



Titans as Teens

Transcript: Chafik Kazoun Episode 14

The podcast is here: <https://www.titansasteens.com/chafic-kazoun-ceo-and-angel-investor/>

[Theme Music full up, then down]

Brody: [00:00:00] Hey, all, Brody here with the new episode of Titans as Teens, a podcast where I've detailed conversations with interesting people from all walks of life about their teen experience and the knowledge, they have for teens today. Today I had the pleasure of speaking with angel investor. Chafic Kazoun

Chafik: [00:00:24] You really learned something by being curious and like trying it, playing with it, doing something with it. That's where I think the magic of true learning happens. That's hard to do in school. In all classes

Brody: [00:00:37] Chafic is an angel investor. He is also the co-founder and CEO of B-Line Medical, as well as a published O'Reilly author. He told me that growing up in Beirut, he lived through a war. And his stories are nothing short of riveting.

I spoke to Chafic about his business experience, how he grew to be the man he is today. To start, however, I asked Chafic to give me a short summary of his life.

Chafik: [00:01:01] I was born in Beirut. I lived in Beirut, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Boston, New Jersey, Washington, DC, then Beirut, then DC, then New York. I didn't travel to all those places. I actually lived there.

You know, I, I consider myself Lebanese. I started programming when I was eight years old in Saudi Arabia, 32 years ago. So, 32 years ago, computers in Saudi Arabia were definitely not a thing. (laughs), but I was just always very passionate about it and I love computers. It was just a hobby, you know, it fed my curiosity and, um, and when I went to go to college, I actually ended up studying business. So, I didn't study computers. My dad, my dad asked me, why would you want to study computers? Uh, and somehow kind of convinced me not to do it, but he didn't try to convince me.

So, I graduated from business, graduated from Beirut and decided I wanted to go to the U S and work in tech. But I didn't know if anyone would hire me. I'd already been doing tech things on the side for fun as a kid. So, I started a bulletin board system when I was 15. It was the first bulletin board/email system in Lebanon. I, uh, was then building websites and basic, basic stuff back in the nineties there. Uh, built the first online car rental reservation system



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for Avis in Lebanon. Which literally they haggled over \$700. They didn't even want to pay me that much for it. But then when I went to the U S I was just focused on, am I any good?

You know, I was 20. I don't know who would hire me if I knew what I was talking about. I just realized I was pretty good at what I was doing. And I flourished into, um, I had a big passion for building software and building products. And especially, you know, back in the late nineties, nobody cared about it, but interfaces, user interfaces. Back before you had the current terms of user interface designers, or user experience designers.

So, I got very embedded in this cross section between, I had some business interests. I was really curious about design, typography, color theory. My best friend studied graphic design, so I think that helped as well. And then I had all this kind of just hobby engineering on the side that all came together in the nineties around, especially a technology called Flash, which at this point is defunct, but I was the first and only beta tested for Flash in the Middle East.

I was 19 years old and I had an engineer from San Francisco that called me every day during the beta period to check in and make sure everything was up to snuff when they were doing the final beta releases, it was what was interesting. Uh, so came to the U S, wanted of the proved myself. Realized I was capable and was working at one consulting company, realized I don't love consulting. And especially with government work, which was even more boring. As I was doing that. I just realized I did want to focus my efforts on building user interfaces and Flash was at its prime. I was doing a lot of speaking at conferences around then I met my, uh, business partner now he was working at our company.

Uh, he actually was one of the founders of that company and he hired me. And I was just focused on building just at the time advanced Flash work. So probably speaking at around 10 conferences a year, then wrote a couple of books, which I feel very lucky to have done that it was a great experience. And, um, I think a lot of that came to the point where I knew I wanted to build a product business.

I was 26 years old. My dad's an entrepreneur. So, I think I always thought entrepreneurship is a normal job that a lot of people do. So, when I was 17, he came to me, you know, my dad and I didn't talk a lot. Like Arab culture, the parents and the kids don't, especially the fathers are not usually as, uh, integrated in the kids' life. So, my dad came to me one day when I was 17, he said, Hey, do you want to, do you want to work for somebody, or do you want to work for yourself? And I said, well, you know, as long as I'm building amazing products, because I knew back then, I just wanted to build amazing products. You know, I just want to be able to work at a place where I'd get to build amazing products. And, um, so because we weren't that close and I took whatever, he he'd asked me more seriously.



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And I remember making a decision that year, that I never told him. I don't know if I ever told him I'd probably should, that 10 years from that year, if I hadn't started a company, I would quit and start.

So, it sounds very arbitrary, but I was 26, working at a company doing, uh, some really interesting work, but, uh, made this promise. So, I went to my business partner, Lucas, and I said, Hey, I have this promise, I'm going to, give you this year. And then, uh, I plan to go start a product company after. So, we were working on a project, multiple projects, but the last one we were working on was a project for George Washington Medical Center, to help run a certain type of, uh, healthcare trainings. Captured the data, the video, do some analytics and of course ended up making sure it was super beautiful, sexy really easy to use because that's what I love to do. And, uh, I was getting ready to leave and he came to me. He said, you know what? I want to leave. Let's do this together. And, uh, that was the start of the company, frankly. And, uh, so that was 15 years ago, now started the company at the time. It was just, it was not your textbook Silicon Valley story.

As used to, you know, everybody could be their own boss and entrepreneurs. So, I started a company with no funding. We took no debt. We signed three contracts with, George Washington was actually our first client, but the second and third and fourth was Ohio State University, University of San Diego and Georgetown University. And we did a good job of selling them vaporware because they paid us 50% upfront. And then with a project completion of six months. Contracts were probably around \$200,000 each. So, you imagine, we got \$300,000 in the door to help fund us. And we went from there, lived on site at Ohio State. Lived in San Diego, a few months. Made sure everything was working. And I mean, I could talk to you through the whole journey, but at some point, we just transformed from doing a specific type of training to all the healthcare simulation training.

So today our platform, we record, uh, probably around 82% of the med students in the U S are recorded in our platform. And by recording, it means we capture the video, audio, data, of these exercises. And then in nursing, we're in a smaller segment, but we're growing a lot there now thanks to the acquisition.

And then, uh, we're in 30, our platform is deployed in 35 countries. And outside of that, I, I guess you've mentioned a bit of angel investing. I've been doing that for about five years. Um, I would say so far, I'm finally starting to make money out of it. Uh, you know, at the beginning it was a good learning experience.

You like everything else, you have to spend some money to learn and, uh, definitely have some good lessons learned. But the last couple of investments I feel very, very good about. And that's been really rewarding because, um, with the right companies, it's not just about giving them money. There's just a lot more, you could do, impact.

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So, there's some companies where I've helped them define the roles of the founders, their org structures, help influence their strategy. There's one, I'm working with them on their actual branding and positioning. And, uh, and you know, I guess based on being able to speed up their progress a little bit, it just, it was very rewarding.

My company was acquired last August by a company called Laerdal. They're the largest healthcare simulation training company in the world, but nobody's heard of. They actually, 70% of the global resuscitation CPR training that are done with their devices. And it was a textbook kind of digital play. We are a digital platform and their company had been around 80, 90 years.

Excellent at what they do. And, uh, we're just very complimentary. Um, uh, yeah, that's a bit about me.

Brody: [00:09:55] I'm really curious how you started coding at the age of eight, cause that's really young.

Chafik: [00:10:00] Yeah. Um, I got very lucky that my father, in the seventies, he also went to the American University of Beirut. And they had one computer, punch card computer. And for whatever reason, he was the only, he studied civil engineering. Um, and they had access to it. And I, I think his like final project or something, he decided to do it on a computer. He was very technically, computer savvy for his generation. So, I actually had access to computers pretty young. And then at some point he, um, used to have a Macintosh in the eighties, in Saudi Arabia. At his office. They only had one. So, I had exposure to that. And then at some point he, he bought me a basic computer, it's an equivalent to a Commodore. And I started programming with just BASIC and Logo, and he actually helped me write my first program, which was just a very simple, BASIC program. I loved it. Yeah.

Brody: [00:10:59] That's insane. Like, especially thinking about how, like, kids don't even do that today.

Chafik: [00:11:04] Yeah. I always liked building things. I used to build and race remote control cars. I was very into that. Um, I used to, of course I was a Lego kid as well, and computers just felt like another thing that you get to build. Um, yeah.

Brody: [00:11:21] So. Is there like one small thing that if you were to change it in your current life right now would make a really big impact.

Chafik: [00:11:29] Uh, that's a great question. I feel very blessed about my career. You know, I don't know if there's a lot I would change. I think I've been very lucky that, look, you can always wish for one or two things. I would say. I think the really important thing is, today I have some friends that I really, really value. I feel like the sooner people realize how important real friendships are, the better.



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Brody: [00:11:58] What is real friendship?

Chafik: [00:12:00] It's just like, you know, relationships with people, they really add a lot to your life. And I guess I saw, my parents are divorced, and I saw the ramifications, you know, what happens after, and in my culture, in Lebanon, they live in Lebanon, in Beirut.

You know, the it's not, it's not as an open-minded culture as in US. So, it actually caused issues in their social lives. And the friends that they do still have mean a lot. And it's just, and at some point in my life, I focused on having less friends, but deeper friendships. And friends that I don't know. I mean, I feel like the friends that I do have, if I do legitimate needs something I can call, and I do really enjoy their company and really respect them. I feel very lucky to have them as friends. Because I think it's very easy to work, work, work, and do all the other things in life. But that's. Work is not, not what life is about. I think the relationships you build in the world really matter a lot. I mean, I love what I do. Maybe that's also something I've just been lucky about.

I mean, I liked computers when I was eight years old and nobody used to pay anybody. Now. It's like, one of the most prized careers, um, that I just got lucky into, I don't know what I would've really done if computers weren't around. I probably would have been an architect that overworked and didn't make much money. So yeah. So, I'm going to be, so I would say is, I would say sooner people realize how important relationships are the better.

And I really realized that 10 years ago

Brody: [00:13:39] For me, I always seem to mention this, like every single time I talk with someone, but it just reminds me of, um, Epicurus's ideal. I'm not sure if you're familiar with like the Epicurean commune where. I'll explain it. Epicurus was a Greek philosopher who essentially said the purpose of life is you want to be able to find your means to live by just to get by and then live with your friends for the rest of your day.

Chafik: [00:14:04] That sounds great. But that's, that's sign me up for that. Yeah. Yeah.

Brody: [00:14:11] And moving around as you did a lot when you were younger, did you ever have like one high school that you went to or where there, like, many?

Chafik: [00:14:20] No, I went to four high schools. I went to probably a combination of all the schools around 15. So no, I didn't stick to one very long. Which one did I stick to the most? My university is probably the only thing that I spent more than a year, really. And when I was very young, maybe there was some, I had two years

Brody: [00:14:41] Did that ever impact like your friend making at all?

Chafik: [00:14:44] A lot. And I think that's why I talked a little bit about what I just said, relationships. Because when I was young, I was constantly changing schools. Couldn't

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maintain friendships. Which ended up making me use the computer more. Cause it was, uh, the thing that was always around. And then, uh, I got very good at making the first kind of level of friendship, very quickly with people, reading people really quickly, et cetera, but going deeper and maintaining them was hard. And then later in life did I feel like I actually understood how to do that and how to value it. But yeah, it was, it was definitely hard.

Brody: [00:15:18] You were like the king of first impressions,

Chafik: [00:15:21] Maybe first impression, but I think it's more like, I very quickly, unfortunately would say, come to my conclusion about people. And I trust my instincts about people very strongly, and it's been very good for me in business.

Brody: [00:15:35] So, so like being able to tell someone's motives, even if they're not directly trying to tell you

Chafik: [00:15:41] Yes, and their talent and, and those things, and if they're someone that I will be able to have a long friendship with and we have some value alignment. Those are things that I feel I have a lot of intuition around. Because, because of all the changing in schools.

Brody: [00:15:59] Yeah. Just being able to like pick out that someone I like, that's someone I don't like. Yeah. I understand.

Chafik: [00:16:05] Yeah

Brody: [00:16:06] Were you, one of the people who cared about grades or would you really just more focused on your computer and programming?

Chafik: [00:16:12] Not about grades at all?

Brody: [00:16:14] Um,

Chafik: [00:16:15] Actually. I mean, One, no, I didn't care about it. Two, neither did my parents. And my father literally told me, my father was always about hobbies. He was not about grades. And he just said, don't worry about grades, just pass. And, but he fueled the hobbies. So, like I mentioned, remote control cars and computers. They spent a lot of money on that kind of stuff for me, which I'm very grateful for.

Brody: [00:16:43] Would you endorse that method today?

Chafik: [00:16:45] I think they could have put a little bit more pressure on, on the grades. But I mean, yeah, just because there's one good discipline about doing well in school, it's more about the discipline than the grades. Sometimes, you know, and I feel like I have a personality I go very deep and very OCD about things and I will master it, but I'm not, I don't have that discipline of consistently delivering the same thing over and over.

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I feel like if you're good at grades, you probably will pick that up. I got the lowest GPA. You could graduate university with pretty much.

Brody: [00:17:22] Like 2.3? Or something?

Chafik: [00:17:25] Uh, like a 1.98, .

Brody: [00:17:27] Oh, okay. Never mind.

Chafik: [00:17:28] Yeah, I got like, it was like rounded up to two, like, uh, I don't remember what it was, but it was just like the lowest you can get. I mean, on the plus side, I don't, I never dropped a class because I didn't care if I had an F. I never, my feelings were never hurt if I didn't have a good grade. Incidentally the classes, most people failed and found really hard were my highest grades in university. Cause I found them more interesting. I just focused on like fueling my interests and I think that that's really important and it's very synonymous to having like a playground, like being able to play like is really important. And some people say curiosity, right. Um, and my dad was hobbies, right?

Brody: [00:18:12] If I'm understanding you correctly, what, um, and correct me if I'm wrong, you're actually, is that what you're trying to say is you think that school is and still, it was, and still is, really good at teaching students how to learn and how to be consistent at learning. But not actually the material is that important versus the hobbies, which you said are like, what you actually should, try and improve on.

Chafik: [00:18:41] Yeah. So, I would say school is very good at teaching you discipline, not necessarily on learning, but just discipline.

Brody: [00:18:48] Okay.

Chafik: [00:18:49] And I think school gives you a breadth of foundational knowledge that you wouldn't necessarily go pick up on your own, which has some value.

But I think learning, you really learn something by being curious and like trying it, playing with it, doing something with it. That's where I think the magic of true learning happens. So that's hard to do in school. In all classes, you may do it in one or two classes you're especially curious about. So that's how I look at school.

I think the other thing is like human interaction, right? People are talking about having the students work being remote, and people are saying, well, it's been great teaching them at home, or I know how to do it really well. And it's like, yeah, but you cannot replace the human interaction and, and you need that.

So, I worry a little bit about when people discount that. I got a lot of value out of meeting different people, people, I didn't like, people I did like, people that pissed me off sometimes,



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or people who like, you know, had opened my eyes to different things. And how else would they do that without school?

Brody: [00:19:59] Hmm. What's your, your hot take on how you would change the schooling system today, if you could.

Chafik: [00:20:08] I think that the schooling system needs a big change, like just, but I think it would be like too long of a discussion to talk about. But what I would say is the biggest is. I believe you need to tailor education more, ensure the standards are very high.

It's very easy today for education to become a lowest common denominator, versus truly challenge kids. To kind of give you an example in the Middle East, where I grew up until I was 10, when I moved, when I was 10 to the U S, my mathematics level was so high because it was so high in the Middle East.

Not because I was particularly only good at math. Because I was so challenged by it, where in the U S the mathematics level on average is not high. So, I think today my biggest challenge is, uh, you know, trying to like baby kids and make it too easy. Like, I, there's a point where I'm like, no. A way to tailor education yet really set a high standard and push people, I think it was really important. What I really do value in the U S is like it's teaching does fuel, I don't think people give enough credit to the U S education system's way of training students to make more choices.

You're familiar with like the French baccalaureate system, which is an extremely rigorous system, very high standard. You know, the friends of mine who've gone through that program are some of the like most cultured educated, smartest people I know. The problem with it is it's so rigorous that they don't actually get much choice or freedoms, to get, to the fuel kind of any sort of, uh, innovation creation, parts as much. Where in the US it does do a good job at that. And the other way, the other way people explain it as in those kinds of systems, they make you memorize a lot. And in the U S to make you really try to understand things more. So, I do value that.

So that would probably be the high level of education. I think the other end education is. You know, there's a lot of discussion around equality of gender in different roles later. Like my founding team at my company, we had more female engineers than men, but today we don't have a single one and we keep, you know, attempting to get better at that, but it's hard. Similar, you know, you have the current movements with black lives matter and all of that. And I think a lot of it, you know, it's important to do all the things people talk about, but I think education early on has a very key role in setting the expectations for people.

So very simply. Is if a woman grows up being told you're not good at math, no matter what you do later, it's really hard to undo that. And I feel like education, the education system doesn't take enough responsibility in that.



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But at the end of the day, my belief is if you don't fix it early on, you're doing a lot of like patchwork later to fix it. And that's very hard. If you're someone who grew up being told because of your gender, you're not good at X, you're probably not going to want to do it.

Brody: [00:23:43] Yeah. Also, the negative reinforcement, like you'll probably end up believing it subconsciously.

Chafik: [00:23:49] Yes, no, you will. You will.

Brody: [00:23:54] Uh, I'm wondering if there's a certain story that you can remember from high school that sort of like gives people an idea of who you were as a person back then,

Chafik: [00:24:04] I went to four high schools. Um, probably the biggest one is my last year. My last year of high school, we moved from Washington DC to Beirut.

I went to a school called the American Community School. Most people in Lebanon go to private school, you know, unless, you know, you're lower, you can't afford it at all. And the school I went to in that year, I was, um, we were 44 students and I was the only one that worked. It was not a very normal thing there.

And I worked at a company that did computers. And I was mostly doing, uh, I set up a bulletin board system in Lebanon. But there was a month during that school year where there was instability in the region and Israel was bombing Lebanon. And there, there was a clash on the border and I'm sure Hezbollah was involved and, and everything kind of shut down. And in a month, at the beginning of it, I really stayed home. So, this COVID sheltering thing. I mean, I've been around that, that goes into environments for different reasons. And, uh, I still ended up going to work sometimes, but I was the only one at the office. I was 17.

And I remember one morning I woke up that first week and my dad walks in my room and was like, what are you doing? Why are you stopped? Stop sitting in bed? Like, get out, go to work, do something. I called a friend and I said, Hey, I'm going to go to the office and do some stuff.

Do you want to come? He asked his parents, his parents are like, are you fucking nuts? Like, it's a war out there. Like stay home. You're not allowed to go anywhere. Said ok. . So, I went downstairs, got into my little, I had a, I used to drive a Honda civic from 1980 that my parents bought when they got married and they still had, which was a very reliable, awesome car.

I remember driving to the office and parking. Well, there was nobody on the road other than tanks and military checkpoints. And I went to and opened the office and, uh, I went to call a friend who was in DC, and there was probably half a mile down, there was an Apache helicopter that was bombing a building.



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And I sitting at the office , like kind of doing my thing, called this friend. And then, you know, it's like a little weirdly surreal, but basically, I mean, it literally was, targeted somebody in the building. And he's like, what is that? So, I go it's a helicopter, just bombing the building. It's like, okay, no big deal. Hang up and go about my day.

I didn't think much of it at the time. And that whole month, it was a month of that. Like I went to school, and the school wouldn't let, school open two weeks later for the seniors, but nobody else. And it wouldn't let us out. We had to stay, in the school, but we weren't allowed out.

And my dad, I was pissed cause I was like, oh, I want to go to the office. My dad called them, as I said, don't keep my son and he's allowed to leave. So, I was the only one that literally used to leave the school and go to work.

I guess the thing that I go back to is, those kind of experiences really shaped me, like when shit hits the fan. I'm like, well, we're, we're alive. Everything's fine. You know,

Brody: [00:27:46] Keep going and carry on.

Chafik: [00:27:48] Exactly. And, um, yeah. And I guess that story, like from high school probably is one of the bigger ones, because also I didn't live in Lebanon as a kid. I went every year, but we didn't really live there. I escaped during the civil war and when I was very young, like four or five years old, but otherwise it wasn't, it wasn't something that I experienced a lot of until that not period.

Brody: [00:28:13] Hmm. I'm not sure if I work ethic is the right word in that situation, but maybe grit is the word I would use to describe you in that situation.

Chafik: [00:28:27] Yeah. I mean, I was, I was young, so I wouldn't say I was sitting there working on amazing stuff, but yeah, I would say grit. I'd say also desensitized, little bit of like, you know, lack of sensitivity to the situation, but it's definitely helped me with grit. For sure.

Brody: [00:28:43] I'm curious if there's something you do today or daily, weekly, whatever, to make sure you're growing as a person, whatever that may mean.

Chafik: [00:28:53] That's great. I have a lot of thoughts about this, so we'll take a couple of minutes. I think one is, I do sit down every year and I try to do, set some goals. And do some real review kind of, you know, my values, my mission, like I do that, and I've done that more religiously than most people I know. I generally have, always have a notebook with me. And so, it's like a journal that I hear is mine.

I have all of them from the last 20 years. I have the one where I invented our product, I actually have the first page of that. And I do that, pretty regularly. I find it very therapeutic. And I'd say on the learning side that, oh, the reason I was talking about the annual thing is



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that one of my top goals for the last five years of prioritizing, is learning. Continuous learning.

Of course, we have a lot, but, uh, the, the other things is, uh, I'm , part of, a couple of organizations, one called YPO, one called EO. They're basically organizations at the core, it's about continuous learning, but they're all focused around helping entrepreneurs, CEOs, founders. And I get a lot of value out of. I think you learn a lot from peers, you know, and that's something that I work very hard to ensure I have like really powerful peers.

And that's where I say kind of crosses friendships, relationships and learning because I think people have different styles of learning. My style is I like to, like, I can go through something pretty quickly and get the gist of it and not need to understand every detail, uh,

Brody: [00:30:38] Summarization.

Chafik: [00:30:40] Yeah. Like, I, I, and that's even kind of like I read, and I won't like remember everything, but I could probably map out the general themes and frameworks and connect the dots to different things. And that's very much my learning style.

Brody: [00:30:54] When did you come up with the idea to do the yearly notebook thing?

Chafik: [00:30:58] Think I was like 20 or 21. I don't remember how it started. I always cared for, like a decent pen probably. And then at some point I was like, well, I need a decent notebook. The thing is, I'm what you'd call a thinking type. I'm a person who liked, likes to think about things. I can go deep into it. I could get lost in it. Too much. So, so then this annual thing, and there's a, there's an annual planning, which happens independent of the book. But then I usually end up starting a book around it, but sometimes I might go through two notebooks in a year. But they, they helped me get my thoughts out from my head to paper. Sometimes that makes them more real. Sometimes that makes them more thought out, frankly. And sometimes it's very therapeutic. You know, it's really helpful sometimes if something's like been, you've been stewing on it, you need to let it go writing about, it kind of really helps. So, some of it doesn't make any sense. Sometimes very personal stuff, but sometimes it's actually literally like new business ideas that I may never do.

And it's in my notebook somewhere. I did start something new about three, four years ago. I start every notebook with, because I'm writing well, I'll let you know the titles, usually of the first page, "Things I Should Keep In Mind". And I just add to it throughout the year. So that it's all in one page.

And I usually, when I finish a notebook, And I start a new one. I review the old list and I copy over what still applies. And then typically, I, I know I used to have a site, same page, you know, this was things I should keep in mind. And usually I also had another one called



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"Things I Should Keep in mind for B-Line", but right now there's one that's, uh, that I have is, uh, "Things to Keep in Mind for my Next Phase".

And I find that really, probably around once a month or so I will look at that list. And give you an example of one. It's very silly, but I have one that says, "Think Less, Do More" . Like that's all it is. Why? Well, because I tend to overthink things. So, I try to remind myself of that.

And, but I do, I mean, I don't know how familiar you are with kind of like goals setting. Usually have top three to five goals. I try to break down them a bit. I usually have an annual theme, which guides me through the year. Last year was "Make Waves". Which was an awesome theme. So, as I'm going through going this acquisition potential for the company, was very helpful to have that as my theme. And I was like, well, how the fuck would I create waves, now I'm going to go that way. Yeah. And I forgot where I read it, might've been Churchill that said it, so it's just like, when you ranked things down, you just remember it different. And I really believe in that, like when you write things down, it kind of sticks different than just thinking about it and not writing it. And it can't be on a, I mean, I'm super techy. I don't do that writing on a computer. Still pen and paper.

Brody: [00:34:16] I, yeah, I agree. I think I've heard this too before. I think it's cause like you have to use more brain cells or something to physically write it down than you do. You're thinking about it or typing.

Chafik: [00:34:29] Yeah. I wish more people took those kinds of things more seriously. I think people can easily go about life without thinking about those things and then look back and see that, uh, there's just things they didn't prioritize that they should have.

Brody: [00:34:46] Mm. Yeah. I agree. Especially cause like technology is a, I don't know a good term, but like a false blanket really, where you write down, you're like, oh, how can I forget it? It's permanent. And you just don't. Remember it. You don't check it. And that's why it's different.

Chafik: [00:35:03] Yeah.

Brody: [00:35:04] Is there a mistake you made any time in your life that you think others can learn from?

Chafik: [00:35:10] Yeah. There are a lot. Mistakes that I probably have done have been where I've focused more on making things make sense or be rational where it's just not something that could be explained. Probably work-wise is when I just don't listen to my gut. I mean the textbook one, which I'm sure you've heard, and if not, you will. Is when someone's on the team, and I know they shouldn't be on the team. And I don't do anything about it quickly. And then later becomes a bigger problem. And then you're like, fuck, we knew this,



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what the hell? Like, why are you just not listening to that? I think that's, that's happened before.

Um, you know, if you look at like my company, I always tell people I don't really regret anything, but if there was something I would have regretted, it would be, I started it in Washington, DC. And it's helped us in a lot of ways, but it has also made it challenging. It was harder for us to find talent

Brody: [00:36:27] As opposed to like if you made it in New York or California.

Chafik: [00:36:30] Yeah. Yeah. Nowadays it's better. But in those early days, I mean, 50% of the company, we transplanted to DC. And the lawyers don't understand tech, the none of the people, I mean the whole world didn't understand tech. And I, I say I was a little ignorant at the time because I thought location doesn't matter. I mean, computers is everywhere. You're you don't need it. That's one.

I would say there were times where, rather than hire people to do the specific role that I was able to do, and they would do better. I would sacrifice sometimes and keep doing it myself and use that funding to fill other roles. Where in its sometimes actually was not good, a good decision. Probably the earliest example is when we started the company, me and my founder co-founder we didn't have a, like a head of ops, like a COO or somebody. And I wish we had hired someone much earlier than we did. Because although I was able to do it, I'm not God's gift to that kind of work. And the people who are really good at it, they just run circles around me. And I think that that was a mistake.

Brody: [00:37:54] Hmm. So, delegation.

Chafik: [00:37:56] Yeah, I think the. I'm going to counter that to say, what are the things that really, I think is important, and it goes again, I think that's a common theme of relationships. You know, the times in my life where, like cultivating relationships helps me on a personal side and on a business side. Immensely.

And I think it is amazing to me, how few people do that in the world. And it's such an opportunity for everybody. And every time I look at like opportunities that opened up, it was just me being proactive and especially with relationships.

But there's like a lack of people being proactive or prioritizing people as people. Those two things can almost take you anywhere and they really can. The rest of it is hard work. It is hard work, but it's like, and like caring about like-minded people. I mean, you're going to like certain types of people and, and that's okay. Like you got to spend time with the people you enjoy, but people. It's all about people.

Brody: [00:39:11] Is there some sort of skill that you think just by knowing it will put you ahead of the curve for the future?

The logo features a stylized red letter 'T' with a white outline. To its right, the words 'Titans' and 'as Teens' are stacked vertically in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

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Chafik: [00:39:19] Is there a skill just by knowing that you'll be ahead of the curve...

Brody: [00:39:24] In any subject, it doesn't have to be business-related it doesn't have to be anything.

Chafik: [00:39:30] So I think this wouldn't, this is not my answer, but I will start with it is I think everybody has to understand a minimum amount of technology.

I just don't think, I think the people who think they could get far in life these days without it, it's pretty hard. I feel like I have a huge advantage to a lot of times where I'm in the room with business people who don't understand technology today, I think in 10, 20 years, if you don't, then you're going to be even in a worse position.

But when I look at the next 10, 20 years, I really think a lot about leadership. You know, being, and it's something that it's like a really weird term leadership, but, but, uh, and that's something I feel like I'm still growing and trying to get better at every day. But I think that is the one thing that if someone was really good at you can get anywhere.

If you want a recommendation is a Professor Francis Frei just published a book. She she's probably done one of the better jobs of explaining leadership that I've seen. But the really big thing about leadership is like, one, you have to lead it's obvious, but you have to, you actually have to lead, which means you actually have to like make some hard decisions.

The other that people don't appreciate enough is your job is to make other people be their best self. And bring their best foot forward. You need to know how to build teams, how to lead them, how to take them to that kind of goalposts that you set.

It's a hard skill, uh, and it, but it can be learned. I feel like, uh, I'm definitely a better leader than I used to be. And I definitely have a lot of room to grow. And that's the one skill that I would think it would put people ahead.

Brody: [00:41:31] Interesting. My next question is, and this is, this is the hard one. So, don't be worried if you take a bit of time to answer it is. What does success mean to you??

Chafik: [00:41:42] What does success mean to me? God, I wrote this down at some point it's in a notebook. I promise. You know, I think it's, successes, what, what of your values you know, you've been able to stick to. I think, I mean, like. Like I really value in being able to play, you know, and I want to be able to create things and I want to have a certain amount of freedom around it.

So, I think that comes down to being able to do that. And then. It's having deep, meaningful relationships again, because like, I love like a dinner with, with friends, a small group of dinner with friends. There is nothing that I enjoy more and get so much gratification from. So much joy and value, you know?



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And so, for me, success is like, obviously you need a certain amount of income, so the minimum income to be, to do what you need and so on, but you don't need a lot, you know. What, what you really need is to feel like you're working on what you really want to work on, to feel like you're making a difference in the world, and to have people around you, a community that you really connect with and care about.

Like, for me, those are. Those are the definition of success. You also want to, like, I never want to look back and have regrets. I don't want to look back and be like, what if X? And what if Y.

Brody: [00:43:15] Do you like negate those regrets by saying I don't regret that? Or do you not make regrettable decisions in the first place?

Chafik: [00:43:23] Sometimes I will make a decision that may not be the best clear decision, but I do it because I will look back and not regret it. 'Because like, like you gotta have fun. I mean, you got to enjoy life. And like, I think the other is like, you got to enjoy the journey and it's something that I do much better now than I used to, but I really re actually I do regret not doing that better.

Like, it's very easy not to enjoy the journey, but it's a journey. Time moves and you get to make the choices of what you're spending your time on. And there's not a lot of bad legitimately bad decisions. I think. You know, unless you're something harm or really detrimental, clear, like there's a lot of like lessons learned from the decision made.

And ideally you would just learn from it and move on.

[theme music up, then down for]

Brody: [00:44:21] Chafic Kazoun . Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Titans as Teens. If you want to learn more about the podcast or other episodes, visit [TitansAsTeens.com](https://titansasteens.com). for tons of information and further reading. And make sure to follow on whatever platform you're listening on.