

Shelby Stanger: There's some people you meet in the world who make you believe you can personally help change it. Mick Ebeling is one of those people. Named one of the top 50 most creative people in the world, and the recipient of awards including the Muhammad Ali Humanitarian of the Year Award, Mick's the founder of Not Impossible Labs. The company uses technology to find solutions to problems one person, one solution at a time. It was founded on Mick's core belief that nothing is impossible forever. Besides being an entrepreneur, film producer, philanthropist, and technology trailblazer, Mick's a public speaker, author, fellow podcaster, dad, and he's someone who's made it his life's mission to help people and have a lot of fun along the way. I caught up with Mick in his office in LA to learn more about Not Impossible Labs. We learned about the work they're doing like helping deaf people experience music, and using sunglasses as the base for a tool to help people with ALS communicate again, but we also got into so much more. We talked about mixed outlook on hackers, fear, failure, risk, how technology can be used for good, and how you can do the impossible. I'm Shelby Stanger and this is Wild Ideas Worth Living.

Shelby Stanger: Mick's an incredible speaker. He's done a TED talk and presented at some of the top companies in the world, so let's just dive right in and hear straight from Mick about how his career started and the genesis on Not Impossible Labs. I want to note that there's a few passionate slang words that cause this episode to be marked explicit, so just be mindful when listening near kids.

Shelby Stanger: You're full of wild ideas. You've made the most wild ideas ever happen. Let's just go to your background. You said you didn't study tech and innovation in school, but yet you do so much with tech and innovation today.

Mick Ebeling: Well it's funny our mission statement at Not Impossible is change the world through technology and story, but if you really break it down the story part is the part of the world that I understand. The technology, for me, it's a vehicle. It's a tool to actually go out and create things, to address what we call absurdities, which are just things that we see in the world that we say, "That's ridiculous, that shouldn't exist." The story part is the part that I understand from my background.

Shelby Stanger: But then you got into animation and production for big Hollywood movies and TV shows. Talk to me about that, because that's interesting.

Mick Ebeling: Well like most amazing things in life, it happened completely on accident. My wife and I just came back, we'd just gotten married. We went over to Europe. When we came back for the holidays, we slept on a friend of ours floor, just for a couple days. We crashed in Venice Beach before we went home to our parent's house for the holidays. He was working in animation, and in this new, crazy program that we'd never heard of before called After Effects. I said, "What is that?" He said, "This animation program called After Effects." I said, "What does it do?" He said, "It makes things move." I'm like, "That's amazing. How do you make money doing it?" He said, "Oh people just call you." I said, "People

just call you?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "That's a stupid way to make money, or thinking about just waiting for things to happen. You actually have to make things happen."

Mick Ebeling: He said, "What would you do?" I said, "Well I would make the phone ring. I wouldn't wait for the phone to ring." He said, "All right how about this." We were supposed to go surfing that day. He said, "Let's flip a coin. Heads we go surfing, tails there's this conference out in Las Vegas that I know there's a bunch of people who give work out for this kind of stuff." It was this big television conference. We said, "Heads we go surfing, tails we go to the conference." He flipped the coin, landed on his wrist and it was heads, go surfing. I stared at it and I reached over and I flipped it over to tails. I said, "I'm going to Vegas," which is a big deal to skip out on surfing. So I flew to Vegas and I came back with a bunch of work and that kind of launched my career, and that launched that company. That company ended up being one of the biggest companies in the animation business and it kind of set the path of what I was doing. It was completely, it was on accident but with intent, I guess, which I think is key in life.

Shelby Stanger: To put a visual on the animation stuff you've done, if you've ever seen a movie and someone's been texting and then the text is over the picture-

Mick Ebeling: The stuff we did, and I did that and then I started doing it for myself and then I started representing lots of amazing animators. One of the animators, the film you're talking about is Stranger Than Fiction, and there's this whole graphic sequence that became a cornerstone of modern day graphics and animation. We did the James Bond main title sequence for Quantum of Solace, which there's only four entities in the history of James Bond who have ever made a main title sequence. It was a big deal.

Shelby Stanger: Mick is not just a Hollywood guy. You accidentally got into Hollywood. You thrived in Hollywood with animation, and then you decide to do something a little different through your connections and you meet this guy name Tempt.

Mick Ebeling: Well decide I think is a strong word. Again, like great things in life, it was something that happened. I mean you have to make choices in life but sometimes I think when things are presented to you, it's an opportunity to walk through door number one or door number two.

Shelby Stanger: But you say yes to a lot of things. That coin flip story you just told is really interesting. A lot of people would have just gone surfing, instead of Vegas. You're like, "No let's see what happens. Let's say yes."

Mick Ebeling: As kind of corny and kind of dad advice as it is, the harder I work the luckier I get, you know. I think you have to make intentional choices but also be open to how things present themselves, you know, and not feel like there's a path. There's not a carved path on the way that life works. I think there is indications of how life has happened, and the way things have worked in the past, and you can

take that as information to put into your cake batter to figure out how you're going to bake the cake of your life, but I don't think that it always has to be that way. I think you can make choices to steer it in different directions.

Mick Ebeling: If you think about some of the people that you are probably most inspired by, most of those people didn't follow a traditional path. I think it's important in my life, it's important to how I convey what the potential future can be for people at Not Impossible and for my kids, so ...

Shelby Stanger: Well thanks for saying this because the whole point of this podcast is to interview people who have taken a nontraditional path, and taken this wild idea and made it a reality. One of your first wild, I mean you've had a lot of wild ideas but one of the biggest wild ideas that kind of launched Not Impossible, was the EyeWriter, and meeting Tempt. Can you just tell us a little story?

Mick Ebeling: The hyper condensed version of that story is that is the origin of everything that I do now. If you back that up a little bit, the origin of that is with a really good friend of mine named Ubi Simpson, who we were surfing with today. I met Ubi surfing in Costa Rica, just happened to be in the water, we hit it off, we stayed in touch. We became friends. My wife and I were about to go out on a date, he totally hijacked our date, took us to this art event. The art event was this fundraiser for this artist named Tony Tempt Quan, who is this incredible graffiti artist who had ALS. His friends had come together to put a bunch of their art on the wall that people could buy and it would raise money to take care of him. We were blown away by the love and the energy of the room. It was not your traditional gallery event. That moment was this, that was the origin of Not Impossible. Now really if you walk that out, that happened in the spring time. Holidays rolled around and what we ended up doing was for my production company, the animation company, we would give gifts to our clients, and we'd give them bottles of booze or baskets of things, tickets to things, but we decided in this situation, and a lot of this came from my wife's input. She said, "Why do we give people stuff that they don't even care about? Why don't we make a donation to a charity on behalf of someone?"

Mick Ebeling: We made a donation to the Tempt One foundation on behalf of our clients. I sat down with his father and brother to give him the check and I said, "I'd like to give you the check, thank you so much." We chatted for a second and I said, "What are you going to use the money for?" His brother said, "I just want to talk to my brother again. I just want to be able to communicate with him." I said, "Well wait a second, I've seen news reports and read articles and seen things on YouTube about Steven Hawking having this device where he moves his eyes and the robot voice talks, the machine talks for him. Steven Hawking has ALS, your brother has ALS, why don't you have that?" He said, "Too expensive." He said, "That's if you have money or insurance and we don't have either."

Shelby Stanger: Tempt is like 34 when he got diagnosed, he's young.

Mick Ebeling: At that moment when I was talking to him, he had been lying motionless in the bed for seven years. I was just blown away. That to me, and that's kind of the language of Not Impossible now. To me, that's absurd, that you could live in Los Angeles 13 miles away from where you and I are talking right now in Venice Beach, a dude is 13 miles away, we have a GMP greater than most developing nations and that guy can only talk through a piece of paper with the alphabet written on it where his family and friends run their finger over the alphabet and he blinks when their finger gets to a letter, that's not right.

Shelby Stanger: That must have been so frustrating.

Mick Ebeling: Yeah he said it was horrible. He would blink at the wrong time, his brother would blink at the wrong time. For me, staring at a father and a brother, I'm a father, I'm a brother, and I said, "That's absurd. I'm going to get you one of those. We're going to change the script here. I'm going to get you one of those Steven Hawking machines." They looked at the check and they said, "No you're not. It's not big enough." I said, "Don't worry I'm a producer. We'll figure out how to do this. We'll bob and weave and cajole and coerce and do whatever we can." They got really excited and I got really excited and they were like, "We're going to be able to talk to him again," and I got kind of caught up in the moment and I said, "You know what else we're going to do? Why don't we also figure out a way that if there's a device that allows him to move his eyes back and forth and that selects letters and the robot talks, why don't we figure out how to hack that so the eyes move back and forth and then that tracks the pupil so it moves a cursor on the screen and he can draw again, but he can draw using his eyes, so rather than just selecting letters his eyes move the stylus with the proverbial paint brush or pencil?" They said, "You can do that?"

Shelby Stanger: How did you think of that?

Mick Ebeling: Here's the deal, I didn't respond when they said, "You can do that?" I was silent. They took that as a yes. As soon as they walked out the door I'm like, "What the hell did I just do? I'm way over my skis." Then I ended up talking to people and networking with people and just meeting people. That's one of the things I think that I learned from that particular moment was most of the times people don't know what the hell they're doing. The most incredibly gifted, brilliant people in the world, most of the time they're way over their skis. They're just confident enough they're going to figure it out. I'm not putting myself in that category in any way, shape, or form, but winging it, and just kind of you fake it until you make it kind of thing, is something that's real, it's so real. I was like, "All right here we go. I don't know how I'm going to do it but I'm committing to it." That was one of our mantras here, which is commit and then figure it out. That mantra I can't tell you is so powerful for us, because you've seen absurdity, you see something that you go, "That's ridiculous. That's not right. That shouldn't be that way." Then you say, "All right, I'm going to do something about it. I don't know how, I don't know who, I don't know when, I don't know anything but I can't, as a human being just sit by and see that and just watch it take place."

- Mick Ebeling: That's what we did. I brought all these brilliant people together. My wife and I, my kids, and moved out of our house, they moved in, we pushed the tables and chairs against the wall and we hacked and made and went crazy for two and a half weeks. My job was to be a producer, to keep them on schedule and get materials and feed them, but they were the brilliant ones in this. Building that team is something that producers do, and so that's what I realized was my spidey sense, or my super power, was not necessarily being the brilliant one, but being the one who could bring the brilliance into the same room, and be able to help to channel it along the way so that brilliant things and amazing things could happen. So that's what happened. After about two and a half weeks of no sleep we took it to his room and unveiled it and he had a gang of friends, a bunch of family and friends gathered downstairs in the parking lot. We set up. We broke into the used car parking lot. We set up a big gas generator with a massive projector connected to it, wireless signal back up to the room. From his room, with all his family and friends watching downstairs, we projected on the wall this artist drawing again for the first time in seven years.
- Shelby Stanger: You basically gave him a pair of sunglasses that were like \$8 somewhere that you bought on Venice beach, it was like a coat hanger, and what else?
- Mick Ebeling: Zip ties, some duct tape.
- Shelby Stanger: Duct tape, and some code.
- Mick Ebeling: And some code and an old web camera.
- Shelby Stanger: And a web camera.
- Mick Ebeling: The web camera tracked his pupil. You take the web camera, mounted it to the wire, it focused back on the pupil so as his eyes would move back and forth, that would track the pupil.
- Shelby Stanger: Wow. Listen to that. He figured out a way to take an \$8 pair of sunglasses, duct tape, coat hanger, an old web camera and allowed this guy to have a device that, how much is the Steven Hawking device, like thousands of bucks.
- Mick Ebeling: It was super crazy expensive.
- Shelby Stanger: \$20,000 at least, or more.
- Mick Ebeling: Yeah and the team, the whole EyeWriter team, that's what it was called, the EyeWriter, we made this thing for less than \$100.
- Shelby Stanger: Less than \$100 with zero background in ocular technology or medicine.

Mick Ebeling: But what drove everybody was not what had to happen, or not the what, it was the fact that there was a dude that everybody wanted to help solve a problem for. It wasn't about, "Oh do you have an expertise in this? Do you have an expertise in this? Do you have an expertise in this?" It was more, "Are you absolutely passionate about solving this problem. Yes? Cool, you're qualified." You don't have to have any experience in it. Are you committed down to your core? We didn't say that, those weren't the words that we used, but that was the group of people that were in that room. They just were come hell or high water, were going to f'ing solve this. There's a person on the other end of this. It's not, "Hey let's make a device to help people with ALS." It's easy to walk away from that because there's not a name or a face-

Shelby Stanger: That's too big.

Mick Ebeling: It's way too big, right. I think that's one of the other things that we do at Not Impossible. Two main things came out of the whole EyeWriter experience. Well lots of things came out of it. It was the birth of Not Impossible, but we realized that when you see something that's absurd, that you commit and then figure it out. But the other thing, and this was clearly our secret sauce, unless your last name is Gates or Buffet and you've got endless cash to throw at problems and you can burn cash to get to a solution, which if you got it, great, go solve problems, but for the rest, the 99% of us who don't have that, if you attack a problem for one person, and solve it powerfully for that one person, that gives you the focus to be able to go through all the obstacles, because you know there's someone on the other side of what that problem is. Then once you solve it, then you tell the story or spread it, or start telling the world about it, and that has the potential to help many people. That's one of our underlying mantras here is help one, help many.

Shelby Stanger: This is one of my favorite things Mick said during our conversation. Help one, help many. It's something he says a lot, and it's so true. If you make a positive impact on one person, you might actually be able to use those same tools to help so many more people, and there's always a ripple effect. It's simple, but poignant advice I think we can all learn from.

Shelby Stanger: I think if you help someone else, I know when I help someone else I'm just invested a little bit more fully, and my ego is out of it. If I'm trying to do something for myself, it's hard. Then if I think about that person enough, I mean there's more than one person like that person. If you're listening to this podcast and you have a wild idea, this help one, help many model is so important. To follow, so you didn't just do this with the EyeWriter. By the way, how many EyeWriters are there now?

Mick Ebeling: We don't know, we released it to OpenSource so people can make them as they want. Here is the thing about this, walk through this exercise. I'm going to help all people with ALS. It's like a mad lib. I'm going to help all people with, fill in the blank. Now, imagine yourself walking away from that. Imagine yourself running

into some obstacles, what you see as insurmountable obstacles. You get busy, you get sick, you get a promotion and you buy a house, whatever. All these different things that happen to your life, right. Now, how does it feel when you walk away from that commitment? Now-

Shelby Stanger: It's not a person, so-

Mick Ebeling: Now say, I'm going to solve this for, I am going to help Steve, or Kim, now how do you feel when you walk away from Steve and Kim, and you look Steve and Kim in the eye and you say, "You know what? I'm so sorry. I got really busy at work. I'm not going to help you." It's a totally different emotion, right? Committing a human to human commitment I think is so much more powerful than a human to cause commitment, because I don't care who you are, people don't like to be liars. People don't like to let other people down, whether you know them or not.

Mick Ebeling: When you're searching for what you want to do with your life, I think if you have the ability to see somebody, anybody with a problem, and to be able to reach out to them and do something to help that individual, as small and as meaningless as that might sound, it's so powerful because it builds a confidence in you and it builds a stamina in you and it builds a belief in you. They're like, "Wait a second I just did it for one. I'm going to do it for someone else. I'm going to do it for someone else." One to two, two to four, four to eight, and all of the sudden you start to see and you're like, "This is something that has the potential for you as an individual to be big."

Mick Ebeling: There's a saying that I love, whenever I give a talk I always finish with this saying it's by Horace Mann. It's, "Refuse to die until you have won some victory for humanity." Horace is breaking it down pretty clean. If you've done good in the world, you can go. If you haven't, you've got to stick around a little bit longer and go do some good. You can go to your deathbed realizing, "I helped somebody," right, you've made the world, as small as it might sound, you've made the world a slightly better place and as trite or manipulative as the logic might be, imagine if every single person in the world helped one person, what happens? Everyone's helped.

Shelby Stanger: After the creation of the EyeWriter, Mick was ready to continue this mission of helping one person to help many. When he heard a story about a doctor in Sudan who had to do amputation surgeries because of all the bombings in the region, he knew he wanted to help.

Mick Ebeling: There was this young boy named Daniel who heard the bombers coming, as they come every day. He wrapped his arms around a tree, the bomb went off not far from where he was-

Shelby Stanger: Because he was in an open field, he couldn't get somewhere.

Mick Ebeling: He was tending his family's goats and cows, right, so he was in the middle of an open field. He wrapped his arms around a tree, the bomb ended up going off, his body was protected from the blast because the tree, but because his arms were around the other side of the tree, it blew off his arms. I read this story and I see the picture of this armless 12 year old boy, and the first thing he said when he woke up was, "If I could die, I would, because now I'm going to be such a burden to my family." Not woe is me, not poor me that I'm a double amputee, but I'm going to be a burden to my family. I read that and I was blown away by this doctor. I was just dumbfounded that this happened, that a 12 year old boy was armless due to a bomb, and his first thought wasn't about him, it was about his family.

Mick Ebeling: That was a commit then figure out moment. We did the same thing we did with the EyeWriter. My wife and kids and I moved out of the house, all these crazy people moved into our house, we started a hacking program in the ... By the way, just so we're clear, we failed so many times along the way. Everything looked like it was in a dumpster fire. Things weren't working, technology wasn't working, our prototypes weren't working. The entire project was a series of failures that finally led to a success. It was not like, "Oh yeah, oh yeah, let's go help this kid." It was so many issues along the way. But we went over and got into the refugee camp and we started the world's first 3D printing prosthetic lab. This was 2015, before this was really accessible technology. We made arms for Daniel, that's the boy's name. He was able to feed himself for the first time in two years-

Shelby Stanger: He's so stoked.

Mick Ebeling: So stoked. But then we left and it took us three days to get back to LA, and when we got back to LA Dr. Thompson has pictures of arms that were made by the people that we had trained, and so they were making arms for other people.

Shelby Stanger: By the time you landed in LA five arms had already been built.

Mick Ebeling: Yeah, yeah.

Shelby Stanger: Now, how many?

Mick Ebeling: Again, we don't know. Here's the thing, we created this story around what's possible, and that story went so big that people were popping up all over the place making arms for people. For us, we don't take credit for that, but it shows the power of a story when people see, "Wait a second, if these guys can go over to a war torn country where there's electrical surges and they're off the grid and they can make arms, what if we do that for our own country?"

Shelby Stanger: See what I mean? Mick's literally helping change the world. His commitment to people and his willingness to ask for help, recruit others, and to try pretty much anything allows him to make a huge difference. When we come back, we'll get

deeper into how Mick deals with the fear of failure, and what's next for Not Impossible.

Shelby Stanger: Five years ago REI took a stand. They closed their doors on Black Friday and paid all 14,000 employees to opt outside. In that moment, a movement was born. Now after five years of change, it's time for the movement to do more. This year when REI closes their doors on Black Friday and sends employees out to opt outside, they opt to act. They opt to make the fight for life outdoors an everyday activity, and they want you to join. Meet REI outside this Black Friday to be part of a nationwide day of action kicking off a year of change. Together let's leave the world better than we found out. Find out more about how you can opt to act at REI.com/optoutside.

Shelby Stanger: Making a choice to use his resources and time to change someone's life with something like the EyeWriter which he did for Tempt, or to make a 3D printed arm which he did for Daniel, that was a huge undertaking. I'm sure Mick had moments along the way where he wasn't totally sure it was going to work out.

Shelby Stanger: Failure, you talk about failure. You failed over and over again, and I think what keeps people from doing these wild ideas is fear of failure. How do you not have fear of failure?

Mick Ebeling: I would say you have fear of failure. Don't stray away from that. Don't let it deter you from moving forward, but know that fear of failure is just like breathing and you know, it's normal. If you're not afraid of failing, I don't think you're alive. Think of the most accomplished fill in the blank, athlete, scientist, doctor - there is a little failure, like Jimminy Cricket behind them that's saying, "You can't do this, you can't do this," and it drives them forward. I think to stray away from failure, look okay here's my rant. We live in a society now where everything is portrayed to be perfect, right. It's flawless and I'm beautiful and I'm so happy. That's not reality. We're all sad at times. We all have fears at times. We're all happy at times. That's just the balance of life. To stray away from things because it's going to be hard or you're afraid, everybody has that. Every single human being on this planet has that. You're doing not just yourself a disservice by not pursuing something because you're afraid it might not work, but you're doing the whole world a disservice. I get all fired up about that.

Shelby Stanger: No this is good. Then what's your self talk, because I think the difference between your self talk and someone who just doesn't go for it, is the person who is afraid of failure doesn't go for it, starts beating themselves up the minute they fail. The minute you fail you're like, "Okay just give it another shot. We're going to keep going," or you say something. What is that? I'm thinking basketball here, but like ...

Mick Ebeling: It's kind of like why not, right. Why not walk up to somebody and ask them out on a date, what's the worst thing that can happen? They're going to say no. Are you still alive? Yes. Okay cool. Can you eat that day? Yes. Okay cool, you're

better off than the majority of the world so you've got a little fear of rejection, okay cool. If you say you're going to do something, you can't quite do it. You tried, you learned a lot from that, and maybe your attempt inspired other people to go do it. Here's one of the things. We became obsessed about the concept of impossible, and here's the reality of impossible. Think about wherever you're listening to this podcast right now. Look around. Can you see anything that wasn't impossible before it was possible? Answer, no. Every single thing. Cars, chairs, these microphones that are in front of us, the clothes that we're wearing, the lights in the room. Every single thing was impossible before it was possible. So, the inverse of that is also true. If you base it off the old SAT questions, right. The inverse of that is also true. If everything that is possible today was impossible first, then that means if you base it on history, if you base it on stats, if you base it on data, if everything that's possible today was impossible first, then that means everything that's impossible today is on the trajectory, is on the path of becoming possible. There's no hocus pocus. I'm not trying to be all spiritual or guru-y, or ooga booga. That's just straight history and data. So if that's the fact, if that's the reality, then our job in this brief, microscopic period that we're on this planet, is just to do whatever we can to transition things from impossible to possible. If you can't do it, great. Two, three generations from now they're going to figure it out, but maybe something that you did contributed to that.

Shelby Stanger: What about if there's a financial risk? I find that that what keeps most people that email me, from going for it. The finances, they're scared. They're scared that they're going to be completely broke and not know what to do next.

Mick Ebeling: It's real. None of the things I'm saying... I don't want to be flippant about the things that I'm saying, but how committed are you, you know? If you're going to bitch and moan about your life and how unhappy you are, then change it, or just keep bitching about it and be miserable and make everybody around you miserable, right? If you're committing to being X, a writer, whatever it might be, go get a job at Starbucks at night. If you're that committed to it, go get a job at night, cut your stuff back, do whatever you go to do, go back to eating ramen, but if your decision is nope, nope, nope, I did that in college and I did that before and I don't ever want to do it again, cool, then that's your decision. Don't torture yourself over it. If your decision is eating ramen and working at a night job so that you can do your stuff during the day or vice versa, then just call it as it is. If that's more important, than that's more important, or just say, "I'm committed to doing this and I'm going to do whatever it takes to do it," and then maybe after awhile, here's the reality, maybe after awhile you're like, "You know what? I guess I'm not as committed to this as I thought I was. I guess it is more important for me to have a better quality of life," or whatever it might be. Cool. You did it. It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all, right. You might as well go for it, give it a shot. You're going to be a better human being for actually giving it a whirl.

Shelby Stanger: You never regret the risks you took.

Mick Ebeling: Never.

Shelby Stanger: You never say, "I wish I didn't take that risk."

Mick Ebeling: Totally. Again, the death bed talk. Nobody ever says, "Oh you know, I wish I wouldn't have quit my job to go see if I can build this company or do something else. I really wish I wouldn't have done that."

Shelby Stanger: Okay so the hacker thing is really interesting to me too, because I was reading your book while my website got hacked and I was like, "I hate hackers," and I'm reading you love hackers. You figured out a way to not only use hackers for good, but in general, technology for good. This is interesting to me because in the beginning of the year I started this podcast season off with an episode on unplugging and how we need to be more in person, but you have figured out a way to use technology to let people see, give people arms, and now you're working on something else that I'd love for you to talk about, and just your overall view of technology as being a conduit of good for the world.

Mick Ebeling: Technology is just a tool, right, like anything else. I think if you would go back in time, think about things that happened that gave people the power to actually do things, right.

Shelby Stanger: Lightbulb.

Mick Ebeling: Electricity.

Shelby Stanger: Computer. Electricity came before that.

Mick Ebeling: Just see it as such, you know. I think that unplugging, I will kvetch and bitch just like the next person about the fact that we've become a society of people that are constantly looking down at screens and not up and what's possible, but if you see they're like, "All right hang on a second. I'm just going to use this as a tool. It's just leverage. It's just a hammer and I'm going to use that to actually do some good in the world." Then just recontextualize it. I think at the end of the day, anything in this world can be recontextualized to do good. That's a brave statement, and I'm sure you're going to get emails from people that are like, "No what about this?" You can take me to task on it if you want, but everything has the ability that if channeled in the right way can actually do some good.

Shelby Stanger: You can email Mick directly. [laughter.]

Shelby Stanger: What's Not Impossible Labs working on now? They just finished up a project that allows deaf people to experience music, and next they're using a device most of us use everyday to help solve food insecurity.

Shelby Stanger: I want to ask you about what's next, but I learned a little bit about what's next while I was in the water. It's interesting because it uses cell phones. Hunger: Not Impossible.

Mick Ebeling: Everything that we do here focuses and starts, we have a design process, and the first part of the design process is recognizing something that's absurd, something that you see and you're like, "Wait a second, that's not right. It shouldn't be that way." The reacting, rebelling, revolting against that. Come hell or high water, whatever you have to do, you figure out a way to solve that, and we used technology as a way to solve that to create some kind of better quality of life, or some kind of accessibility or solution.

Mick Ebeling: One of the things, and we're working right now in a myriad of different places. The things that you're seeing right here, these are devices that we created a way for the deaf to experience music using their skin as the ear drum as opposed to their ear to get a signal to the brain to try, we broke music into it's separate parts, separate channels and then projected that to different parts of the skin so your ankles would experience guitar, your wrist drums, your chest vocals, the bass ... So that's something that we're super excited about, and that's going to transcend and transform how music is experienced for everybody. Everybody five years from now will, this is my bold prediction, everybody five years from now will be going to shows or at home feeling and hearing music, not just hearing music. It's kind of like why would you only drive in first gear.

Shelby Stanger: What does it feel like for you when you put this on, as a not deaf person.

Mick Ebeling: We'll have to have you try it out so you can talk about it.

Shelby Stanger: I'm so interested.

Mick Ebeling: It feels transcended. You feel like the music is in you, because it truly is. It's vibrating in your skin to your brain, so you can quote hear the music through your skin. The brain is this fantastic neuro plastic organ that it can learn how to understand how to see without the eyes working, how to hear without the ears working, how to smell. You smell and hear and see and taste through your brain. These are just the eyes and ears and nose and mouth, are vehicles to get those signals to the brain, but you can get there other ways, and it's been proven time and time again. This book that you see right here by a friend of mine, Erik Weihenmayer, he's this incredible blind climber, mountain climber. He's climbed all seven summits. He's just a badass. We did this demo at South by Southwest where we put this thing called the Wecab on him, and it was a camera on a little headband that was connected to a little electric plate. He put it in his mouth and I would put a card on the table in front of him and he could read the card by the signal being projected on his tongue, and he was able to read the card. People thought it was a magic trick, so we passed the cards out to the audience and they came up and did it and they were like, "Oh my god, that's

amazing." That's a perfect example. You don't see with your eyes, you see with your brain. The eyes are a vehicle to that. We're just realizing now different ways that the brain has the potential to see or smell or touch and so Music: Not Impossible is about crafting that way, a new way for the brain to experience music. It's like, as a human, as the human species, that's never really been done before. Our brains will evolve and grow the more and more and more that that's done, we'll have that ability to start to understand music just through vibrations, and not necessarily through "sound."

Shelby Stanger: I didn't even know about Music: Not Impossible, because I thought I was asking you about Hunger: Not Impossible.

Mick Ebeling: You know what, I got distracted.

Shelby Stanger: Project Hunger.

Mick Ebeling: It's called Hunger: Not Impossible.

Shelby Stanger: Hunger: Not Impossible.

Mick Ebeling: Music: Not Impossible started because we saw how the deaf were experiencing music and we said, "Let's figure out a better way. That's absurd, let's change that." Then we came up with Music: Not Impossible. Hunger: Not Impossible came out of us recognizing the fact that there's close to 50 million people in this country, in the United states, that struggle to put food on the table every day.

Shelby Stanger: What's that number?

Mick Ebeling: Close to 50 million. Imagine 50 million people aren't sure where their next meal is going to come from. That's crazy, right? We said that's absurd, let's change it. We went - help one, help many. We chose our one, and it was Homeless Youth, so we went down, there's a group down the corner from around our office called Safe Place for Youth, and we started interviewing kids down there who were homeless in Venice Beach. You know the one thing that they prize most more than anything in life, is a cellphone. We said, "All right, we weren't expecting that." We figured out this ridiculously simple way that kids, that a charity, Safe Place for Youth, or Covenant House, or United Way, or YMCA, or Boys and Girls Club, it doesn't matter. The input the cellphone numbers of their constituents, of the kids or the veterans or whoever it is, whoever the nonprofit serves, and it sends them a simple text message that like Uber or AirBnB or Lyft, it gives them a geo-proximate solution to where they are that allows them to go and get a meal that's paid for by the charity that the kid or the vet or whoever gets to walk in and claim at a restaurant, and they get to walk in and claim the meal and walk out. The charity or the school or the church or whoever, gets to serve their population that they're trying to serve, and they don't have to actively be doing face to face, or making food or basically started a restaurant in the charity which has all these other costs and problems. The restaurants get to

get business sent to them, and it's discounted but they get to make money when they wouldn't otherwise. Then the kid gets to walk in and claim a meal and not have that, the guilt or that shame of having to beg for the meal, or ask someone to pay for the meal, or "Hey mister outside, can you ... " They get to walk in and just like every other kid, they get to walk in and claim a meal to go pick it up and leave. So you've got this incredible, simple, ridiculously simple text-based ecosystem that's getting kids fed. We're hyper excited about it because not only are we going to be able to deploy this in the most ridiculously simple way, but everybody wins. The charity wins because they're taking care of the kids, or their vets or whoever they're taking care of. The restaurants win because they're making a couple bucks, and then the person that they're serving gets to eat that day so they don't have to worry about that and they can think about the next thing for them. The crazy thing about it is almost every single kid we met with and was part of the program has said, "Sweet, now I can worry about school. Now I can worry about getting a job. Now I can worry about my future." It wasn't like, "Sweet I'm going to go to the beach and just mess around today." It was, "Now I get to think about my future now." You just take care of that one basic, Maslow hierarchy of need, which is food and water, which is more important than shelter, right. You can live in a mansion with no food for probably 5-7 days before you're dead. You can live on the streets for the rest of your life but if you're fed every single day, there's a better chance for you to live. I'm being dramatic but that's why we're so excited about Hunger: Not Impossible.

Shelby Stanger: It's not just in LA.

Mick Ebeling: No we're going to be deploying this across the country.

Shelby Stanger: How did you find the restaurants?

Mick Ebeling: The restaurants, just any restaurant that has online ordering. That's the only kind of criteria. If you can order online then they can tap into our system.

Shelby Stanger: How can people help and get involved?

Mick Ebeling: This has just gone big for us.

Shelby Stanger: This is going to launch though in December.

Mick Ebeling: This is going to launch in November, December, and what we're going to do is craft a way, this is a perfect example of commit then figure it out. As I speak to you right now, this is not figured out, so I'm committing to something right now that I'm going to have to leave and go and tell my team, "Hey guys we just made a commitment to seven billion people on Shelby's podcast. We've got to pull this off."

Shelby Stanger: That's fantastic.

Mick Ebeling: We want people to be able to go, they can go onto our website and in that spirit of help one, help many, we want them to be able to chose a kid and feed a kid for a year. Feed them one time a day, two times a day, whatever, but to feed a kid for a year. I know we talked a little about this beforehand, if you're listening to this and you're thinking I'm not sure what I'm doing with my life, or what my purpose is, or if I should keep my job, or I should quit and do something else, first of all go for it. Whatever you think you shouldn't do, go do it because like we said earlier, you're never going to look back and regret the risks that you took. What if you also said, "All right I don't know what I'm going to do with my life right now. I don't know what my calling is. I don't know how I can support a bigger purpose, what if I just chose one kid and fed one kid for the year? What if me and a friend-" Maybe you're listening to this and you don't have a tremendous amount of additional money to throw at something. Great, then let's get five friends together and let's feed one kid for a year. It's one of those things that you can wake up and know, "All right. I don't have all my shit figured out and I'm going through my struggles, but at least I know that I'm caring for another human being right now and I'm solving a problem, a massive fundamental issue for another human being." I think that kind of puts things into perspective a little bit for you.

Shelby Stanger: Yeah. Mick thank you so much. I mean you're doing so many great things that you started out of nothing. I think if people go into the new year and they're trying to make a resolution, no just listen to this podcast with Mick and take his advice. Start somewhere. Any advice on how to find that purpose?

Mick Ebeling: Finding your purpose is, two things, you have to listen and you have to be patient. You have to listen to yourself and what motivates you, how you feel when you experience certain things, and whether or not that's a feeling that you want to either stray away from or gravitate towards, and then be patient if you don't have that, if you don't wake up knowing exactly what your purpose is. Be patient. It's a journey. The fact that you're on the journey and you're contemplating what your purpose is, it has to start there. But just be aware. Be aware. Be patient, but also be diligent and be persistent on the search.

Shelby Stanger: Mick thank you so much. This has been an incredible interview, and I think a lot of people are going to be super charged for the new year.

Shelby Stanger: Be aware, be patient and you'll find your purpose. Mick was on a completely different career track when he found out about Tempt and he decided to do everything he could to help him, which led to the EyeWriter. People like Mick Ebeling and his crew, they're changing the world one person, one project at a time. Mick, thank you so much for the work you're doing and for spreading the Not Impossible story and teaching us all that nothing is impossible forever. You've definitely made me feel more empowered and I imagine you've made a lot of listeners feel more empowered too. Thanks also to your crew, Adam, Jordan and the Not Impossible Labs team. Thanks for taking me out surfing in

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Venice Beach, and thanks for making sure other people have the resources to take your work and use it for even more good.

Shelby Stanger: This podcast is produced by REI with help from Annie Fastler and Chelsie Davis. Tune in week after next for a conversation with Whole 30 founder, Melissa Hartwig Urban, we talk about not only how she started the Whole 30, but what keeps her grounded and tips for how to navigate this holiday season. As always, we appreciate when you subscribe, rate, and review the show wherever you listen. The reviews are hilarious and heartwarming. I love them. Keep them coming and remember, some of the best adventures often happen when you follow your wildest ideas.