

Michael Jordan Changed My Life

Versiti Podcast: Season 2 - Episode 3 - Part 2

Host: Edgar Daggett

Guest: Erin Patton

INTRO CLIP

ERIN: What you see is what you get when people ask about Michael and working with him and those sorts of things. He was always quick to make everybody feel comfortable.

He would take the lowly position instead of exalting himself. And I learned a lot about leadership. Like, leaders know how to go low and Michael obviously has his confidence in his abilities, you know, carried themselves, but in situations where he felt like others sort of feel like they needed to decrease, he would take the time to decrease himself. Or in a meeting, he would ask for the person that wasn't saying anything, or the person that he knew was nervous... he would ask them to contribute something to the meeting, the same way that he would ultimately pass the ball to Steve Curry to hit the game when he shot because he knew that the team was only as strong as its components.

BUMPER

EDGAR: Welcome back to the Stand Out From the Inside Podcast by Versiti. I'm your host Edgar Daggett. Welcome to the second part of a two-part episode where we have Erin Patton author, not only an author, but he's also working with the community. Directly with inspiring youth, but he has also worked with huge brands, including the Jordan brand. Last episode we talked a little bit about where he started, his beginning roots. If you missed that episode, go back, take a look, catch up on part one. But in part two, we'll be talking a little bit about this story at Jordan's and what he is doing today. Erin, welcome back. But now how did your life in PR, you've done a little PR and some organizations following the marketing. How did you get that opportunity at Nike? Nike isn't this small little company that anybody can just walk in and be like, Hey blank, I have this, can I get an opportunity to work for you? How'd the opportunity come?

ERIN: Sure. As I've mentioned earlier, there are times in all of our lives, and our careers, and our success path where we look back on it. And as much as we'd like to take credit for it. I use it somewhat judiciously to say, obviously, we contribute to our success path and to the extent that we're driven and to the extent that we're ambitious and to the extent that we recognize opportunities, and we seize them. So, all of that said, there's a divine element that is at play. And for me, that occurred in a very interesting way. So, I received a call from a headhunter. And I was working at the, at the PR agency in Chicago and the head hunter said, you know, we're, we're looking to fill a director of corporate communications position for Kellogg's in Battle Creek, Michigan — the cereal company. I was like, cool. When you're in a place that you're like, okay, anything other than where I am right now. And, and then, you know, you put a director tag on it and it was corporate. I was doing PR agency, which is different from doing corporate PR. In corporate PR, like you're the brand, you know, gatekeeper, the agency, you're always working with the gatekeeper. And so, I was like, you know what, I want to be the gatekeeper. And so, I went up to Battle Creek, Michigan for the interview and... true story: I get off the elevator and I walk into the room, and it was set up like one of those continental breakfasts, like a Courtyard Marriott. They had all the cereal in the room, and they were like, you know, help yourself. I thought it was a test of early brand affinity. So of course, you know, I went with Frosted Flakes. Anyway, it was a great interview over a bowl of cereal. I was one of two candidates. I ultimately didn't get the job. I was really prepared. I was really ready for it. And I had a lot of nieces and nephews. And so, I was going to be sending cereal back home in perpetuity. It's going to be great. But they called and said, you didn't get the job. I was dejected, and I remembered something that my mom always told me. She said when one door closes — I know you've heard this too — when one door closes the other one opens. But it is really the time in the hallway in between that defines our faith. And it also defines our discernment in terms of not just what our plan is, but what we feel our creator's greater plan is for us. And we're, and we're somewhere in between, we're trying to figure those and reconcile those things. So, in either event, I get back and two days later I got a call from a head hunter that said would you be interested in working for Nike? And I'm like, yes. And she said, well, listen, it's in Portland. And I was like, Oregon? She said, yeah, Oregon. And so, I said, yeah. I said, I'd be interested. I had never been to that part of the country. It was unique, the Pacific Northwest. But the opportunity in and of itself was a life-changing one for me. I grew up in Pittsburgh, as I mentioned, and we were the city of champions. Six Superbowls, world series. So as a kid, like sports was literally in my DNA. So, to walk onto Nike's campus and see the buildings named after, these iconic athletes the John McEnroe building, Bo Jackson, et cetera. Now you got Jordan, Serena has her own building now, et cetera. So just to walk onto that campus. Not only that, but to see athletes in the environment was... it's sorta like that commercial with

ESPN, or now you see a lot of them doing it, like Steph Curry, you know, at the CarMax counter or whatever, you know, but at Nike, that was the real deal. You know what I mean? Like you walking in, it's like, whoa, that's Scotty Pippen. You know? So, for me, it was really Nirvana to walk into that environment. I interviewed for the position of manager of PR for the U.S. and I did receive the offer and accepted the offer. That's one of those examples where as I would encourage, and as I know you do, just because the thing that you wanted didn't happen doesn't mean that God is not moving on your behalf or that the next opportunity for you is not there. It's just not now, or not yet, or there's something that's coming greater. And that was really the case for me. And so instead of sending cereal home to my nieces and nephews, I started sending them Jays and Nike sneakers. They were perfectly fine with that. Anyway, I came into the role of US PR manager, and one of the categories that I was responsible for was the basketball category. And that led me within my first year to a photo shoot in Chicago for the launch of the new Air Jordan. And so, my job was to go behind the scenes and we had Entertainment Tonight and Slam Magazine, different entities there. And so, I was facilitating the behind-the-scenes access interviews with Michael, and I had never even met Michael. And this was for the Air Jordan 10 — the patent leather sneaker — when it first came out, not the retro. And the commercial was a 1,000-foot hoop and it's Michael running through the air, and he jumps up and he dunks. Then he looks down and he's like, you know, a thousand feet in the air. And he's like, whoa. And so, so anyway, I get there and one of my colleagues they said he's in the trailer and I'm like, well, bro, you know, can you introduce me? You know, I can't just roll up on money like that. But that was how Nike is. That's how it was. We're there to do the job and we're cool with them and nobody starts talking, not that I was starstruck, it was just... well that's MJ for one, and that was my first real sort of interaction. So anyway, I walk in the trailer and Michael is there with one of the wardrobe stylists and they're like drinking hot cocoa and laughing and joking — an elderly lady — and I'm sitting there in the front of the trailer. And he's ignoring me. He doesn't say anything and I didn't want to interrupt. And so, I sat there and I cleared my throat that didn't get it. And I wanted to say something, but I didn't feel like it would come out right. It came out more like I was talking to Michael Jackson, like, "Hey Michael." And so anyway, eventually, he looked over, he said "Hey, what's up EP, you're here to do the interviews?" He knew who I was. He knew what I was there for. And he started laughing. And that is essentially, what you see is what you get when people ask about Michael and working with him and those sorts of things. He was always quick to make everybody feel comfortable. He would take the lowly position instead of exalting himself. And I learned a lot about leadership. Like, leaders know how to go low, and Michael obviously has his confidence in his abilities, you know, carried themselves, but in situations where he felt like others sort of feel like they needed to decrease, he would take the time to

decrease himself. Or in a meeting, he would ask for the person that wasn't saying anything, or the person that he knew was nervous... he would ask them to contribute something to the meeting, the same way that he would ultimately pass the ball to Steve Curry to hit the game when he shot because he knew that the team was only as strong as its components. And then in some cases, the weaker of the components, even when you're an NBA athlete like Steve Curry — who's great on that team — he knew that instead of me hitting the shot, somebody else had to do it. So anyway, that was really the experience... and we connected. And that aspect of as I mentioned earlier, maybe being a little bit younger, being closer to the consumer; Michael was very much a student of what's happening on a consumer basis what's happening in sort of culture. Where's the needle? And because I was young enough to not be drinking all of the Kool-Aid. And so, I would come into meetings when we were talking about seeding and I'd say, let's get them on the barbers. And people would be like, quiet, like barbers, what is he talking about? And then MJ would be like, yo, that's it. That's a good idea. So he, I think valued the fact that I was able to really in an authentic way represent and reflect the life of the consumer. And so that's really how the journey led me from a point of one door closing to one that opened in and changed the rest of my life.

EDGAR: Oh, wow. What year was this happening? What year was when you got to meet Jordan and when you started actually working for the brand?

ERIN: '95 to 2000.

EDGAR: We're talking about, oh, we're in the three-peat era.

ERIN: Yes, absolutely '96. There's a picture of me in the locker room with MJ throwing the champagne on me. I had the opportunity to be there. I had the opportunity to be in Utah when Michael was ill. Just seeing and being part of that experience of what it really means to give yourself to something bigger than yourself in the moment; is something that I learned greatly and deeply from Michael and knowing how he was feeling. And then seeing the sacrifice and seeing him fight through that adversity was transformative for all of us who had seen it or witnessed it, heard about it, watched it, lived through it. To be within that inner circle at that time; it was amazing to see his commitment to cause in a moment that was even bigger than himself.

EDGAR: Wow. That's incredible. And how long were you doing that for?

ERIN: So, I was there for that period of five years. We launched the brand in '97. As I mentioned in my role, I wrote the business plan — the original

business plan — and worked between the footwear and apparel divisions to create more of a unified product strategy. Because prior to that, Jordan was essentially the Air Jordan. Then there was some apparel that wasn't really selling all that well. Like the footwear was really the engine. And so, a big part of my responsibility was to create a unified product creation process, a process that was being engineered by greatness in and of itself with Tinker Hatfield — the lead designer on all of the Air Jordans. So, I had an opportunity to work and collaborate with Tinker. Nothing like this happens with just one individual. And so, there was a team of individuals that were committed to the Jordan brand; that had been a part of the success even before I got there. People like Howard White, who was Michael's first marketing representative. When he first came in '85 and eventually became VP of the Jordan brand, H White, was just the soul of Nike, really. Peter Rupee, David Bond, Mark Parker, who became CEO as well; Gentry Humphrey, a lot of guys and gals that came together to make it what it was, but it was my specific charge as the exclusive employee of the Jordan brand to separate it from Nike, which was not easy. We had to create ultimately separate sales efforts. And so, the salesmen were no longer able to just sell the Jordan and Nike stuff. We were getting our own reps, we had to get our own advertising agency. So really my job was to create, it was a business unit, but for the world, what we were building was a brand. And really, as Michael felt, it was a company. The Jordan CEO commercial around the time of the launch that we developed was Michael playing the game and then at halftime, he snuck into the locker room, and he was approving sneakers and all these things. And then he ran back on the court, but he still had his dress shoes on. You may remember that. So, we were really attempting to convey what was a reality, which was Michael was tangibly involved in the business. He wasn't just wearing the Jordans. We'd be over in Asia with my product developers, sourcing leathers in the most remote places in Taiwan. There was a certain leather that Michael liked in the sneaker, et cetera. And so, he was very involved in the process. In that period of '95 to 2000 and with the launch in '97 at Nike Town, New York, which I alluded to previously where we had a tribe called Quest and others there. It was myself, Michael, Tinker Hatfield, and then Ahmad Rashad was the emcee — Michael's close friend, the NBC reporter. And so, we launched the brand to the world in '97 and then subsequent to that built the organization during that five-year stretch I was there and then I decided to forge my own entrepreneurial path after that success.

EDGAR: Wow. That's an incredible journey. So how would you say, not only separating yourself from Nike, but you have such iconic products like the Jordan Ones. They're to this day, you know, sneaker market, everybody knows... billion-dollar industry, Jordan Ones are selling 10, 20, 30 times the retail price. How did that separation, and what were the problems? What were some of the issues with separating? You don't have to go into too much detail,

but then Jordan today is an iconic brand — separate from Nike. How do we tie in the other products? The complimentary products. So people are wearing jerseys and shorts. What were some of the issues that you were seeing at first? And then how did you overcome some of those challenges?

ERIN: Great question. The biggest challenge we all faced was ego. Every last one of us. And a lot of it was with good intention and a competitive spirit. As you can imagine, Nike is very competitive place. It's a very competitive place in terms of the individuals. And any given meeting that you walk into, it's like walking onto a basketball court or a football field where you have to be on your A-game. And there's a lot that's riding on brand initiatives. There's a lot that's riding on the sell-through of a particular product as it relates to the relationship with Footlocker. And so, our biggest challenge in creating what we called a positive yet inherent separation from Nike for the Jordan brand was being able to overcome the challenge that it posed to individuals whose day-to-day responsibilities and bonuses were tied to the success of that product. And what I've learned is in organizational behavior and in society in general, people resist change because they fear what they're going to lose. That's the biggest barrier and opposition to change is the fear of what I stand to lose. What privilege I stand to lose. What opportunities I stand to lose. Navigating that was the toughest challenge. And there were pure business realities operating within that. For example, there was a legitimate concern that the Jordan brand would cannibalize Nike's basketball share. So, are we going to be out here cannibalizing each other by having these two separate brands in the market, or would it really be a case of incremental growth, which is what we felt within the brand to say one plus one equals three? So, you take Nike, basketball; you take Jordan brand, and you add that together. And then we control all of the market share for example. That was the greatest challenge: just getting to a place... And that was my toughest challenge period. Because for me, I was Jordan. I was the only Jordan person. But for everyone else, they were doing Jordan within their category. So, they may have been doing advertising and they had Jordan and they had Nike basketball and they may have had tennis, another category or whatever, so to then say, okay, you're not going to do Jordan anymore. They felt some type of way. I learned a lot about what it really means to build consensus. And I learned it the hard way because my ego didn't embrace the resistance. And sort of the resistance that I was meeting, I just said, you know what? I'm just going to force my way through this, and you either get wedded or get rolled over mentality at times. I paid the price for that. And so, I learned that it's very important to build the type of consensus where you're inviting people who are losing something into a greater gain. That's what leaders are able to do. We call that adaptive leadership; as opposed to sort of, technical solutions, we can offer technical solutions to problems all day, but as leaders, we have to provide those types of adaptive solutions where I'm helping someone adapt to change who's

resistant to it. Who's comfortable with the status quo. Who's comfortable going into Footlocker and saying, okay, you're going to buy this, you know, this Air Max shoe. And if you don't, you're not going to get the Jordan shoe and sort of using that kind of dagger. So, all of these things that went into shifting the paradigm, not just in the market... before we could shift the paradigm in the market. That was the easy part. Getting people to say, yo, Jordan brand! Jordan got his own brand. He's doing another sneakers. Kevin Garnett's rocking the sneaker. Ray Allen's rocking a sneaker. They got all, you know, they're doing a woman's sneaker. Like all of these things are happening. Like the consumers were cool with it. But it was shifting that paradigm internally. And I know that's something we all deal with as leaders, as innovators and many of us with an entrepreneurial spirit. And even a lot of the work that you guys are doing and groundbreaking work and you're breaking through apathy and you're trying to get people to move and you're trying to get people to commit. And, and, and so that requires a level of adaptive leadership where it's not so much about what you're going to lose; if that's your time, if that's concerns you have, or whatever may be behind your inability to be motivated and really bringing people into the greater gain that what you're really doing is you're committing to a cause that's bigger than yourself. That's greater than yourself. And that's when we start to move the needle.

EDGAR: Wow. Yeah, we deal with that adversity all the time. 'Cause being comfortable, it's tough; you're, comfortable with where you're at. You don't want to change because you don't know whether it's going to be positive or negative. And then being able to inspire; be able to... if you have somebody that can inspire you, that can help you adapt. I try to communicate with people within our community and they're stuck in their way. They're like, this is what we do. This is how we're going to do it. This is forever, you know? So how do we change that? And you've made a great point. How do we convince that what we're doing is for the greater good? What the change is will help you in the future. It might not be an immediate gratification where you're going to get something right away, but how in maybe three months; year, five-year, it'll be so beneficial at a greater scale.

ERIN: Absolutely. Absolutely. That's the key to any grassroots initiative, campaign, call to action. It really hinges on being able to shift mental models around. Even what it means to sacrifice, to make the ultimate sacrifice. A scripture even informs to lay down one's life for brothers. That's the greatest thing that you can do to love one another, as you love yourself, and loving your neighbor, and coming into a mental model that says, you know what, it ain't just really all about me, you know? And as fundamental as it sounds, we live in an environment and in a society and in a culture where we're so focused on what it means to me and what I get out of it and why should I, and here look what I'm

doing. As opposed to being able to really say, how can I serve somebody today? And supporting a campaign like this. How can I, step outside of my own thought process around what I'm doing and how it's going to benefit me to say, you know what? I did something today it's going to change somebody else's life. And there's no greater feeling than that. Taking a step and a measure like donating blood. You're saying in that moment, you know what, it's bigger than me. It's bigger than me. And I believe that when we get to that point, when we're operating in that way, we see the blessings that flow into our lives, that flow into our communities that flow into our country. When we come into agreement. When we're able to come into agreement around the challenges that we face, as opposed to taking dividing positions of, should you get blood, or should you not get blood? Should you be pro-gun or anti-gun? Are you Republican? You Democrat? You White or you Black? All of these divisions are the reason why a divided house cannot stand. Right? And so being able to come into agreement and the way you do that is by coming to an agreement to say it's bigger than just, it's just me. You know what I mean? It's bigger than me. And so, I'm going to go ahead and take that step. I'm going to go ahead and answer that call to action because I know it's bigger than me. I'm going to go ahead and donate. Even if it's my time, if it's my talent, if it's my treasure, no matter what it is. Today, I'm going to make a difference. I'm going to take that step. I'm going to take that faithful action because it's bigger than me.

EDGAR: A hundred percent agree. And, for those listening, making a small impact; it's just part of a bigger story. And whether you see the direct response from it. We always like to say, the blood that you donate will be in your community, will benefit your own people. But it benefits everybody. We are all together. We are all one people. I always say we are one. It's just us. What you donate, the products that you're giving — blood products that you're giving that— We can't make in a lab; we can't make it. It comes from all of us.

ERIN: It's life.

EDGAR: Exactly. For many individuals, it's a difference between being here today and unfortunately not being here tomorrow. So, it's that impactful to certain individuals.

ERIN: One other thing it's life, and blood is also light. When you just break down what blood is, it's literally light. And so, what we're doing is we're giving life by giving light. And that's something that I believe is transformative on our communities, on public health, and on our mental models themselves. So, yeah.

EDGAR: I agree. It's very impactful. We ask everybody who's listening and watching; make your donation today, make that impact and help your community. Now, Erin an amazing career at Nike, big launches. Not everybody can say, it's something massive that maybe others won't be able to say ever that they'd done. So, what are the day-to-day operations for yourself now? You've transitioned, what are you doing today that's helping the community?

ERIN: Sure. Well, speaking of answering the call to action that's bigger than yourself. I answered the call to servant leadership. I answered the call to ministry to galvanize communities. And for me, what that looks like on a day-to-day basis is I'm the founder of New Birth Institute. And we're a faith-based think tank that's focused on the research and motivation toward spiritual formation, human empowerment, public health, and societal advancement. Where I spend my days is researching, writing, teaching, counseling, and building relationships and partnerships that are bringing imaginative resources into urban communities and under-resourced and underserved communities; particularly in areas such as public health, for example. And looking to bring cognitive support, for example, to our young people; to change the atmosphere, and to change the environment within urban communities. And a big part of that is we're re-imagining the community center. And so, we're building re-imagined community centers in urban environments and not just a community center where you can go play basketball, but a community center where you can go and get cognitive support for PTSD, get cognitive therapy or where we can bring residents into that environment who are mental health practitioners. So, we're able to bring some first response to mental health for example. And in addition to that focused in and around leadership development as well, and writing, as you referenced the books. I'm committed to serving the community in those ways on a day-to-day basis right now, and also developing a Black male leadership development institute; which is coming up next month on the campus of Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh; where we're taking a group of high school students in partnership with the Urban League and bringing them through a year. It's a cohort that will go through a six-day institute and then a year of symposiums geared toward growing and developing them as leaders. And so, leadership is very much integral to the work that I'm doing as well.

EDGAR: And where's all this happening. Is it in your hometown or where you're from Pittsburgh?

ERIN: Yeah. The institute is happening back in Pittsburgh. The New Birth Community Center, a model that I built, is beginning in Pittsburgh, but that's a modular concept that we'll be expanding into communities around the country. I believe that having a very healthy and vibrant community center within inner

cities and under-resourced communities that provide an outlet for, you know, enrichment — from life enrichment, academic enrichment, services, et cetera, and just a place to celebrate occasions, you know? And just to celebrate life I feel is very much needed at this time. And so that's something that we'll be scaling on a national basis.

EDGAR: That's incredible. And you have a second book as well, correct? So, it's called C+Suite Leadership for Christ, correct?

ERIN: Yes. Yeah. Leadership by faith is really what the book is serving as a guide for, and a guide post essentially to help individuals. And those in the C-suite, which are your chief executive officer, that's what the C-suite is all about the COO, the CFO. And so, it's really about helping those individuals as well as entrepreneurs. And if you're coming into an enterprise or coming into the marketplace on whatever level you are in organizations across the board, it's really a guide and a framework to navigate faith and leadership and marketplace and very much looking at what that pattern of leadership looks like; from a servant leadership standpoint as well as what it looks like for succession planning based on a true model. Servitude and discipleship, for example. So, we just released that book about a month ago and already doing extremely well and working with many companies as we're going in and training individuals within management teams. Just as you have the Myers-Briggs personality dimension, we have some assessments and personality assessments that really enable a leadership by faith framework. And as much as we are in the great migration and great reconsideration that we're seeing in so many people sort of reconsidering how they're looking at the workforce, we believe that it's an important time for companies and organizations to reconsider what role faith can play in leadership, not religion, not orthodoxy, but just pure faith. And what that looks like in terms of how it informs effective transformative leadership.

EDGAR: That's amazing. Yeah. So, real quick. I want to know when you're in these communities, who are those individuals that can benefit from this program? Like, is it anybody within this community that's low, struggling, whether on that cultural or religious or faith-based. Who are those individuals that should be looking out for this program?

ERIN: Yeah. Everyone. We believe in the great commission to share the good news to every nation, every individual. It's not about a religion, it's an interfaith movement. Where we're calling people across faiths, across ethnicities in the true spirit of Christ. Christ wasn't about religion. And it's more about bringing people together, bringing communities together in much the same way as I discovered at that kitchen table over a cup of hot cocoa. It really comes down to

us as communities and as individuals coming together to do the work of the Kingdom. And so, in terms of who is invited into that, we are all walking missions. We all have the spirit within us that enables us to enact change; to be part of the change that we all want to see in our communities. We have the ability to come together in looking at issues such as gun violence, as opposed to going into separate camps; if we can come together against the spirit of darkness that's behind it; even whether we're pro-gun or anti-gun, if we come together and say we're against that spirit of malice or hate or whatever it is that's operating, then we'll start to see the heavens move in an amazing way here on Earth. And so that is the call. We have a call to repent similar to what Abraham Lincoln issued back in 1863: You know, we believe that it is time as a country for us to really lean in on faith and to repent and turn toward our creator and have our land forgiven. And so, we have a movement which is America must repent now. We're initiating a separate call to action that's americamustrepent.org. And so, these are the ways that we're looking to galvanize communities and individuals. It's not necessary. And you know, this, it's not necessary for a person to feel that they have been anointed to be this or qualified to be that. God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the call. And so, we each have a calling on our life to make a difference if it's in ways that we're discussing today or broader ways. But now is the time to move beyond the status quo and to really engage and use your personal agency.

EDGAR: Couldn't agree more. And it goes to like all people in the community, our youth as well to stand up and do what you believe in inside and find a mentor as well. Sometimes that helps to lead you on a great path.

ERIN: Yeah. We have to get to a point where we're ready to give ourselves to something. What is it that I'm willing to give myself to? And make that a focus and make that a dedication as much as we give ourselves to all of the other things that we make time for in our lives. If I'm giving myself to Netflix and chilling, I can give myself to going out and donating some blood today. Right?

EDGAR: Alright, Erin. I got one final question. Well, two final questions. One. Who inspired you, like who was that leader within your career to this day — could be till this day — that inspired you to do more, to get more? And who got you to where you're at right now? Is there anybody in your workplace, family, friends who was that leader to you?

ERIN: I would begin with my mom, and I say that because not just of the sacrifices that she made for us and being a single parent, but also for the work ethic. My mom would work at the hospital by day, caring for the diagnosed, and then she would come home and barely have an hour, less than an hour. If that.

Before she ran out to be a barmaid and serving the undiagnosed and coming home at two in the morning and then turning right back around for a 6:00 AM shift. There's so many moms and parents who make that ultimate sacrifice. And so I believe that it really begins there because that's where I saw what leadership looks like. Even in times of adversity. How my mom handled adversity. That taught me a lot in terms of how to persevere and be able to withstand the changes in life; the trials that we face in life without losing enthusiasm for the win. So we can take some losses without losing our enthusiasm for the win and knowing that win and that victory is closer than we think. I start there and then as I came into business, came into organizations... Phil Knight, I learned a lot from Phil Knight at Nike, obviously. I mentioned Michael earlier and the ways that his leadership and his ability to influence through leadership. We talk about influencers these days and Michael, he really influenced mostly by his character and his personality sort of flowed from that. But I think today we sort of reversed it where the influencer is about the personality and then the character behind it is... where is it? It's less important to have the character and more important to have the personality to influence many, if you will. So, I learned that character not only counts, but in the final tally, it is the sum of the parts. If you have solid character, then that's when it manifests in your leadership. It's going to manifest in your influence. It's going to manifest in your partnership. It's going to manifest in your marriage. It's going to manifest in your relationship. It's going to manifest in your ability to be a good parent, for example. And so, I learned that from Michael. I learned social impact and the human rights flame, which is lit within me came from coming to know the family of Nelson Mandela, and Mandela's history; having gone over to South Africa and gone to that Robben Island cell and seeing his sacrifice and coming into a relationship with his family and representing them in some of their interests here in the U S. That was transformative for me in terms of what leadership looks like in terms of social impact. And then with that in mind also, Stephon Marbury, I would mention. Together we'd launched the Starbury sneaker, which was a \$15 sneaker, which was groundbreaking at that time. But I learned from him that it's bigger than what we do in this case. It was bigger than basketball to be able to do a \$15 sneaker that was geared toward kids whose parents couldn't afford the Jordans. Right? Or we'd be in cities where — Detroit — where they had just laid off a million people or laid off a ton of people... and the father was able to come get his son a pair of Starburys and was crying about it. And I saw Steph, you know, give thousands and thousands of dollars and gift cards to families and just walk the streets of New York and love on people. And so, a level of empathy is something that I'd learned greatly from Stephon. So, there've been many... within the context of my career and my success path, but those are a few that specifically helped me to create the framework for my level of emotional intelligence and the type of leadership that I believe in.

EDGAR: That's awesome. I'm a big believer of having like a mentor or somebody that teaches. I have a few of myself up to this day and I'm just beginning my career. That's something that I always try to push on people of the community: find somebody who can teach and always evolve at you, or like always innovate yourself. Be willing to learn, be accepting. And you don't know where that leads. Saying you have tons of leaders or self-mentors from the beginning days, your mother to individuals like Phil Knight, who was the CEO of Nike, but that's impressive. That's super, super awesome to hear. And an incredible story that you've shared now. Final question. Favorite Jordan?

ERIN: Mm, a great question to end on. And it's a toss-up between the 13 and the 14. My reasons are less sort of, I guess aesthetic and more sort of personal. And so, the 13 was my favorite because it was the first Jordan, I worked on from concept to finish. When I say worked on, Tinker Hatfield designed the shoe, but from the product engine side where I was responsible for working to get that shoe from concept to finish. And so, I went into Tinker's office one day and Tinker was notoriously late with the Jordans. He was like, Michael Jackson. He was like... you don't go into the studio and ask him when it's going to be ready. Right. It's like "when it's ready." But at the same time Footlocker was calling and saying, Hey, we got pre-lines coming up. You know, we need to see it. So, we can book our orders. I always was in that position of having to go and knock on Tinker's door, or peek in. I went by one particular afternoon after playing ball on campus. I knew that was kind of a good time to catch him when he came back in from his workout and so he said, come on in. Before he showed me, he kind of set things up, he's a master at that. So he said, "you know, Michael, you know, the way he plays defense, like he's, you know, he pounces on you, you know, like he's like a cat, and that was Michael's nickname, black cat." And so, he pulls out this picture of Michael playing defense against Magic Johnson. And Michael is just like locked in on him. And, you know, Tinker's like, "he's a predator, Michael, Michael's a predator." He pulls out the sketch. And it's like a cat's paw. If you remember the 13, the midsole is literally a cat's paw. You see the knuckles on the mid-sole of the shoe. And then finally he said "you see this little hologram here?" He said that's the cat's eyes. And when the cameras hit that thing it's gonna create this impression when Michael's doing what he does soaring through the air and dunking. That was my favorite in that respect. And then following that up the 14 was another masterpiece where this time, Tinker called me and said, hey, we're going to see Michael. And it was around playoff time. It was time to get going on the shoe. And so, we went to Michael's house and he had just gotten this new Ferrari and he was like... and that was really a him and Tinker conversation. I was driving a Chevy Blazer. So, I was like, y'all going to have y'all Ferrari conversation. And so anyway, Michael was really excited about it. It was this candy red. And so, we went inside and we had our meeting and then we leave and we're on the plane going

back. And Tinker shows me this initial sketch. And it was the AJ 14, which was inspired by the Ferrari. Like if you look at that shoe with the midsole, it was this really, really candy-coated red paint that had the sort of the medallion, which was in the shape of a Ferrari where the jump man was. And so those two would be my favorites just based on having walked through that creative process together with Michael and Tinker the way that we did.

EDGAR: That's awesome. And then to hear from somebody who actually physically had an impact on that shoe, that worked on it to launch that's super cool. Well, Erin, it's time. Unfortunately, we've gotta go different ways, but it was super awesome to hear your story, and have all of our audience hear your story and what you've done. You've made an impact within our communities, within all communities to be honest. But it's been super awesome and fun having you on the show.

ERIN: Thank you so much for having me and thank you for all you're doing to stand apart in your leadership and your campaign. I encourage everyone to support this campaign, to donate to the campaign, to get out and not just donate even the funding, but, but to donate to this cause and to give the gift of light and love by donating to this campaign. I'm delighted to have been part of it. Thank you for your time and interest in hearing my short story. And it's certainly one that I know we all share. And so, I'm grateful to have had this time. Thank you. Thank you very much, Edgar. It's been a pleasure.