, you know, I’ve used the word “transformational” a few times in this conversation, I don’t use it lightly. You all are doing incredible things over there in Redmond and beyond. And it’s a new – it’s a beat of a new drum over there, and it’s fun to watch and I look forward to seeing more from you all in the near future.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Well, thank you so much.

**CHASE JARVIS:** Appreciate it. Thanks for having me on the show, Kevin. It’s a dream – it’s a treat.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Awesome.

[MUSIC]

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** Well, that was Kevin’s conversation with Chase Jarvis. So, I was really inspired by that conversation. You know, I’m somebody who has more of a creative than technical background – at least academically. And so, a lot of this really resonated with me, especially when you were kind of – when you two were discussing creativity is habit. I thought that that was really powerful because I think that a lot of people do go into creative pursuits thinking that it has to be this instant-on thing. Like, I’m either good at it or I’m not. And there is a habit aspect to it that I think is really important.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah, I totally agree. I mean, I certainly take this approach with my children, where I’m less concerned about the particular creative thing that they’re doing and more that they are just doing something creative.

And, like, I have two kids, like, 10 and 12. And they – they have different creative interests. My daughter is, you know, 12 years old, just loves writing and is a voracious reader. And so, the thing that she spends her creative energy on is writing. And just – I can watch her get better and better the more she does it. And, you know, getting over that activation energy just to start to, like, whatever is stopping you, whether it’s fear or like you’re worried that you’re not going to be good enough or that people aren’t going to appreciate what you’re doing, if you can get over all of that and just start, like, you will get better and better. And, like, that’s the thing where just indulging in that habit is so important.

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** No. I totally agree. It’s interesting because I have a lot of people who still to this day ask me for advice on how to get started writing.

And how do you do this? How are you good at this? That’s always my advice, which is similar to what you and Chase were talking about, “Just start.” And I say to people who want to write, “Just write. Do it.” The more you do it, the more familiar you’ll feel. It doesn’t matter what it’s about. It doesn’t matter, you know, make it part of your day. Before I was a journalist and had to do it every day. To get ready for that, I used to journal, and I used to write every single day. It didn’t matter what it was, you know, whether it was snippets of poetry or a screenplay or whatever.

And I’m convinced that that’s how I worked that muscle. And I think the same is true for anything else. Like, I’m sure with you and your photography or with your, you know, woodwork stuff, like, just the very factor of doing it makes you better at it. And that’s certainly true, as you can attest, to coding. Right? I mean, like, that’s legitimately how we all get better at it is just by doing it over and over again.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** Yeah. Not only will you get better at it, it’s easier to start, the more that you do it.

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** Yeah.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** You know, which is – so, I had a very similar experience writing. My PhD advisor told me that I should be writing every day. And I’m, like, “What do I write about?” It’s, like, doesn’t matter, just, like, set up a discipline, like, find a place, find a time, just go write, like, even if it’s typing someone else’s words. Just get into the habit of doing it.

And it really, really, really helped. It turned – it got me habituated to this whole process where you know, and he was doing it because he was getting me ready to write a dissertation and to, like, you know, get into the habit of being able to, like, produce a lot of written output, which is a lot of what being an academic is. And that just – having that habit was crucial. And I think it’s true for anything. Like, whether you’re a coder, whether you’re – you know, like you’re – you want to, like, be a creative cook and, like, make a great meal once a day, whether you – like you’re a flower arranger, like, whatever it is. Like, there’s so many ways to express that creativity. But, like, the only way that anyone’s ever going to know how creative you are is, like, you’ve just got to do it.

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** Yeah. You have to get out of your head and actually, you know, do it. And it can be daunting, but as you said, I think the more that you do it, the easier it becomes and the less daunting and scary it is. So – yeah.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** And the more you realize how things are connected, that being creative in one thing, like, helps you be creative in another. And I think one of the things that Chase said that’s really just sort of practical advice no matter, you know, what you are, like, even if you don’t have the aspiration to earn your living through some sort of creative practice, like, we’re all trying to create a life and, like, you want it to be a good and meaningful and fulfilling life. And so, you know, just being creative in general I think helps you just live that more fulfilling, purposeful life.

**CHRISTINA WARREN:** Yeah, I totally agree with that. I totally agree with that. I think that’s a great place to end this. So, that’s it for the show today. Thank you to Chase Jarvis for your creative inspiration. And if you have anything that you would like to share with us, e-mail us at BehindTheTech@microsoft.com. Thanks for listening.

**KEVIN SCOTT:** See you next time.