



Episode 900: Politics Isn't All There Is, So Cheer Up

Guest: Gonz Trevino

WOODS: You've got quite a story and I want to hear the whole thing. You've been very successful and you've done all kinds of things that I find interesting, even in your childhood. The fact that you were doing potato chip arbitrage is amazing to me, so you're going to have to tell that story. But give me the, let's say, 35,000 feet in the air overview of your life, because you were born in Mexico, moved to the U.S., and you have just blossomed and exploded in terms of productivity and accomplishment, both in professional life and elsewhere. Give me the bird's eye view and then let's get into the weeds.

TREVINO: Absolutely. So that's actually a little bit of a misconception. I was actually born in Texas. I was born in Brownsville, Texas, and when I was about 10, 11 months old, just under a year old, my parents moved to Mexico. So anything that I can remember, I was in Mexico, but I actually was born in America, which was nice because when I moved back it was really easy since I was a citizen. So I grew up in Mexico up until my early 20s. I was going to college at the time in Brownsville, Texas and living in Matamoros, Mexico, so I was crossing the bridge every single day to go to school. Around that time is when my entrepreneur I guess adult life kicked in. I always feel like I've been an entrepreneur my whole life. Eventually I got married here in the United States. Met a wonderful girl from Houston, married her, and through moving here and there, I now wind up living in Texas full time. I've managed to start a couple of businesses. I've got six under my belt now. I just launched a charity, too, that I'm really excited about. And really, my goal and everything that I did was for the purpose of having full control over my own life, and I felt like I could do that best by starting my own businesses and being independent.

WOODS: Would you describe yourself as having come from modest beginnings or from privileged, so-called, beginnings?

TREVINO: I would say – so my parents were American. I would say they'd be considered middle class. It's a little different in Mexico, because the class system's all sideways over there, but if I was American, I would have had a very similar upbringing to a middle class American.

WOODS: Okay, now, a lot of people who have middle class upbringings like me have no entrepreneurial mindset whatsoever. I had nothing like that. I just thought: I do the following things that everybody else does, and then I seek a job the way everybody else does. And doing the sort of thing you do, well, that's something other people do. I

don't do that. It's magical people who have some magical insight into the world who do that. And it took me years and years and years to become independent and make my own way, so I'm fascinated by people who kind of did it from the beginning. Now, I know you started in sales and you were really, really good at that. In fact, let's start there. Tell us your sales background. How did you become the number one salesperson in the whole country for Cutco cutlery? What do you attribute that to?

TREVINO: [laughing] So around when I was 20, I started selling Cutco knives. And that was more based out of needing something to do. You know, I was 20 years old, was bored, was in college. My parents really wanted me to get working. I didn't want to, but you know, Cutco was a nice compromise because at that point, it was something I could still kind of do on my own while making money. I didn't have a strict schedule. You kind of build your own schedule, build your own appointments. And I did really well with it. I honestly went in blind not knowing how I was going to do and had some pretty good immediate success.

I did take a four-year hiatus after doing it for about a summer, maybe three, four months, something like that. I took a four-year hiatus, did some odd jobs in the middle. I came back in 2012, now married and needing to pay bills. And so I came back to it with the intention of just working a little bit of Cutco, making some sales on the side, using it to supplement my income while I figure out what to do as a career. And so as I was doing that, I was working Cutco and then trying to do other stuff. And the more I realized, hey, when I'm doing Cutco, I'm making more money. And so 2012 became a year where I was going to do it on the side.

By the end of the year, I was doing it full time. 2013, my second full year since I came back, I was breaking records. I broke two national records that year. I won a couple cool competitions and stuff. And then I believe 2015, flash forward two years later, was when I became the number one salesperson in Cutco of all time in a calendar year. First person to sell over a million dollars in Cutco sales. And how I did it, the honest and most simple explanation is I created a lot of systems. I hired people. I had as much help and leverage as I could, and I just focused on my database and focused on my book of business and just went at it really, really hard, honestly. I was working — I was killing myself, about 90-, 100-hour weeks every week. I don't think I took a day off that year, and if I did, it was probably because I passed out for a full Sunday and just woke up the next day or something.

WOODS: So was it more raw effort as opposed to some special insight as to how to make the sale?

TREVINO: I would say raw effort but with a lot of structure and planning behind it, hiring some people. I had some assistants help me with paperwork. I did hire some assistants to help me call clients and weed through the good prospects and the not so good prospects, the cold and the hot leads, and it really helped me narrow myself down where I could focus on what was generating me the most sales. You know, they call it the 80/20 principle. I'm sure you've heard of the Pareto principle. They say 20% of what you do will lead to 80% of your results, so I think one thing that I was really good at is I was very good at focusing on what was valuable in my business and ignoring all the stuff that wasn't. And so all the things that I could leverage, hire somebody to do, I hired out or I found help with or I ignored. And then the 20% of the

things that were the most valuable, that's what I focused on and I stayed really, really concentrated on that.

WOODS: How do you go from being the number one salesman to saying, You know, even though I'm on top of my game and I'm on top of the world, I think I'm going to go out on my own and I'm going to start my own businesses, which you have done multiple times now?

TREVINO: So basically, one of the things that I love about Cutco is that I could create my own schedule. I was a completely independent salesperson. I got paid fully on commission. So in a way, I really was just — I had my own business already. I had some experience in starting my own business. I hired my own staff, trained my own staff. I did predominantly everything by myself. So at this point, I realized, you know what? I believe I can do anything. I've gained a lot of personal growth through this experience that I can leverage into creating other sustainable businesses. So the next thing that I started was investing in real estate. I'm in the process of purchasing my sixth investment property. So I own rental houses, by houses and then I rent them out, and it's something that I'm very passionate about because it helps build what I mentioned earlier that I really, really value, which is financial freedom, personal liberty, the ability to do what I want.

My total dream is to wake up on a January 1st and know that whether or not I decide to work that year, I'm completely covered for the entire year. I can go to sleep on December 31st and I'll be financially better off whether or not I work, just based on all the investments and everything I have coming in. Now, I enjoy working, so I'll probably find a way to keep myself busy, but it'll — there's a difference between working for fun and working because you have to.

WOODS: Yeah, there sure is, isn't there? There sure is. So all right, so let's talk about — what would you say right now is the most profitable thing you do?

TREVINO: The most profitable thing I do? You know, it's crazy because if you'd be interviewing me in a year, I might have a better answer, but right now I'm in a very interesting transitional phase where I've got about three or four things that are all about the same. And I'm in a personal debate right now with myself and my wife about which businesses we should focus on and which businesses we should grow. So we definitely want to keep my Cutco business going. I just launched a magazine as well in San Antonio here where I live, so that's pretty exciting. It's a trade publication and we've got a lot of sponsors on board. I've got my rental houses, of course. So we really have a lot of moving pieces. I have an inspection company that I'm also launching here pretty soon. That's not launched yet, but pretty soon we'll be launching an inspection company and we've got an awesome blueprint on how to grow that. I've got two business partners already lined up. So there's a lot of stuff. And I think if you'd ask me this in a year, I'd have a much better answer, but the most honest answer right now is there's a lot of stuff that's all competing very evenly at the moment.

WOODS: Well, fair enough. Now, you actually work for Jason Stapleton.

TREVINO: I would say something close to that. What I do, I do have an online T-shirt shop and I do Jason Stapleton's T-shirt shop for him.

WOODS: Yeah, right, I mean, I phrased that badly, but you know what I mean.

TREVINO: Yeah.

WOODS: Yeah, so I've had people asking me about would I want to do merchandise for my show, and my feeling is I have so many plates I'm spinning right now that if I added one more thing, I don't know how I would promote it. I mean, I'm barely able to – well, I've got a cruise, I've got a homeschool curriculum, I've got my Liberty Classroom, I've got my Supporting Listeners program, I've got my books, I've got the podcast, I've got my eBooks, I've got my entrepreneurship list. If I had to promote one more thing, I don't know how I'd do it. In fact, I have a friend who has proposed a print magazine under my name, and I said I just – I wouldn't be able to promote it. I've got too much going on. No one could keep up with all these things. So that's why I've shied away from it. And also, I don't know, maybe I just find it too weird that somebody would walk around wearing a hat with my name on it. I'm not sure I'm ready for that.

TREVINO: Right, well, there's two things you can do. Number one, you could have me do all the work. I could split the profits with you, so whatever you want. You've got to think like an entrepreneur. If you just slap it on your website, mention it on your show once a month, maybe email once a month, you'd be surprised. You'd get a little bit of extra coming in. But it's not for everyone, and that's the truth. If it is something, you could keep it away from your name. You could just have designs that area about liberty, right? Or you could have designs that are about being an entrepreneur. So there's really a lot of ways that you can skin that cat.

WOODS: Man, so you already know the objections. That's good.

TREVINO: Oh yeah.

WOODS: Yeah, okay, all right. So how'd you get to know Jason Stapleton? Because obviously I know him.

TREVINO: [laughing] Well, the very short version is he was the first libertarian podcast I started following. His podcast actually guided me to yours, and basically, at that time – so I was always, I'm going to say apolitical, is going to be a nice way to put it. So I've always been very entrepreneur-driven and so I like economics. Because of starting businesses, I like learning about economics. Inevitably, if you're going to learn about economics, you wind up learning about politics because they're very interconnected. So through learning about economics, I bump into politics podcasts. I've always been a very big believer in free market-type principles, small government, and I love individual responsibility and liberty. So you want to understand what I think about that, that's the shortest definition I can give.

So while I was learning about politics in order to learn more about economics, I bumped into Jason's show, and I loved it. So I joined Jason's community and reached out to him. He actually said in his podcast, "I need somebody to run a T-shirt job for me," and I was like, I can do that. And so my team got on it. We designed it on a weekend, spent a whole Saturday and Sunday working on it. But that's all it took, and now it runs automatic so it's pretty exciting. And the truth is I know Jason as far as

maybe one Skype call and some Facebook private messages, and that's about it [laughing].

WOODS: Well, how about that? Now, I'm looking at the — Before we go on with your life now, can you tell that story about the potato chips? Because I just love that story.

TREVINO: [laughing] Yeah. I've got a couple funny ones from when I'm a kid. It's funny, my dad just told me one that I think is really funny, and it's perfect because he just told me recently, and it really puts a light on the type of personality that I've always had. So apparently, my dad was telling me, he was laughing, he came to visit — and my parents still live in Mexico and they came to visit me in San Antonio. And he was talking about how, when I was in sixth grade and I was going to school, I'd have my housekeeper — we had a housekeeper at the time, and I would have her make me like eight or nine tacos to go to school for lunch. And my dad approached her and was like, "Are you really making Gonzalo eight tacos to go to school?" She's like, "Yeah, he keeps asking for them." So my dad comes up to me and I go, "Oh, no, no, I'm only eating like two or three. I'm selling the other tacos for a dollar each, and then I'm buying the food at the school that I want to eat, and then profiting like three bucks [laughing]." So I was asking them to make me a bunch of tacos, taking them to school, and selling them to the other kids.

WOODS: Okay, yeah, so if people were observing you then, they had to know where your life was headed at that point, I think.

TREVINO: I don't know. I think we were too little to really even —

WOODS: No, that's amazing that you would think to do that.

TREVINO: So the chips one is also a good one, so I'll go over that one. So when I was — this was in like — by the way, this was in like second or third grade when I was doing this, maybe fourth grade at the latest, so I was really little. So when I was in school, I realized that my school sold chips, just regular, generic potato chips. I used to be in tennis lessons at the time. My parents put me in tennis lessons. My mom loved tennis. She was a big competitive tennis player when she was younger, so she thought I should learn it, and she put me in tennis lessons when I was a kid.

So when I would go to my tennis lessons, they had a store, a little shop there that sold potato chips as well. When I saw the prices of those potato chips, I realized they were about half the price of the potato chips in my school. So I put together a dollar or two. I remember I bought a handful of potato chips at my tennis lessons at the little shop at the tennis classes, and then I would take those potato chips, stuff them in my backpack, and go to school. And then I would open up my backpack and sell them to the kids. And I did that for a couple weeks and they caught me. They actually got mad at me. And I remember them taking them to my mom and saying, "Your son can't be doing this." And I think my parents were secretly really proud, but they were like, "Yeah, you can't do that." So they actually nipped that one in the bud, but it was pretty funny how the school thought it was such a bad thing that I was going around selling chips, that I was undercutting them on their potato chips [laughing].

WOODS: Yeah, that – I love that. I absolutely love that. I mean, you're fulfilling a market function. An arbitrage guy is – anyway, what's the point? Pearls before swine, right, trying to explain this stuff to people.

I'm looking at some notes that I got when we first contacted you, and you wrote this:

"Since then I now own six businesses and a charity I'm very passionate about" – so I want to get to that in a minute. "I also own six houses I rent out. We'll be buying an apartment complex soon. I have a business where I purchase products overseas and distribute them all over the U.S. I have a business where I coach young entrepreneurs. I have a business where I sell graphic T-shirts online. Last but not least, I have a business where I do a monthly magazine for the top real estate agents in San Antonio and Austin." So we talked about that.

I guess the fundamental question I want to ask you is, it's almost like there's a – again, it's like there's a different way of thinking between somebody who does these things and somebody like me up until about six or seven years ago. I mean, I couldn't conceive of doing any of these things. I always thought to myself implicitly that other people who have some kind of special opportunities do this. I mean, even as a free market guy, I still had this kind of deep-seated idea that somebody like you just had things handed to him somehow. Like either you were in different circumstances or you were a different kind of person, but these were all things I just couldn't do. I so couldn't do them, I never even reproached myself for not doing them. I never said, Oh, if only I could be an entrepreneur. I just wasn't in the right place at the right time – I mean, really, that's the way I thought. I think that's the way a lot of people think.

So if you coach young entrepreneurs, well, I don't know if you ever get to them before they become entrepreneurial, but suppose you did. What would you say to them to get them out of the conventional mentality of: I'm going to go to school, I'm going to sit by the phone, I'm going to get an offer, I'm going to get a paycheck and hope it doesn't go away?

TREVINO: No, absolutely. And just so you know, a lot of people think that people like me, people like you, and all of these people who have success, that they received it based on something that was either luck or it was handed to them and not that they earned it. There's this funny quote that I've always loved that says, "It takes ten years to become an overnight success." And that's so true because you don't know the journey that everyone went through. I'm 29 years old and I'm a self-made millionaire at this point, and I basically sacrificed my entire 20s. All my friends growing up from high school, everybody I know, they've gotten to do a lot of things that they really enjoy, and I'm sacrificed a lot of the things that I've wanted to do in my 20s for essentially my entire rest of my future. Now, the beautiful part is I'm also now creating a lifestyle where I'll be able to do a lot of the things that other people can't now, so I find it worth it. But the truth is it came with a lot of sacrifices and a lot of sleepless nights. You know the drill.

But it's funny because a lot of people think that a lot of this gets handed to us, and you know, nothing could be further from the truth. When I finally moved out of my parents' house, I was getting married to my wife. I moved out only with the money I had earned myself. I had some savings. I'd done a little bit of work already. I moved

out with the savings that I had, and that's it. I started from scratch and made it to where I am today.

And it's funny, you talked about the mentality as well. You know, how can somebody conceive of doing something like this without I guess the risk and uncertainty. You've got to make your own paycheck. So you never have anything steady. If you don't work, you don't get paid. So how do you survive in a world where you're fully responsible? And it sounds really good now that I'm 29 and I've built a lot of this, but when I first started, I was making maybe like 20 to 30,000 a year on my own. That means one month I could have made 5,000, but in the second month I might make nothing. And so paying the bills definitely becomes a legitimate concern, right? So for me, I've never even been able to conceive of the opposite. I've never actually been able to conceive of a life where I didn't have this sort of freedom and flexibility.

And I even tried it. So I make a joke. I actually got a job once. I worked at a coffee shop for three days. I got hired, worked there, and in three days I quit. That was my first job ever, it was a coffees hop for three days. I couldn't stand it. I was being told what to do all day. It was driving me nuts. And that's actually about a week later was when I started selling Cutco. I signed up to Cutco as an independent contractor, and the rest is history.

But it's funny because as you meet a lot of these young entrepreneurs and people that want to have this mentality. I think there are certain people that are just born with the innate desire to be self-starters, and there are some people that want it but are a little bit afraid. And I think kind of massaging the space in between, helping people guide them from the mentality of that 9-to-5 or "I have to have this steady paycheck" to, hey, when you are your own boss, when you start your own businesses or when you work on commission or when you have a sales business, whatever it is, there is no ceiling. If you get a job that pays you \$20 an hour, that's what you're going to make, \$20 an hour. The only way to earn more money is to sacrifice more hours.

But when you have your own business, there is no limit. You can create your business to be profitable enough to make you \$20 an hour, but then you increase your systems, you find more customers, you build a better website, you have better leverage, better staff, whatever it is, and all of a sudden your \$20-an-hour business is now making you \$45 for every hour that you invest. And then the dream is you get to a point where your business is making you those \$40, \$60, \$100 an hour, but you're not even having to work on it anymore. You've hired the staff to take over the necessary day-to-day tasks that you need to do, and you can focus on other stuff.

And that's sort of where I am with some of these. I can focus on growing other businesses because some of them are now automatic, and the ones that aren't may require minimum amount of input from me as well. So I think that it's one of those things that – it changed my life to be an entrepreneur, and I think that everybody has the opportunity out there. I moved to the United States officially to live here for the rest of my life because I saw the opportunity, and I think people take that for granted. I really do. I think the United States is such an amazing place with an abundant amount of opportunity. There's so much money to be made here, so much – there are so many voids in the market, and I think that anybody who wants to be successful in America can absolutely do it.

WOODS: Gonz, let's take just a quick break to thank one of the best companies in the world.

[Sponsored content]

Tell me about the Rise Up Foundation.

TREVINO: Absolutely. So I will say that is a very new project at this point. So early 2017, at this point it's an early project. We are hoping to – So my goal with this is to essentially take young kids – so 18, 19-year-old, fresh off the foster care system or from a poor family, lives maybe making under \$20,000 or \$30,000 a year, and just graduated high school, and we want to sponsor them through trade school. So we want to raise funds to cover all their costs through trade school. And the reason that we figured out is typically a graduate form of trade school is very competitive with a master's degree, except instead of taking six to seven years of their life and putting them often in six figures worth of debt, a trade school will usually take six to nine months and can offer similar financial benefits.

So you have these kids from a poor family, they can come out making \$40,000, \$50,000, maybe \$60,000 a year after six months. We raise the funds to cover their costs through the training program, and they can come out as dental assistants, plumbers, welders, electricians, AC repairmen, whatever it is. And now they're literally rising up out of poverty. They're helping lift their family. If they were from the foster care system, then they can be on their own instead of turning to homelessness or anything that often happens, and we can really help impact these kids' lives.

WOODS: Well, that's really amazing, and it's a great – I mean, it fits in with everything you and I believe, and I know that it's not a major part of your life, but I know that you and I think very similarly. And I love the fact that before we went on, you said, "Politics is not really that central to my life." And I thought, yeah, that's exactly who I want you to be on Episode 900, because we can't – You know, you read history and it's all presidents and whatever. And I'm as guilty of that as anybody because I want to chronicle wickedness a lot of the time. But at the same time, I want to chronicle goodness, right, and you are a great example of that. How would people find out about the Rise Up Foundation?

TREVINO: Yeah, absolutely, so they can follow us on Facebook. It's Facebook.com/riseupfoundationdotcom. They can find me personally as well if they search the same thing and they search on Instagram @businesswithgonz. So @businesswithgonz, and they can find me directly as well.

WOODS: All right, so is there any other link you'd like to throw out there? Because you've got so much going on, if people would like to find out about it, particularly your entrepreneurship stuff, please let us know.

TREVINO: Yeah, thank you, absolutely. So you guys can follow me on Instagram; that would be a great one. It's @businesswithgonz. You can follow my charity also on Instagram @riseupfoundationdotcom. And you can follow my charity as well on

Facebook at www.Facebook.com/riseupfoundationdotcom, written the same exact way.

WOODS: All right, I will try to get all those things up on the show notes page, which is an easy one to remember, everybody. It's TomWoods.com/900, so no excuse not to check out Gonz. Well, congratulations on all your success. Thanks for coming here to tell us about it. Hope it inspires people to say, "You know? If this guy can do it, why can't I?" So that's the question we want everybody asking, and I'm glad you were here to help provoke it in people's minds. Thanks again.

TREVINO: Thank you, Tom.