



## Season 4, Episode 2, "Opportunity on the Line," Sept. 12, 2023

**Akeem Shannon:** I've got to be honest. I didn't come here to rap. Came to talk about my business, as a matter of fact. Might start a feeding frenzy as I spit on this track, so I ask all the sharks, sit back and relax. Flipstik is the brand. If you already heard about it, raise your hand. It's a kickstand on demand. With Flipstik gravity is under your command.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** From Olin Business School at Washington University in St. Louis, I'm Kurt Greenbaum. And this ... well, if you were thrown by the rap at the top, don't worry. This is *On Principle*. We are here to talk about pivotal moments in the lives of business leaders. And the lines you just heard came from today's guest, delivered to an audience of four on Shark Tank, the nationally televised pitch competition. Mark Cuban called it the best rap the show had ever heard. But as today's guest will tell us, the path leading to that moment in the spotlight was anything but smooth. In fact, you'll hear how close it came to a giant missed opportunity, an opportunity that began with a guy who was just trying to find his treasure.

**Akeem Shannon:** The name is Akeem Shannon, and I am the founder of a company called Flipstik. We are a phone accessory company. We make products that make it easy to create content. If you're a casual content creator, we're the company for you. Flipstik essentially is a little device. It goes on the back of your phone. It's paper-thin and essentially, it lets you stick your phone to virtually any hard flat surface. So you can stick it to a wood, glass, metal, brick, even the back of a plane seat. Your car dash. And what this allows you to do is to use your phone completely hands free. So it's great for creating content. You can imagine sticking it to a wall and recording a TikTok video or an Instagram or taking a selfie with your family. You can use it to watch content. So it's almost like turning your ... your smartphone into a little mini flat-screen TV. Stick it to the back of a plane seat on a long-haul trip. We like to say that Flipstik is great for creating, connecting and consuming content.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** You just told us who it's aimed at. Can you tell us how you came up with the idea in the first place?

**Akeem Shannon:** You know, it was the late night. I had recently quit my job working for a pretty substantial fintech startup, and it was a call from my uncle, who's a[n] engineer at NASA. And he was telling me about a project he was working on for the space launch system. This is back in 2017, and he was going to use this reusable adhesive based off the feet of geckos that NASA had researched in the 1970s. And so as he's telling me about this adhesive, I'm staring at my television, which I had just spent weeks mounting on the wall, and I was like, "Man, I could have saved

myself a lot of time and energy if I had this magic Gecko adhesive and didn't have to find those ridiculous studs behind the wall." And so the more I kept thinking about it, a few days goes by, weeks are going by, and I just can't stop thinking about this adhesive and this TV. And while, you know, I knew it was probably impractical to mount a TV on the wall, I said, you know, a little tiny TV, a smartphone, I think that could work. And so I'm looking up all this research about how these synthetic CT adhesives work. And I'm just like, you know, I think I can turn this into a product.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** Now at this point, let's slow down a second and back up. Remember, Akeem just said he'd quit his job with a fintech company, and when he left, his boss gave him a book called *The Alchemist*. It's a novel by a Brazilian author, Paulo Coelho. And its themes include the idea of getting knocked down and standing up again. Akeem's boss said it changed his life. You've got to read it, he said. So Akeem says, Yeah, I'll read it, but he doesn't read it. A few days later, he watches an interview Oprah does with Pharrell, the rapper and record producer. And Pharrell raves about *The Alchemist*. Akeem doesn't read the book. He's left his job. He's getting ready to move into a new apartment. And one more time, someone else mentions *The Alchemist* to him, and that's when ... nope. You guessed it. He doesn't read it.

**Akeem Shannon:** And so then as I'm moving, right, I move all my stuff to this new apartment and I'm sitting on my couch in the new apartment. My buddy was helping me move and I look on my counter. There's this old, tattered paperback copy with like a 99-cent discount bin sticker on it, copy of *The Alchemist*. And I, literally, chills went up my back, and I was just like, Where did this book come from? And I asked my friend, I'm like, "Dude, where did this book come from?" He's like, I don't know, we just been moving stuff. I'm just putting stuff everywhere. And it's like this book chased me down. And of course, the book is literally about that, right?

**Kurt Greenbaum:** Exactly!

**Akeem Shannon:** ... it's about these crazy omens ...

**Kurt Greenbaum:** OK! OK, Akeem! Three omens here, man.

**Akeem Shannon:** Three omens! And so, you know, I literally sat down, read the book cover to cover, apartment in shambles. Everything's in boxes. I read the whole thing. And so geared with this knowledge of these omens and really being on the lookout for signs to find my treasure in life, you know, that was the mindset I was in when my uncle calls. Which, normally, I wouldn't even pick up that phone, but I picked it up, and I listened it for whatever reason—well, not for whatever reason, because I had read this book—you know, as I'm listening to him. It's almost like my mind was just like it was, it was tuned to hear, like, look for the signs and that and, you know, just hearing about this adhesive was the sign for me. And, you know, from there, I just, I just didn't let it go. And I just kept pushing. And ... and this will be a recurring theme throughout my entire journey of Flipstik, where the most audacious,

out there, impossible things that could happen are always the things that lead to the most success and work out when they shouldn't because I was just listening and, and being aware of all the different, you know, signs that could be around me and then following the path even when it didn't make sense.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** We're just a few minutes into this episode, and it may be obvious that Akeem's a great storyteller. And what that means for us, you and me, is that I've got to cover a lot of ground right now to keep us on track. So here goes. Akeem makes a prototype of Flipstik and starts a Kickstarter campaign in 2018. Readers love it. He raises \$15,000. He starts hawking Flipstiks at barbecues and food festivals and art shows. He's just trying to figure out how to get this thing going. He gets a booth at a local mall and ends up selling \$30,000 worth in two months. He meets someone who urges him to pitch Flipstiks at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. He wins pitch competitions while he's there, talks to a buyer from Target who wants to sell Flipstiks for three bucks in the discount bin. Akeem turns him down. He even meets folks from Shark Tank at CES. But that doesn't really pan out. In the spring of 2019, they declined to invite Akeem on the show. But we're not done. Akeem gets invitations to the BET Awards and the Super Bowl. Somehow, he makes connections with rappers Sean Diddy Combs and Snoop Dogg, who love the product. And all that eventually gets the attention of the casting director at Shark Tank, who hits up Akeem on Instagram. I'm going to be in Kansas City tomorrow, he says. Be there. Audition for the show. That's in February of 2020.

**Akeem Shannon:** Normally when you audition for Shark Tank, once you get the like, yes, you're going to be on the show, it's usually maybe like 90 days and then you're recording. But the pandemic had happened. They didn't even though they had said yes, they didn't know if they're actually going to have a season because everything was shut down. They were just trying to figure out what is going to happen next. So, you know, they were floating the idea of potentially doing a Zoom season. And I was like, please don't let me be on the Zoom season of Shark Tank. That's going to be terrible. And so finally, you know, Shark Tank is ... comes on ABC. That summer the NBA started late, but they did a bubble. And so the Disney people basically connected the Shark Tank folks with the people that did the NBA bubble. And they were like, OK, we're going to do a bubble. They ended up doing a Shark Tank bubble, built the whole set inside of the Venetian Convention Center in Las Vegas. And we were quarantined inside of the Venetian Hotel. And they made it work. They created a bubble. And the show must go on.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** Amazing. So all the producers, all the contestants, all the sharks ...

**Akeem Shannon:** ... everybody ...

**Kurt Greenbaum:** ...everybody just stayed in this hotel for a quarantine period. And then they started recording.

**Akeem Shannon:** Yeah, it was crazy. That's exactly right. It was nuts. I had heard horror stories of people being on Shark Tank and making no money, and I just knew that was not going to be me.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** So about three and a half weeks before your episode is going to air, how many Flipstiks do you have in stock?

**Akeem Shannon:** So I would say we probably maybe had about a thousand Flipstiks.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** And you're about to go on national television pitching this product.

**Akeem Shannon:** And honestly, I wasn't prepared at all. You needed the capability to ship a ton of units quickly. I didn't have enough inventory, and so we had won this big grant and I didn't ... I honestly didn't have the money. You know, I had gone through most of my savings by now, so I didn't even have the money to, to get a warehouse space, get all the equipment that I needed, you know, get all the inventory, everything I needed to be able to successfully fulfill orders I didn't have. Oh, it was chaos. It was absolute chaos.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** Akeem told me one of the horror stories he'd heard. A year earlier, he's watching a Shark Tank rerun. A guy pitches this sauce. Fantastic sauce. The sharks love the sauce. Akeem is impressed. He wants some of this sauce. Checks the website. Can't buy the sauce. Calls a number. The guy picks up. He gives Akeem the verbal equivalent of a shrug of the shoulders. He's still trying to get his website up. And this is the nightmare Akeem knows he has to avoid. Thankfully, he'd done some homework on an e-commerce software company, but he still doesn't have any money.

**Akeem Shannon:** So I called those guys up. I said, "Hey, I'm ready to sign up. I'm going to be on Shark Tank in three and a half weeks. I need everything fully up and running in two weeks." And so they gave me a list of everything I needed to buy, all the things I was going to need. And they rushed everything through to help us get set up. And it was a pretty expensive software to get. So I also had to call the grant program that I had just won and say, "Hey, I know I'm supposed to wait for this money. I know you haven't even announced that I won the money, but I'm going to be on Shark Tank in three weeks and I need like 30 grand. Like right now." They push it up the line and they made it happen. They got me the money within like a week. And so we just started buying all this stuff getting the warehouse set up.

Two of my good friends who have been with me since the very beginning at Flipstik. They were with me when we went to the barbecue festivals and were selling them hand to hand. They flew back from L.A. into town to help me to be there, to help fulfill orders. And then I also had my long-time employee, Maria. You know, she was helping me get all this set up, and we just made it come together and by the ... and

look, in three and a half weeks we had a fully operational warehouse ready to go. We didn't have all the inventory we need. It was on the way. It wasn't quite there. Our factories in China were working overtime to get everything done, but it wasn't quite ready. But we, we set up our Shopify store to take preorders, and so we were able to take all the preorders and capture all the payments and everything went good to go. And the thing that kept ringing in my head and, you know, honestly, it's amazing we got all that stuff done so quickly.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** So you're jumping ahead a little bit here. So if I'm the viewer, I don't know anything that you just told me.

**Akeem Shannon:** No ...

**Kurt Greenbaum:** You know it because you recorded it, and you were in the room. The sharks ...

**Akeem Shannon:** Radio silence. You know, you can't say anything. I couldn't tell anybody. Nothing. And it was really tough because at the time, you know, we were applying for all these grants, and I couldn't even tell them, like, we're going to be on Shark Tank. Couldn't say anything. So luckily, just off the strength of our product and the traction that we had without Shark Tank, we won those grants. We won two \$50,000 grants in 2020, both right before Shark Tank. But yeah, couldn't tell anyone until about three weeks before it aired when they submitted the, you know, stuff to the TV Guide folks. Yeah. That's when we could finally start to say something and promote it.

**Michael Wall:** You know, Akeem was not in a unique situation. You know, one of the things that is ... I'm always reminded [by what] my ... my dad used to always say, you never have time to do something, but you always have time to do it twice. So, you know, this idea of slowing down and really making sure we do things right, all founders and I'm sure Akeem can speak to this, is that you're under the gun. You know, you typically, you have a deadline to meet. It can vary in its time span. You only have so many resources at your disposal, and you have to make decisions to, to reach ... to achieve an objective within a certain deadline.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** That's the voice of my colleague at WashU Olin, Michael Wall. Michael is a professor of practice in marketing and entrepreneurship, and he's also co-director of our Center for Analytics and Business Insights. In those roles, he knows a little something about how business leaders make decisions when they have data—and when they wish they had more data. Michael's background includes starting a couple of digital marketing firms, one of which was acquired by LinkedIn. One of his specialties is focused on the creation and commercialization of new products and technologies. The thing that you found common about this: Can you elaborate on, on that, exactly? What was it, this idea that sort of out of nowhere, this opportunity sprang ... well, it didn't actually come out of nowhere. He worked really

hard to get there. But the fact that it was sort of sprung on him so quickly, and he had to make something happen.

**Michael Wall:** Whenever you're a part of startups and you have any kind of success, to tell-back story is always very clean, neat, and it's a very linear process. And, and the reality is kind of like that old analogy: ducks on a pond, right? I mean, above the water, it looks so smooth out in the water is a lot of kicking going on. It's chaos. It's madness. And so things pop up, if you will, all the time. And what you find, and I think what in this circumstance really struck me, was, you don't typically have everything you need to act. It's something we talk about with students a lot in my classes, this idea that you always get exactly the data that you need and all the information you need to make decisions, and there's a process for you to operate in? That does not exist in any business environment, let alone a startup.

So with Akeem's story, I was really struck by how much I can empathize with, "Oh my gosh, this amazing opportunity presented itself. Now what do we do?" I call it thinking in open space, which is not easy to do. And that, I think, is what being entrepreneurial is all about. Being able to think in open space, prioritize activities, and just deal with the fact that when you don't have data—there's a direct correlation, low amount of data, high level of uncertainty. Why is this hard to get the support of innovative novel ideas? Because there's no data to support it. And so I think for Akeem it was ... I felt almost bad because, I'm like, Oh, I can really relate to that. You've got this amazing opportunity that you feel is like the most important thing for your business. You have to get this right, and that happens all the time in business, like especially with startups. So like, Oh my gosh, this is it. This is our big moment. Now, in his case, that was a really big moment.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** I really love that concept of thinking in open space. I asked Michael to dive a little deeper into that concept. I needed to get a better idea of how it related to Akeem's story.

**Michael Wall:** I call it thinking in open space because whether you are working in a startup or even if you go work for a company like Amazon, typically you're given a task that comes up unexpectedly and you're asked to go figure it out. And they don't really give you any direction. They don't ... there isn't always a set place to go. And it's your job to kind of figure out what you need to do next. And I think this is where the fundamentals really come into play. So I'll give you an example. Any time I'm backed into work, when I say backed into a corner, it means where I don't really know what to do next. That's, that's my definition of back door. I'm not really sure what the best move is next. So in a business context, the ... my go-to every single time is: What is the problem? Whose problem is it? Why is it a problem? And I always call this "What is the progress that they seek?" So think of it: You're standing in a set location and imagine you look over 5 feet across the room and that is where you want to go. Five feet across the room. That's the progress that you're trying to make. But there's something standing in your way. There's something holding you back from making that progress. That's typically your problem. And so how do we

think about making sure we really understand that problem so that we can think about the best way to remove that barrier, to be able to make that progress? The answer to that is different every single time, but I always go back to it. What progress am I trying to make, and what is it that's holding me back? Is it that I have no idea what I'm doing? Is that I don't have enough data? Is it that everything I'm trying isn't working? It always is different, but I think that's what I mean by creating structure in these moments where you're backed into a corner. And so I have a certain list of go-tos, and one of them is that who are we solving for, what's the problem and what, what progress are they trying to make that they can't because of that problem. That's just one example of one of my go-tos, if you will, to create structure.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** So this idea of thinking in open space is first recognizing that that's what you're doing ...

**Michael Wall:** ... yes ...

**Kurt Greenbaum:** ... and then applying some sort of structure to that ...

**Michael Wall:** ... absolutely ...

**Kurt Greenbaum:** ... so you're really not thinking in open space at some point. Now you're thinking in a, in a space that has some structure and some ... some sort of steps.

**Michael Wall:** Absolutely. In fact, one of our professors here, Markus Baer, always says creativity loves constraints, which I really love. You know, and I remember one time he said, if you just go ask someone to come up with a really cool idea, how are you supposed to act on that? But as you add more specificity to your request, it becomes easier for you to act. And so that ... I think that's part of the direction I'm trying to go here is we need to try and create structure when there is none. And so how do we, this idea of creativity loves constraints, how do we create those constraints? And I think that goes back to what Akeem was really having to try and figure out is, what do I do next and how do I know? And the answer is, you're never going to know. But you can have a really strong hypothesis based on your expertise, your knowledge and understanding of the circumstance.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** So in a portion of Akeem's story, I think what we're talking about is, I just found out I'm going to be on Shark Tank in three weeks.

**Michael Wall:** Huge deal, by the way.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** Huge deal. Where I want to be is making the cash register ring when that happens.

**Michael Wall:** Yeah.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** And the constraint is, it's three weeks away and I have no inventory.

**Michael Wall:** Sure.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** So that's what you're talking about. How do, how do I now figure out what I need to do in order to make that constraint go away?

**Michael Wall:** That's exactly right. And so in that case, it's what's the most important question? You know, there's you know, there's a lot of beliefs on that. But what does success look like? When I walk out on that stage and the sharks are standing there in front of me, what does success look like? And when I walk back through those doors, what do I want to have have happened? And then you can start to say, OK, what are the things that are standing in my way? This gets back to that progress. Now, I don't have any inventory, but does that matter? And so what I mean by that is if they believe in you and they believe in your idea, the whole premise of Shark Tank is that they give you the resources. And that's not just money. I mean, their connections throughout the entire supply chain of pretty much any industry is second to none. And so I think that goes back to even thinking about like, what are the most important problems for us to solve first, so that when I'm walking back off that stage, I'm not going to be able to tackle everything. So prioritization, I think, is really what came to mind in this use case. How do I think about, OK, there are things that I can control, there are things that I cannot. I don't want to completely ignore the things I can't control. I want to address those. But let me first tackle the things that I can control. So in the case of Akeem is, nail the pitch.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** When Michael and I spoke off mic a few weeks before this interview, we were chatting about Akeem's story and he pulled out a simple sheet of paper. A matrix, he called it. It's a tool he often uses in class to get students to think about business questions, decisions and actions and how they relate to time, resources and energy—and also how leaders prioritize all of that.

**Michael Wall:** Business is pretty simple. Every single day we are trying to get answers to questions so we can make decisions. And then based on decisions, we have to take action. It's pretty much that simple: questions, decisions and actions. But the hard part is, is that you don't know which decisions are the most important ones to make first and you don't know which actions are the best ones to take first. And so we are all limited by time, resources and energy. And so what I wanted to try and figure out is how can I get smarter about the decisions that I focus on making? So the questions I try and answer, the decisions I have to make and then the actions I have to take. And so the matrix is simply a very basic scoring system to say, OK, how closely does this align to our objectives on a scale just 1 to 3? And then this next one saying, OK, well, how feasible and viable is this for me to do? And you score, you multiply those two numbers and it spits out an output and it kind of tells you where it fits. It's going to tell you, hey, you need to do this right now. It's going to



say or it's going to say, don't even focus on this right now. Those are the easy ones. And that's what I tell students in class, like these frameworks, these, you know, the famous BCG matrix, I mean, they're ... they're great tools, but I think it helps you to eliminate the easy ones. And then you have, it frees up your time to focus on the hard ones.

So what about the ones that score in the middle? Yeah, they really do kind of align with their business objectives and yeah, they are pretty feasible and viable. Now what do we do? And so a framework like the one that I showed you is a great step in starting the process of prioritization. And then from there, you and your team can focus on that gray area to determine, OK, which then of these should we really focus on? There are so many other more, you know, better frameworks than my little back-of-the-napkin version, but to really just figure out what we should be doing. But it is a good lesson for I think anyone who's thinking about these types of initiatives is, does this align to what we set out to do, and how much work is ... is this really feasible? Can we actually do it? Is a viable? Desirability is answered with the first question. So desirability is your y axis, if you will, and then the feasibility and viability, your x axis on that matrix.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** Well, I mean, this is all going back to that idea that I think a lot of people think if I have the data, I can make the decision. If I have the money, I can make the decision. But no, all of these tools and data only give you information.

**Michael Wall:** That's right.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** And it still comes down to understanding how to evaluate that information.

**Michael Wall:** Without question.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** And then when and how to take a leap.

**Michael Wall:** There's no question. And, you know, you hear phrases like, data's the new oil, and I'm not here to pontificate or contradict that point. But what I try and what we try and guide our students, not just me, is that say data is ... you need data, but it's the insights that come out of that data that are way more valid. That's the ... that's the oil. But I think one of the things we've been learning, whether you're a startup or a large established company, is having more data is not the answer. You know, for the last 10 years we've been sprinting to collect as much data as we possibly can. I think what companies are realizing is if you're a startup, you don't have the resources to collect in the first place. And if you're a large, established organization with a ton of resources, you simply collected too much, and it's not actionable. And that's really I think the future of data is really not about the quantity, but more about the quality and how do you make sure it's actionable.

**Akeem Shannon:** Our episode aired the Friday of the national presidential election. And for those who don't remember, we didn't know who was going to be the president. And so I find out early in the day, ABC decided that they wanted to do a special news coverage segment, and they were going to push our episode by two hours. And the reason that's so ... I mean, obviously, people expect it to come on at the time they expect it to come on, right? But also their DVR is expected to come on at the time they expect it to come on. And so because this happened so last minute, their DVR hours weren't going to record the episode, and they weren't going to know the episode was delayed. So it's like, oh, man, our ratings, the ratings are going to be way down.

So the episode airs and right before it comes on, the special news coverage guys are like, "Hey, Joe Biden is going to be making an announcement later tonight, and we will be back when he is going to have the announcement." I'm like, oh my gosh, please don't make an announcement during my episode. Episodes going five minutes in. Good. Ten minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, 40 minutes, and I haven't aired yet. And it's going through the whole episode. Everything's going fine. I'm like, OK, we're good. And then finally, the last segment of the episode, like 47 minutes in, I come on and I'm coming on, I have a rap. "So who's ready to see a demo? It's awesome. This is Flipstik. Flipstik is a paper-thin device that goes on the back of your phone and comes over 70 different designs and colors. And with a simple flip, you can sit it down on any flat surface." All my friends and family are in the room, and we're cheering and screaming, and I do my rap and I'm starting my pitch. The sharks are like best ... best rap on Shark Tank ever. Everyone is cheering. My phone is, is starting to buzz from the orders. It's starting to come in. And about a minute and 30 seconds into my pitch, they cut away for a special election announcement.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** It's five days after the presidential election in 2020. The results are still in flux. Akeem understands, but he's devastated. His phone is blowing up with a sympathetic texts from friends. He cries himself to sleep. The next day, however, he notices something. He remembers we live in a streaming age. People saw enough of his pitch that he'd set the hook. They pulled up the show online and watched it. He sold \$100,000 worth of Flipstiks in a weekend, and eventually he was able to persuade the Shark Tank producers to rerun the episode on New Year's Day of 2021.

**Akeem Shannon:** It's a holiday. Everyone's home. And so it almost is like we aired on Shark Tank twice. And best of all, even though our episode got cut off, it was the beginning of November. So it was the holidays. So people were watching and seeing the product, and we just got tons of orders over the holiday season. We still ended up doing, you know, over \$100,000 in sales over the weekend because a lot of people were watching it on streaming. And then we re-aired in January, which gave us this giant, you know, normally retail tech falls off a cliff in January, but we aired on January 1. So then we got this ... another huge boost of sales again and had a great January. And yeah, I mean, it all ended up ... it was ... it hurt, but it worked out in the end.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** How would you characterize where things are at right now with Flipstik?

**Akeem Shannon:** Yeah, absolutely. So, you know, we ... we were the last ... in 2020 and 2021, you know, we really were carried like over 50% of our revenue for both of those years came from Shark Tank airings. And so we were super reliant on that. We didn't really have the fundamentals down as a business. But in 2022, you know, we started raising money from investors and, you know, really realized that there was a bigger opportunity at play. And so last year, excluding Shark Tank airings from the previous years, we grew over 1,000% our organic sales. Usually it's only like one thing a year that makes the biggest impact. And if I catch that one thing out of the year, it makes the year. And if I just keep doing that every year, then I'm good. You know, one year was getting Diddy, the next year it was Shark Tank. Last year it was Target. Like, you know, it's always that one thing. And then that kind of sets the ... sets the tone for the whole year. I'm feeling pretty good.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** So have you found your treasure?

**Akeem Shannon:** You know what I've realized, and this is also in the book, is that the real treasure is no treasure. It's the journey. I try to take pleasure in the journey. You know, every time I reach a certain height, then I want to go to the next height. Yeah. I mean, I think right now I'm just enjoying all of the ups and downs and excitement that come with, you know, being on this path in life. And it's great that I thought I was going to make like, \$1,000,000 on my Kickstarter, just retire. But if that had happened, I just retired to a beach, like I would have missed out on so much richness, you know, in life. Now I'm like, I'm not going to rush the process. I'm along for the ride.

**Kurt Greenbaum:** As we close up this episode, I'm thinking about something else Akeem said. It was about making sure to catch that one big thing every year. The thing that's going to make a difference. One year it was Diddy and Snoop Dogg. Next, it was Shark Tank. Last year, getting distribution in Target—at well over three bucks a pop. The day before I recorded this, Akeem let me know he made it onto Inc. magazine's list of the country's 5,000 fastest growing companies. Flipstik ranked 727th with 800% growth over the last three years. And with that, thank you for joining us. And thank you to Akeem Shannon and Michael Wall for their great storytelling. Please visit our website for more information about Akeem, Flipstik and Michael. We'll link to their sites and share more about that Inc. 5000 ranking. Look for those links along with past episodes of this podcast at *On Principle* podcast dot com. Even better, consider subscribing to *On Principle* in your favorite podcasting app. And you can reach me with episode ideas or feedback by emailing Olin podcast at W-U-S-T-L dot E-D-U. That's [olinpodcast@wustl.edu](mailto:olinpodcast@wustl.edu).

*On Principle* is a production of Olin Business School at Washington University in St. Louis and comes to you with creative assistance by Katie Wools, Cathy Myrick, Judy

Milanovits and Lesley Liesman. Special thanks to Ray Irving and his team at Olin's Center for Digital Education, including our audio engineer, Austin Alred. Jill Young Miller is our fact checker. Sophia Passantino manages our social media. Mike Martin Media edits our episodes with original music and sound design by Hayden Molinarolo. We have website support from Lexie O'Brien and Erik Buschardt. *On Principle* is the brainchild of Paula Crews, senior associate dean of strategy and marketing for the school. Once again, I'm Kurt Greenbaum, your host for *On Principle*. Thanks for listening.