

Research and Innovation Podcast – “Work in Progress”

Episode 2 – Letting Go of the Script: Brandon Baker on Authentic Work and Self-Discovery

Speakers: Dr Sanjay Popat and Brandon Baker

[00:00:05] **Sanjay:** Hello and welcome to the Work in Progress series as part of the Research and Innovation podcast. My name is Dr Sanjay Popat, and I'm a Chartered Psychologist and Research Fellow specializing in mental health at work. Today I'm joined by Brandon Baker. Brandon became best known for his lead role in Disney Channel's Johnny Tsunami, a film that became a defining part of many childhoods and left a lasting cultural impact.

He also appeared in the Proud Family, Even Stevens, and the Jungle Book: Mowgli's story. But beyond the screen, Brandon's journey offers something deeper. Like many who experience early success, his path has involved navigating identity, transition, and the question of what comes next. Brandon, it's a real pleasure to have you here. Welcome to the Work in Progress series.

[00:00:50] **Brandon:** So excited to be here. Thank you for having me.

[00:00:52] **Sanjay:** Brandon, the reason I wanted you on the podcast is because you've done a few other interviews and podcasts over recent years, some geared towards the nostalgia of Disney Channel, some probing at the shift in your career choice, but I noticed a theme running throughout your answers: this openness about not knowing yourself, but also a desire for authenticity. And that's why I thought you'd be perfect for a podcast all about being a work in progress. And whilst I've seen you mention mental health, I haven't heard you have a conversation dedicated to it, at least not in the public domain. So I'm really excited about that.

So take me back to the beginning. Before Johnny Tsunami, before the recognition, who were you as a child?

[00:01:34] **Brandon:** I'm, I'm really excited to be here and talk about this, just like, as you said. This has been something that I've mentioned kind of throughout, so to be able to dive deep. I'm famously known within my group of friends as the type of person who will unknowingly get you logged into a 30 minute conversation, and make you late for work, talk about life and love. So yeah, perfect place for me to be. I think, to some degree I've kind of always been that kind of person. Growing up when I was, I don't know, five, I was kind of the first, I was the first born within my family, but I was also the first born within my parents' friend group. And so I was the one kid generally speaking at my parents' parties with all of their high school friends, things of that nature. There's one specific story where I'm hanging out with one of my, you know, uncles, quote unquote uncles. He's drinking a beer and I'm asking him at probably around the age of five, like, what happens after you die? To which he looks at me and he is like “who the heck is this kid?”. And he was basically telling me, and everyone's laughing, you know, like, “hey, hey kid, stop. Like, you know, harshing my buzz here. But that is to some degree kind of always who I've been, or at least since as far back as I can remember, or at least since my parents have told me, I've been a little bit more introspective than people sometimes believe that I am.

I find that I'm a pretty good extrovert and therefore people think that I'm more of an extrovert, but I've always been someone who wanted to get into those deeper conversations, a deeper knowledge of self, a deeper knowledge of what we're doing here on this planet. And that really hasn't stopped.

[00:03:10] **Sanjay:** That's really interesting. And then obviously you, you got these major movie roles, the Johnny Tsunami, Jungle Book - you became famous and, and still to this day, these films are cult classics and many of, the people from my generation still watch them over and over again. But what was that fame like as a child and how did it influence how you started to see yourself?

[00:03:32] **Brandon:** Yeah, that was a trip. Experiencing that fame. You know, my early identities before acting were of an artist, of a hockey player. You know, I was good in school and then acting kind of was this thing that was randomly thrown in. A good family friend of ours, their daughter in acting and so, you know, they basically said "hey, do you wanna give this a shot?".

My parents asked me, my brother and sister - "do you want to try this and maybe get a commercial help, help pay for college?". I happened to be good at it. I happened to get incredibly lucky. But it really was that, it was kind of this, you know, one of these various components of self, of identity, that honestly popped off.

So it wasn't this thing of like, oh my gosh, I wanna be a famous actor. I wanna be a thespian with a capital T. But I found this like early success and it kind of catapulted me, my family, in a in a myriad of ways that was incredibly exciting, but also pretty complex and pretty confusing to be an 11-year-old and all of a sudden I'm working full-time. And I grew up in Orange County, which is about an hour outside of LA so I didn't know anyone who was going through this. This was also, you know, in like the late nineties, so there wasn't a ton of, you know, knowledge of like kid actors or what this might be like. There wasn't documentaries about what it's like to be a child actor. And so that fame was, yeah, it was challenging in the sense of, it provided me a lot of opportunity, but it changed a lot of my relationships, my friends, even within my own, like extended family, you know, there'd be certain uncles or aunties that loved it and championed me in a way that kind of gave me more attention within the family. And then therefore there's some other aunties and uncles that kind of gave me crap about it and not on, you know, looking back, were kind of trying to kick me down a little bit, almost as a means of that exaltation from the other relatives. You know, and yet again, I'm 12 and being like, why is everyone being so weird about this?

I do remember one time, you know, I'm 14/15, going through puberty. I'm at a theme park, with my buddies, trying to like meet girls. And anyway, as we're like in the line for the theme park, you know, it's like snaking around as you're getting onto the rollercoaster. One by one, people are starting to recognize me to the point where there is, once I get off of the rollercoaster, this big, I don't know, 70, 80 kids waiting to like meet me.

And that was the moment of like "whoa, this is affecting my ability to just be a normal person". And I looked at my buddy and I was like "run!". And we just like sprinted away from there just to get away from it. So it was this thing of you know, I always wanted to be a, a normal kid. And I was, I was cognizant of that in the moment. There was times growing up where I was offered the opportunity to be homeschooled to, not go to my normal high school. And I, I told my parents, I'm like, I don't want to do that. Even if I'm gone for a lot of the time, I wanna maintain my

friends, I wanna maintain some sense of normalcy. And so, yeah, I always stayed in public school and finished high school like a normal kid.

[00:06:43] **Sanjay:** I think that's so interesting 'cause the world had already given you an identity before you learned who you were in those formative years. And I think as a society that's what we tend to do. We tend to put together who we are with what we do for our work. I mean, if you go to a party or an event. First question is, "what's your name?", second question is "what do you do for a living?". And you say that the identity can be quite self-limiting, so "I'm the guy that does this, so I can't do that". Talk to me a bit about why you wanted to step out of acting, but also what the consequences of feeling so boxed into it felt like.

[00:07:18] **Brandon:** Yeah, I, you know, in, in terms of getting out of acting, there was always a part of me that felt, there were maybe two roads in which my, my life would've gone down. And, and it definitely diverged when acting became this big thing. Yet again, when I got into it, it was like, oh, maybe you'll get a commercial. Never ever got a commercial. Never booked a commercial once. But you know, when Jungle Book happened and these other like TV shows and films, it kind of was a runaway train. No one saw that coming. And so it did feel, you know with those changing relationships. But I, you know, within, like my family, but I lost a lot of friendships as well.

I was gone so much, working that my friends weren't there. You know, as I was talking about before my, one of my early identities was as a hockey player, I started missing practice, so therefore I wasn't allowed to play in the games. And so that identity, was gone, couldn't even exist. And so, there was for a long time this feeling of, oh, I feel like I've gotten part of my, my life path or my authentic organic life path taken away from me by this other thing, which is really, really cool, but it wasn't something that I chose, it kind of came to me. As I've gotten older, I realize the blessing in that to some degree. And I love when things do come my way in that regard. But I've also, you know, done a lot of work internal with therapists and, and other means, to figure out what my internal compass is and how to discern what is authentic for me, who is my organic true self within a given moment, knowing that that is always shifting, and, and how do I fold in, yeah, the acting as part of that.

[00:09:04] **Sanjay:** And you said in your twenties it took you a while to figure out who you were once you'd made a decision to kind of explore other things or reconnect with some of the things from your childhood. Can you talk me through that process of almost dismantling one of these identities that the world had given you? Because I suppose you would have to reconstruct who you are, when other people may already know who they are, but you'd had this very unique situation in your childhood. How did you reconstruct your identity?

[00:09:31] **Brandon:** Oh, it's really simple. It's a three step process. Joking, no.

[00:09:35] **Sanjay:** Maybe I can write a book about the three-step process.

[00:09:37] **Brandon:** You probably, yeah, exactly. Just three pages. Yeah, I, you know, in my twenties I found myself, in a relationship and, my girlfriend at the time basically said "hey Brandon, we're not gonna continue in this relationship unless you go to therapy, you're depressed". There was a kind of a mini intervention stage by my parents and my girlfriend at the time. And so thankful for, for that relationship and that person for helping me get to therapy. And from there, yeah, it was just many years of honestly figuring out how to be honest and

truthful with myself. I found that there were certain narratives, yeah, that I had constructed in order to protect my identity or who I thought I was or who I thought my family was or, yeah, to, to be positive almost. I don't wanna say toxic positivity, but, but to have a positive narrative on how things were going in my life. And that was brought on a lot because of the culture of being an actor where you go into an audition room, you're constantly selling yourself, you're constantly pitching. Rarely do you go into an audition room, and they're like, "how things are going?" and you're like, honestly, I haven't booked anything in a while, and things are not looking great. Like that's what like no casting director wants to hear. It's always like, oh yeah, I've been working on this and this is going well, and oh, so excited to see everyone. And I'd found that I'd kind of taken on that role within my own life, to where I wasn't privy to certain parts of myself that were misaligned or that were sad, or that were broken. And so in terms of figuring out how to extrapolate that identity and put it back together, it was a long process of, yeah, trying to learn what it is that I really, really wanted. Kinda going back and really looking at what I had swept under the rug and analyzing, oh, these were the parts in my past that weren't that great, that I didn't have the opportunity or didn't have the wherewithal to speak to because I was 11 or 12 or even 18, you know, and still not knowing who I truly wanted to be.

The, the thing about the acting thing is - I did have a good amount of success and it did provide me a lot of opportunities. I got to travel, it paid for my schooling, and so many people in my life, looked fondly upon it. Right? I'm even here right now talking to you largely because of that. And so that kind of insulated me from, from being honest and truthful with myself because grandma thought that it was really cool, and because I had an agent and a manager and these other casting directors that I really did enjoy working with. I just hadn't learned how to hold more than one idea as true at the same time, like I can feel that some of these things were maybe not fully aligned, and I can also still appreciate the beautiful things that it gave me. Those things seem to be, diametrically opposed to one another and finding that the truth in that was learning to hold both at the same time.

[00:12:46] **Sanjay:** Yeah, that's really, really fascinating 'cause both things can be true at the same time. It's not necessarily that they are opposed and it takes a while to, to figure that process out. But you said in a few of your interviews that you were depressed. You, you reached, a level of clinical depression and you've partly answered that there, but to what extent was that related to these issues of identity? Was it all because of that or were there other factors at play, during your, your childhood and adolescence?

[00:13:13] **Brandon:** Yeah, I think it was mostly my identity, which yeah, is part of my childhood and adolescence. But, you know, before I'd got into acting, I was a pretty self-regulated, happy kid, kind of being by myself and only when acting was introduced did I feel, you know, overwhelmed or overworked or that I'm living a life that isn't fully my own.

[00:13:43] **Brandon:** And so it seemed that the depression, was largely because of that and, and, you know, various components and relationships that branched out from there. So, relationships with my, my parents about, you know, having conversations that I don't even know that I even fully ever had with them, but of why did you help me get into this? Did you ever think about what, the potential causes of this would be, the ramifications of this would be? Not that those were feelings that I truly had of like resentment, because I really did have a good childhood. I mean, I do look at some of these other child actors that I grew up with, and comparatively at least, mine was, was pretty healthy. You know my, my parents weren't asking me to get into acting in order to pay the bills. I luckily was never, ever put into any traumatic or abusive situation on set, things of that nature.

[00:14:45] **Brandon:** But it was more of, huh, I, I never had these kind of nuanced conversations about how my life kind of got, you know, in some ways felt like, gotten taken away from me. That, that kind of runaway train analogy. Those are hard conversations to have with a parent, or at least with my parents. They're open to it, but also I understand that those are, yeah, pretty mature conversations to have with someone because the times in which I have had those open conversations with them, I, I can feel their, their guilt or their sadness or their surprise. My parents both come from, you know, generally speaking - pretty poor backgrounds. And so the opportunities that they gave my brother and sister and I, and specifically with this acting thing, this was a pipe dream. This was an incredible, not even a dream come true, but they never even imagined it for themselves.

So to have this opportunity given to their son, they were just like, oh my gosh, this is incredible. But I, I don't think that they thought about the potential ramifications of it, and that's okay. This is where like several things can be true at once. Where I think when I was younger I tried to have some of these nuanced conversations, but I found them to be painful for my parents in some regard. And luckily, I have plenty of people that I can talk to about these things, myself included, to really kind of get through them, find some peace. And to still enjoy my relationship with my parents, regardless if I had a conversation with them or not.

[00:16:16] **Sanjay:** And what did it feel like initially when these identity markers, things like the auditions, the recognition, the, the routine of your days - when they went silent? How did that feel? Was it reassuring for you 'cause you were looking at pursuing other things? Or was it like, "oh, this is a bit scary" 'cause I haven't found anything else to replace it with?

[00:16:36] **Brandon:** Yeah, definitely felt scary. And, you know, my decision to leave acting was a long one. I mean, I had that, that kernel, that seed within me of, is this what I wanna do or is this just what I know? And that was with me for years before I officially left it behind. I, you know, I would go to these auditions in my twenties, now that I'm in therapy, and I hadn't fully been honest with myself saying, I don't wanna do this anymore.

It was more of, this is still a great opportunity. And maybe there's still, you know, some meat on the bone for me to chew on. I would go to these auditions that I would know within myself that I wasn't giving it my all, that I, I wasn't fully committed. And so then there's like a guilt there, and there's a shame there, and there's a judgment against myself because I hadn't fully allowed myself to let go of that identity because yet again, that identity had had been established longer than I'd been alive at that point, before I'd even gone through puberty, before I have any ability to self-actualize. And so it felt as though I was somewhat trapped. Now, when I did fully leave, I left - I think maybe when I was around my like late, late twenties, and I moved to Colorado, a few states over from California, just with a, a girlfriend at the time. She was going to grad school and we moved out to Colorado. We broke up within six months, she moved back to California and I was kind of all alone in Colorado and I thought, you know, if I go back to California now, I'll have not learned anything from this chapter in life. This will have just been a blip on my radar. And luckily I did stay, it was quite lonely. I didn't know anyone and I didn't even really know who I was. And that was really scary at first. But then eventually that same sentiment of, I know no one, no one knows me here, I don't know who I am, became a positive thing. And because I didn't even have the ability to go back into acting, then I was able to truly enjoy that silence and enjoy the idea of constructing a new yeah, version of self.

[00:18:42] **Sanjay:** Yeah, it was almost like a freedom that forced you to identify with these other things in your life. Just touching on that, you said on your website, so you spend a lot of

your time now currently officiating weddings. But you said on your website whilst I happily don't act anymore - that's a really powerful statement. And you, you used the word resentment earlier and that there was no resentment about it. Talk to me about how you've reached this place, about where you're, you're fully okay with who you are, but at the same time, you're happy you don't act anymore.

[00:19:11] **Brandon:** Yeah, I think part of that goes back to there was never a part of me that thought, oh, this is what I'm meant to do. This is like my ultimate goal.

[00:19:19] **Brandon:** So, the career that I did have, which was, you know, 10, 15, almost 20 years - was pretty full. And I feel really proud of the career that I had.

[00:19:31] **Brandon:** And the fact I was able to pivot yet again in my, in my late twenties, having that long of a career. So it didn't feel it, it doesn't feel as if there's something that I, I left behind or that I didn't really get to do. Regardless of if I tried my hardest, I mean, there's certain auditions that would've been great to have gotten. But it doesn't feel like, thankfully, I don't feel that I have any regrets there. In terms of the happily leaving it behind, I think part of that is really enjoying, being who I am today. I mean, working really hard to, to love who I am. Not that I'm always, you know, not that I always like who I am. I mean, there's definitely moments and days and, and, and periods of a given year to where I'm feeling, hmm I, I wish to be different and I wish to change or grow in this direction.

But, you know, the, the whole idea of being an actor, of playing someone else, of being, emotionally and mentally and physically malleable in a given moment in order to portray someone else's life, to portray you know, some, some less than comfortable feelings of, of grief or anger or rage or, you know, any of those things. It's a pretty crazy thing to do. It's like a wild thing. Like I don't typically go through my life on a given moment's notice being like, oh, let's see if I can, can access some grief and some sorrow here and then cut, and then let's go back and let's do that seven more times. But in the very beginning of the scene, you won't have any of it, and you'll go through this huge rollercoaster of emotion to, to pinpoint the exact way to model grief or that sorrow. That is, was just honestly a lot on my nervous system.

[00:21:23] **Brandon:** I think certain people have a, have a disposition in order to be that malleable, and I think I really enjoy, the steadiness. I mean, look, I, I actually enjoy crying. I, I enjoy the emotional spectrum, but I like it when it's been earned within my own life.

[00:21:40] **Sanjay:** Yeah, that's, that's so interesting again, because the, the biology, when you're screaming and shouting and crying, it's still there, isn't it? And it's not as if we can just say to our, our bodies, actually, this is pretend for a minute and it's gonna be better. You know, we do actually feel those emotions, so I can imagine that being very taxing.

But thinking about your new career, the officiating the weddings, why does that make you happier? Is it more aligned with your values? Is it more fulfilling? What is it about it that has such a good effect on your mental health?

[00:22:11] **Brandon:** So many things. Yeah, I'm typically out in these beautiful spots on these beautiful wedding days. So in terms of regulating and mental health, being out in nature is one of my favourite ways to do it. Going from you know LA traffic commutes to now being up in these

gorgeous mountain vistas or in these beautiful tropical beaches. So much gratitude to just find a beautiful spot in nature all the time. It does feel the officiating is, is a good use of, of my skills that I've earned. So it is helpful in looking back on the acting and, and thinking of that as, know, a springboard to this particular chapter in life of, oh, well, I am good at speaking in front of people. I, I actually do have the ability to read the, the energy and the emotions of a room and help guide people in that regard. But where it kind of differs from that is where I, I get to be myself. That everything that I'm saying in these wedding ceremonies are things that I believe, and these are truth that I, I find to be true.

And of course there is some performance aspect of it in terms of being a mirror for the couples and a mirror of for their guests and and helping them guide through the ceremony. But it does feel, yeah, so good to to be me.

[00:23:33] **Sanjay:** I'm, I'm really glad to hear that. And you actually refer to this new career of yours as a calling. And there's been a lot of research on callings and some of the research shows that when people feel deeply called to something, the highs can be incredibly meaningful, but the challenges can also be felt more intensely. Is that something that you've experienced with this new line of work, perhaps more in comparison to acting, which may not have been your calling?

[00:23:57] **Brandon:** No, I don't think so. What's, what's, what's interesting - I, I think that idea of calling, at least for me, is something that is evolving and, and continuing to grow as I do.

[00:24:08] **Brandon:** If I, if I am marrying people, 40 years from now – great, I'll be really excited about that. But this does feel similar to acting as part of my path towards whatever my calling is, and that calling doesn't feel for me as necessarily a destination, but this journey of unfolding of, of self and identity, where I do think that officiating - I mean, kind of touching on your last question - another thing that has been really helpful for me is being around people in love all the time. Really getting to see the intricacies of relationship about how do people relate, what their ways of showing and receiving love are. That's incredibly galvanizing for, for me in, in my relationship with myself, let alone my relationship with my wife, friends, you know. With, with the calling, kind of going back to my thought of, of getting to know people in their internal worlds, the calling of, of acting led me to feeling, really attracted to, drawn and, and, and grounded within getting to know couples for their wedding ceremonies. And it does feel as if being a wedding officiant is going to lead me to the next thing, if there is a next thing. I'm not necessarily married to, pardon the the pun, but married to there having to be something else. But knowing myself, knowing how much I like learning and like growing and like evolving, there's definitely going to be something else. And I know that there will be something from this process that will guide me to that.

[00:25:46] **Sanjay:** Yeah. And when I was, researching for this interview, you used the word self-actualizing a lot and you've already used it today. And I love that from a psychologist perspective, this process of becoming fully yourself or more authentically yourself. I think that's something that we should all be striving for in one way or another. What does that process of self-actualization involve for you?

[00:26:06] **Brandon:** Yeah, it is such a, a fun, fascinating process of, of self-actualizing because, inherent within it, at least from my perspective, is this idea of who I wish to be or how I, how I can be my most authentic organic self. And then I grow again, and then I somehow find

another kind of north star in which to align to and so on and so forth, and rinse and repeat. And I find that is, you know, I think about things in, in, in a macro sense of the seasons and the earth, right? This idea of, of blooming and blossoming, and then going back internal for the winter and then doing that and again and again. And I find that it's the same process within me. Oftentimes when I feel a little bit restless and I wish to grow, I will do something, that will bring in new variables, oftentimes leading to a little bit of chaos or disorganization or uncomfortable feelings within me as I'm learning something new. And then when there's a little bit too much of that, I try to bring things back to a status quo and find some, some safety and routine and yet again, rinse and repeat. And that is the beautiful, fun, oftentimes maddening part of that. But something that I tell myself and tell my wife all the time is that you don't know who you are. And that, for me is, is, a positive moniker for me; that I'm constantly discovering who I am. I, I used to romanticize the kids in school growing up who said "oh, I always wanted to be a doctor. I'm gonna be a doctor. And that's just who I am". And I find that I romanticize the, the safety and the certainty of that. Probably because I'm not that way, probably because I keep on finding myself, putting myself in positions in which I am jumping or trying something new. And yeah, willfully taking on some level of, of risk or uncertainty. But I think that is nature and nurture. I think there's a part of me that's always been that curious, five-year-old wondering what happens after you die, what happens after I do this exciting thing, but I think also acting is a part of that. So in terms of folding in the gratitude of, of my acting career into who I am now, I don't know that I'd have the same depth or, or, or interest in adventuring internally to discover new versions of myself if I wasn't able to know how to do that and learned that by trying on these different identities and these different characters as an actor.

And because I was able to see various parts of me become other people, then I know within my own life that I don't wanna box myself in because I can do that for myself as well.

[00:29:01] **Sanjay:** There's almost a paradox there 'cause self-actualization, as you said, is becoming more authentically yourself, but at the same time you, you said that acting may not feel, have been authentically yourself. So do you feel that engaging with self-actualization is taking you further away from the young actor Brandon? How do you feel about him now? Are you connected to him or dismissive of him?

[00:29:24] **Brandon:** I think more connected than I ever have been. It's, it's funny that in my, my journey of, of, of, of mental health, but also just growth, finding authentic versions of myself - I've kind of come all the way around now, to where. Well, in terms of my relationship with the young actor, Brandon, I feel for him, and there's been many times within therapy or journeys where I will actually commune with him and talk with him and be that person there with him, because he hasn't died.

He hasn't gone anywhere. My, my body has aged, you know? But that version of myself, where we put numbers in a given age, in a given year, those are all still components of myself that I carry with me. And so there's times in which, yeah, I'm there for him to support him and, and, talk him through whatever he either is still going through or maybe did go through. But now as I've feel more grounded and, you know, more realised version of self - is the closest now where I have been to considering, oh, what would that be like going back to acting now? Now that I do feel I have a grounded idea of who I am beyond the acting component. There's been a few people in my life recently who have, who've reached out and said, hey, I think you know, you were a great actor and I think you should pursue doing this again - I'm a director, yada, yada, and I think, I think now knowing what you've gone through in terms of your mental health journey, I think that would be really fascinating for, for you to pursue and to see. So I'm more

open to it than I ever have been. It's nothing that I'm actually like, actually, you know, going out and pursuing necessarily. So perhaps if it's one of those things that eventually comes my way, it's something that I'd be curious about.

[00:31:17] **Brandon:** And that feels pretty healthy, and I'm pretty happy about that.

[00:31:19] **Sanjay:** That's really exciting. I love that you said you've come full circle, so you're able to approach that with a different sense of self than you would've done in your childhood. I also read that you wanted to move into a career where you could help people struggling with their mental health. Is that true?

And, and if so, is it still true?

[00:31:38] **Brandon:** Yeah, definitely. And yeah, that goes back to the calling thing.

[00:31:41] **Brandon:** Also, part of why I was so excited to be here and talk with you today, because, people reach out to me for opportunities all the time. And, you know, some conversations feel a bit stale - nothing against those types of conversations, they just don't speak to me.

And this is something that I, yeah, I'm very passionate about. So, you know, my overall calling feels like it's, it's being pulled in that direction, which is why the officiating thing feels like, oh, this is great for me to personally be around people and love. It was part of a really healing chapter, being out here in Colorado, to be around that, to be able to speak in front of people again, to get over any performance anxieties. But a lot of the officiating journey has been a, a large part - I've done a lot of therapy and, and work at that same time.

[00:32:36] **Brandon:** And so this direction, these conversations are things that I'm incredibly passionate about. I'm definitely the friend within my friend group is constantly therapizing people. Sometimes maybe even against their will. I'm sure my wife would say that. But because I do care and because I know how, helpful it's been for me. I've also learned, of course, you know, you can lead a horse to water and I've learned that okay - this isn't for everyone. I remember the, some of the first few "aha" moments I've ever had within my journey. There's been, oh, I need to tell my parents about... oh, my friend, like they needed... And I, I've realized how annoying that can be. But I do know that the more that I speak about it, since it is my truth and it is, that I am passionate about it - that it does attract the appropriate people and the right people, that to either hear about it or want to help me with it, or, talk about these things that mean a lot to me.

[00:33:36] **Sanjay:** Just whilst you were talking there, I was thinking it's almost ironic and circular because you left acting because it didn't feel authentically yourself. And initially that created this sense of feeling lost and these mental health struggles, which is now what you're using as inspiration when thinking about ideal jobs.

So it's almost, as we said before, it's come full circle that the problem of the identity mismatch has also formed the solution to the problem. Does that resonate with you? Tell me if I'm just, getting at something.

[00:34:06] **Brandon:** Yeah, no, it, it does. I mean, I acknowledge the fact that it's quite convenient, right? I am writing my own hero's journey, right? So it's more helpful for me in, in that way, regardless of if that's the truth or not. It's like, that feels like my truth. But I've also, I'm aware that, you know, perhaps that is just a truth that is more digestible for me, or a truth that is, is, more interesting and healthy for me to believe in.

[00:34:36] **Brandon:** That does not matter to me.

[00:34:38] **Sanjay:** Sure.

[00:34:39] **Brandon:** I've learned enough in this life that mostly that it doesn't. Yeah, I don't care about that. I believe in it enough to where it feels honest and it feels truthful. I know that it serves me, that narrative, and I, I enjoy the irony of it. I like that, you know, I can take things from that, that that portion of my life was, was useful to me. And you know, comedy is, is two seemingly unrelated ideas come together to form that irony. And so I, I appreciate the comedy of my life in that regard.

[00:35:13] **Sanjay:** I wondered, Brandon, is there anything that we've not discussed about your mental health journey that you would like this opportunity to, to tell people who may be listening?

[00:35:21] **Brandon:** Sure. Yeah, mental health is not one size fits all. It's kind of gets to be, at least in my experience, your own journey of what works for you. And that is the fun part of it. Even, even discerning what is healthy or not is your own judgment call, which sometimes makes it, kind of hard and and complex to know, if you're being honest with yourself, if there is some self-deception in there, am I actually happy? Do I like where I'm at in life? Especially with social media now and the internet and being able to have these viewpoints into everyone else's world, you can kind of very easily decide that you're unhappy with where you're at because you can point to someone else's point of view that you prefer better than yours. And so what I would say is somehow find a way to, be honest with yourself and to continually check in on, on that process, on that mechanism. Because it's, it's very easy to, in my experience, to trap yourselves within self, into narratives that you've constructed for yourself, to rules that you've given, maybe someone else has given to you, but that you've adopted and therefore you are trapped within your own unhappiness or outside of your own version of happiness for you.

[00:36:53] **Brandon:** So some ways for me to be, be still and silent enough to hear myself are, yeah, yoga, meditation, when I can finally sit still -to get outside of the monkey mind chatter - super helpful. Therapy has been an incredible tool. I understand that it's not for everybody. And some people in my life have said, you know, I, I do read self-help books and I don't think there's anybody who's gonna tell me anything about myself that I don't already know. For sure, I think of therapy as there's someone who I, look up to or revere or has some information that I deem to be valuable and I get to learn from them. I've found that to be incredibly helpful. Any way that you can access flow state where you can turn off your monkey mind and you can regulate your nervous system.

[00:37:45] **Sanjay:** Amazing. And just one final question that we ask all our guests to finish, and I wrote this question before, I knew you were coming on, but it seems like a perfect question for

you. If your life was a book and where you're at right now was a chapter in that book, what would that chapter be called?

[00:38:00] **Brandon:** Incredible. This is a question that I ask to friends in my own life.

[00:38:05] **Sanjay:** Oh, really?

[00:38:06] **Brandon:** So this is perfect. Of course I don't have an answer for you off the top of my head.

[00:38:11] **Sanjay:** That's okay.

[00:38:13] **Brandon:** If this was a chapter in my book, what would the name of this chapter be called? Yeah, I, so I just sat with myself, on a personal solo, journey. This is kind of a, kind of a spring cleaning and oil change that I do with myself yearly. Sometimes it is crisis intervention if I need it. Other times it is just that like, oh, let's be with ourselves in this, what feels like really, really, quality way.

[00:38:41] **Brandon:** And so I've been talking to my therapist of, I found recently, there's this nugget within myself where I didn't fully trust myself. And, and by nugget, I wanna say it is kind of hidden in there - there's like 2%. Kind of going back to my depression and even growing up in acting where there was a, a, a fear of mine that I had that, what if I fall into a depression again? Can I trust myself to take care of myself in order, in order to not do that? You know, with with the acting, there's still components sometimes where I find myself trying to people please or, or where I will abandon my own integrity in order to be what someone else wants me to be. And so I put together this playlist for this solo journey that I, that I did, and it was called "I trust myself". And that's something that I've been meditating over and I've been writing and journaling about. And I do trust myself. And that's, that would be the name of this chapter.

[00:39:42] **Sanjay:** I love it. Brandon, thank you so much for your time and for speaking to me today. It really has been fascinating. Really appreciated.

[00:39:49] **Brandon:** Thank you so much. This has been incredible. So nice to meet you. Appreciate it.