

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/ending-secrecy-expanding-careers/>

Andy Dunn, author and co-founder of Bonobos, explains his struggles with secrecy after his first manic episode and shares the story of his second episode. He encourages the entrepreneurship community to make disclosure of mental health issues a career-enhancing move. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a hotline for individuals in crisis or for those looking to help someone else. To speak with a trained listener, call 988. Visit 988lifeline.org for crisis chat services or for more information. The Crisis Text Line is a texting service for emotional crisis support. To text with a trained helper, text SAVE to 741741. It is free, available 24/7, and confidential.



Transcript

- So you have this manic experience 00:00:05,340 the first time in your life in college, you're in a fraternity.. Your fraternity brothers actually all come to the hospital.. - Yeah.. 00:00:14,040 - Everybody's seen you and also your friends and family 00:00:17,400 have seen you in the ward.. And then can you share what happens after? - If it weren't so difficult, 00:00:25,320 it's sort of fascinating what happens.. There is a small group of people who know exactly what happened, in my case, my family and my close friends who never talked about it.. And then everyone who I met after that who never knew what had happened.. So it was a secret from everyone I would meet going forward.. It was known by a select group of loved ones who never discussed it.. And so I wrestled with what you might call a traumatic memory..

It was once a month or so, I would think about it.. I would have a rising panic, oh my God, I have this thing.. And we do something really cruel with bipolar and other mental illnesses, which is we conflate the identity with the illness.. We say someone is bipolar rather than they have it.. We would never say someone is cancer.. That would be a terrible thing to say.. We say they have cancer.. And yet with mental illness, the moment that you are diagnosed, you no longer just have to deal with this new illness, you actually are the illness in the eyes of society.. Imagine being a disorder.. And that was how I felt for 20 years..

And then the beautiful thing that happened in my life story is when the mania recurred 16 years later and it caused a reckoning for me and for everyone.. Then it was, we were all in a different world.. We were in a world of transparency, acceptance.. How do we deal with this? How do we fight it? How do we navigate it? And it was a funny thing.. You know, and I'll just give the headlines on the story.. I had a second catastrophic manic episode in 2016.. I at that time was in a different place.. I was 36 years old.. I had an awesome girlfriend, I was ready to settle down.. Bonobos had 600 employees, we had 60 stores..

We'd raised, as you alluded to, over a hundred million of capital.. We had over \$100 million business.. Had a lot of responsibility.. I had a lot more to lose in some ways, depending on how you define loss, and I had this terrible episode, same thing, messianic delusion.. This time, I thought I was a hybrid of the Dark Knight and the president, which by the way is a badass combo, right? Can you imagine it? Batman in the Oval Office? And unfortunately, after a week in the hospital and I

was ready to be discharged, I was discharged straight in the handcuffs.. Four NYPD police officers arrested me.. They took me straight to the 6th Precinct in Greenwich Village across from my favorite restaurant.. I'd never even noticed it was there.. And I was arrested and charged with felony and misdemeanor assault because during the mania, I was naked, I was trying to run into the street as this Batman/president hybrid and I struck my now wife and now mother-in-law.. And that led to a very difficult six months afterwards of going through the legal system, trying to figure out if I was gonna have to step down from the company..

And most importantly, was I gonna lose the love of my life? Was I gonna lose this job that I cared for so deeply? Was I gonna lose my reputation depending on what news may come out of it? And I remember talking to my arresting officer in jail and I said, as he took my mugshots, "Are these gonna be on the internet?" And he turned to me and he goes, "Dude, you're not the founder of Google.. You just sell pants." And it was a moment of comic levity, but it was true.. I think for a lot of people, we feel like what happens with mental health or mental illness can limit or ruin our career.. And so part of the journey here is how do we make disclosure of mental health issues and of mental illness, not a career-limiting move, but maybe even one day, almost like a career enhancing move? Like this person has this superpower and we're all attuned to it, we're all here to help that individual stay healthy 'cause we recognize that there's some beauty in it and there's some potential for creativity and high performance, depending on what it is.. And I think we can.. And you raised Elon, and I think he's a fascinating example, right? He's the most influential entrepreneur on the planet and he took some interesting venues disclosing being on the autism spectrum on "Saturday Night Live," and then apparently disclosing having bipolar disorder in his new book.. I can't comment on any of that, but I think we come to expect people who are doing innovative things to have something quote unquote crazy about them.. And I'll just close this little section of our talk with my editor at Penguin Random House wanted to call the book "Here's to the Crazy Ones" after the Steve Jobs' Apple commercial, after he got fired from Apple and came back and talked about how effectively the crazy ones are the ones that change our society.. I took umbrage at that title 'cause I didn't wanna additionally stigmatize the idea of quote unquote being crazy.. I think it's a choice of someone who is dealing with mental health issues or mental illness if they wanna self-describe in that way..

I actually don't mind, you know, self-describing that way, but I didn't wanna impose that on anyone else.. And so I think that's kind of the job here, the job to be done is how do we unlock the potential, if we can call of that quote unquote craziness, maybe better put neurodiversity, but not be taken down by it, not have a do harm to ourselves and to others...