

# **THE COMBUSTION CHRONICLES**

**EPISODE SIXTY-EIGHT  
SHOCKING VULNERABILITY**

**HOST: SHAWN NASON  
GUEST: AHMAD IMAM**

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**Shawn:** Welcome to the sixth season of *The Combustion Chronicles* podcast, where bold leaders combine with big ideas to make life better for all of us. I'm your host, Shawn Nason, CEO and founder of MOFI. As an experience evangelist, I believe the only way to build a sustainable and thriving business is by putting people first.

This season is all about human-obsessed, maverick-minded influencers who are changing the business landscape by standing up for what's right, prioritizing relationships over transactions, and taking a few risks along the way.

Mavericks think differently. And, human-obsessed mavericks take all of that mavericky stuff up a notch. Filled with empathy, these special mavericks put their heads and hearts into action to think bigger and more boldly about changing the world each and every day.

Ready to blow up the status quo and ignite a people-first experience revolution? Yeah, me too. Let's do this.

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**Shawn:** On this episode of *The Combustion Chronicles*, I have the pleasure of talking to Ahmad Imam. He is a presenter, host, and highly regarded social media personality who has grown a community of one million-plus engaged followers in under three years. A content trailblazer described as charismatic, bold, smart, and engaging. Ahmad's magnetic personality and message of empowerment, has seen his content go viral, averaging four million views per month, being announced as one of the top 10 influencers to follow in 2021, and awarded the International Man of Empowerment 2021. Ahmad has also been recognized with international honors by the Royal office UAE, who awarded Ahmad the Leadership Excellence Award for his contribution to making the world a better place. Ahmad, welcome to *The Combustion Chronicles*.

**Ahmad:** Shawn, thank you very much. And I appreciate that lovely introduction.

**Shawn:** What a powerful thing, this journey you've been on the last three years. And you've shared stages in front of huge crowds, with amazing people, like Richard Branson and Tony Robbins. But I know that's not how you got your start. So could you share a little bit about your journey from dishwasher in a pizza shop, to wedding emcee, to now International Man of Empowerment in 2021?

**Ahmad:** Yeah. I definitely didn't get my start on stages. Yeah, I've very much had a few different chapters in my life. They've all been very, very different, but it's always been taking one little step up from that previous step and growing through it. So I am an immigrant from Egypt, essentially, and my family is Egyptian. We emigrated

from Egypt to Australia when I was just 4 years old. I actually couldn't speak a word of English. And when we arrived in Australia, I got thrown into a school. I was very different. I looked different. I dressed different. I definitely spoke differently. And I kind of just had to pick up the English as I went.

But my schooling years weren't the best. I don't have the best memories of them. I was bullied quite a bit for being different. And throughout that process, it actually completely destroyed my confidence and my self-esteem, especially at a time when you're going through, you know, let's say, your primary school years to your high school years, where you're trying to understand your place in the world and what it is that you do and, you know, how you're going to fit into the world. And so it really did crush me throughout that period.

But, I ended up getting a job at a pizza place, and like you said, I was making pizzas and washing dishes out back, just a very nominal job that I got locally. And I had an amazing boss there. I mean, he was my very first manager more or less, he was very different. So he was a serial entrepreneur, and he saw something in me that I didn't see in myself. I mean, I was a seriously shy, awkward kid, but he actually saw something more. And I remember a specific moment on this, it was when I decided to leave the pizza place and, you know, move on to greener pastures, he actually gifted me something that changed everything for me. And he gifted me this 24-disc CD set. And it came with a little yellow book, and on top of the book it had a name, and it said Anthony Robbins. And this was so long ago that even his name was different, right?

We're talking about CDs here. But he gifted me this CD set. I didn't know what it was. I had no idea what self-improvement was. I went back home, I put on that very first CD, and as soon as I heard that voice... If you know Tony Robbins, you know exactly what I'm talking about. You know that voice. It just shifted everything for me. From that moment, I decided to go on a bit of a journey to build my confidence, to build my courage, and to start doing things that absolutely terrified me. To jump out of my comfort zone and to help me grow through the process. And so I went on this, what I would call about a 15-year journey, doing things that would frighten me, knowing that I would not only overcome them, but I would become a better person through that. And so that did involve volunteering to be a wedding MC. It did involve volunteering to do sales presentations.

So I've had a number of roles throughout my career, starting off, you know, like you said, in a pizza place. I did door-to-door sales, selling vacuums. I did door-to-door sales, selling experiences. I was in call centers, a lot of work within the sales field.

So, going from everything, from a sales rep to a sales manager, to a sales leader. And it wasn't until probably about three and a half years ago, that I decided to jump on LinkedIn. And I did that really to just try something different, experiment with content, put myself out there a little bit to challenge myself again. And I must say, LinkedIn completely changed my trajectory also.

[05:46]

**Shawn:** That's so powerful. And Ahmad, that's how I met you, is through my network and through... Some amazing people said, "You have to follow Ahmad and you have to speak to him." You know, one of the things that we talk a lot about on *The Combustion Chronicles* and at our company, MOFI, is these things called maverick mindsets. As we talked about Richard Branson and Tony Robbins, to me, those are some of the most successful people, but they were mavericks when they first started. They were doing something different. They didn't follow the crowd. They blazed their own trail.

So, many business leaders think that they need to act like they have all the answers. And what I love, and we've already heard it from you, is that you show your vulnerability a lot of times on your LinkedIn post. You talk about your failures as that door-to-door vacuum salesman, and your feelings of self-doubt as a young man, as you shared. Why do you share so much about the ways you've fallen short of perfection, or do you even worry that will reduce people's confidence in you?

**Ahmad:** No, not at all. Not at all. And look, I do it for a very legitimate reason. And that is, everyone is going around on social media and not only sharing their highlight reels but just showing them at the top of the mountain successful. And when you think about it, how much value does that really add to people? I mean, it might give you something to aspire to, but what people really want to hear about is they want to hear about how you actually got there. They want to hear about some human emotions that you experienced throughout the journey so they can really resonate with you as a human being. And so, I really just talk about the climb most of the time, how I actually got to where I actually got to. I don't talk about the top of the mountain. I might every now and then provide updates on what it is that I'm doing, but a lot of the time and how I'm adding value a lot of the time is showing people that I am very human, that I experience the exact same emotions that they do, that I have experienced many hardships and struggles and persevered through that. And that is what people really feel at their core. So if I've differentiated myself in any way, it's shocking vulnerability, and it's definitely going against the grain on social media.

**Shawn:** And that's powerful. And again, I appreciate your vulnerability. At MOFI, we talk about this thing called the Experience Ecosystem™, Ahmad. And we are all about improving experiences for our customers, employees, and really anybody else that we touch at the company or in social media. So after you failed at selling vacuum cleaners door-to-door, you started selling experiences. And you mentioned that a minute ago. And you were much more successful at that. You also started focusing more on the quality of customer interactions and less on the quantity. And I really think that's something we need to key in on, is what are the elements of a good customer experience in your mind? And how does having those quality interactions with customers help ensure they have a positive experience?

**Ahmad:** Yeah, great question. And look, for me, it's the difference between, let's say, being in a selling or customer service scenario and having a full script, compared to being authentic. And so what I drilled in on is, you know, less about quantity and more about quality. And if we're using, let's say, door-to-door sales as an example, I mean, when I started, I was doing, let's say, 100 houses per day. I would knock 100 doors per day, which is painful, especially when, you know, most of the time, you're getting rejected or you're getting a door slammed on you or you're getting a dirty look. And I went from doing, let's say, 100 doors per day and 100 knocks per day, to probably about 25, and just spending a lot more quality time with people. So doing a lot more listening, doing a lot more observing, allowing them to talk, and just building off the quality of that interaction. And despite me reducing, you know, the number of people that I reached out to, I actually increased my conversion throughout that process, and I made it relatively enjoyable for me.

And so I realized that me being at someone's door, showing up at someone's door, or ringing a doorbell, them opening up the door, that is where the experience begins. And everything that happens from that point on, I live and die by, right? I can just be another door-to-door salesperson, or I can be a story that they actually tell at the dinner table that night. And so I decided to go in with a little bit more edutainment. It's what I call a combination of being entertaining and educating. Educating people in an entertaining way, and just being very conscious of that client experience and the process that they're actually going through, from the moment they meet me, to the moment that I say goodbye.

[10:23]

**Shawn:** Awesome. One of the cool things that I first heard you do is you're a co-host of LinkedIn's first-ever TV show called *Level Up TV*. And if you haven't seen it, you need to, for anyone who wants to learn how to build their network or expand

their reach. You said this, and I'm quoting you here, "There is nothing quite like a live stream to break down any barriers and to really bridge the gap between you and your audience." And just recently, my business partner and I started a live show on LinkedIn as well, and so I get this. So could you talk about how you're able to bridge that gap and create a positive experience for your audience? Especially since you're not even in person, we're really separated by technology.

**Ahmad:** Sure. I put out a lot of content. I mean, I've been putting out multiple pieces of content every single day now for the last, I'd say, about four or five years. And feed content is great. Look, you can pick the topic, you can start a conversation in the comments, and you can get quite a bit of engagement and interaction. But there is nothing like a live show and connecting with your audience live. And the reason being is there's nothing you can fake on a live show. It's literally just you, the camera, and the audience. That's it. You know, there's nothing you can edit, there's nothing you can filter. Whatever you say, you know, is what you said. And I love that. And that's the reason I love being on stage, because it makes me feel like I'm performing to an audience. And that's where I get my buzz.

But you also build a completely deeper connection with your audience. Them being able to see you in a live setting, like I said, without any edits or filters or anything like that, it actually builds trust because they see you in your element, right? Everything that you're doing is you. Your mannerisms, the way you talk, your speech, your eloquence, that is all you. So it's building that trust very, very quickly. And the other thing that it's doing is it allows you to respond to your audience in real-time, which, again, is amazing. So when I'm on my live show, I'm reading out comments, I'm shouting people out. I'm mentioning people by name because that's important and it makes them feel included. It's another level to building a loyal community on social media. And for me, I don't want to just have a community. I don't want to just have followers. I want to have raving fans, right?

Like you were very kind to say, someone recommended me to you. And I love hearing about that because it means that I'm doing something right or at least something different. And so live is a different element. We were lucky enough to create LinkedIn's first TV show. And what I mean by that is it literally has a TV show-type feel. We structure it like an actual TV show. We have different segments. We have questions, we have competitions, we have stories to tell, we have lessons to give. So we were very, very lucky to do that early on. We actually started that at the beginning of the COVID process, to actually reconnect with our audience when we couldn't, because part of what I do is I'm also a presenter and host for Success Resources, which is a live events company. In fact, we're the world leading live

events promotional company. And we work with people like Tony Robbins and Richard Branson and Gary Vee and Robert Kiyosaki, and everything like that. And what happens to a live events company when COVID hits? You go from 500 events per year to zero. And so, this live show, *Level Up TV*, was a way for us to reconnect with our audience, let them know that we're still there, and also be just completely real and authentic and vulnerable about what's happening.

We started off actually talking about yeah, how tough this is. How difficult it is for us to be going through this process. We were there talking through the shifts and transitions we were going to make into a virtual event business as we were doing it. And so it really makes your audience feel like you're also part of the journey in live form.

**Shawn:** I love how you guys you took something that could have been so tragic, started this, and really brought the human back into something that could be very impersonal. So, I want to jump into some business case and value proposition talk because many of our listeners are business leaders, and lead teams, or are C-suite. And you train your employees to be brand ambassadors, which we all know is really, really important. What's one thing any business leader can do to start turning employees into brand ambassadors?

[15:00]

**Ahmad:** Well, that is part of what I do. What I mainly do, though, is I'm a social media consultant to high-net-worth individuals. So majority of the time I'm actually working with the CEOs and the founders and the business leaders, executives, etc. Helping their staff is just one element of what I do for them to help further promote them as a personal brand. Yeah, so for me, I've had the opportunity to work with a lot of incredible people that are amazing at what they do. And what's interesting is, a lot of these people that I work with, are people that have real influence offline. Right? They're CEOs or they're celebrities. I work with millionaires, with billionaires, with royal families. They're people that have this real-world influence, and a lot of people admire them offline, but they don't know how to translate that online. And so what I do for them and what I do for their executives and teams, is I help them connect to their audience, and I help them position themselves correctly so that they can transfer that influence, or at least replicate that influence from offline to online, and then completely amplify it. And I've achieved some incredible results with my clients, which I'm very proud of.

But like I was saying to them, the social media enterprise space right now is a \$200 billion industry. And it's growing at about 25.2% in terms of compound annual growth. That means by year 2026, it's going to be a trillion-dollar industry. So anyone that is not investing highly in using social media to promote their business, to complement their business, to lift up their team as brand ambassadors to help them further promote their business, to position themselves as an influencer within their business and an influencer within their industry, anyone that's not doing that is going to be left behind. And that's just why I focus so heavily on a lot of these key characters, who have incredible potential, have done amazing things offline, but are at risk of actually losing out to anyone that does it better on social media.

**Shawn:** Let's talk about that a minute, Ahmad, because last year I made a conscious choice that I was going to double down on LinkedIn and not focus on other platforms. So in my opinion, LinkedIn has quickly really become the platform of choice for both business individuals and companies that want to increase their influence. So, what's the business case for a company? What do they need to do to really invest in it's LinkedIn presence and why? And this is coming from a top 10 influencer, so I hope people are listening to this.

**Ahmad:** Yeah. Look, and it doesn't need to be LinkedIn. It really depends on where your audience is. For me, operating within a B2B space, it's definitely the number one platform for me. And, you know, I'm able to connect with decision-makers directly on LinkedIn, which is very difficult to do on other platforms. There are so many reasons why you need to focus on building your influence and visibility on social. And I know a lot of people are averse to this and they don't have the time or they don't have the ability or are just not willing to do it. There are so many ways to build that presence on social media without you having to do a single thing. And there are people set up that have businesses set up to help accommodate that. You've got social media managers, you've got social media consultants. You can hire virtual assistants to help you oversee the entire process of creating content. But the idea is that you want to build trust, and you want to build trust with your potential clients, and also your existing client base to further solidify and reinforce that trust.

And the strategy, essentially, is you get people to know you first by making yourself as visible as possible. You get people to like you. And I know it's strange when you say, you know, "Get people to like you." Well, to get people to like you, you really just have to be authentic, and you have to be consistent, and you have to be consistent with your authenticity. That's very important. And if people start to know you, start to like you as a result of you putting out content and engaging on their

content, giving away as much free value as you possibly can, showcasing your expertise and your knowledge and case studies and your personality and your values and the human side of you. If you can do all that, they're likely to trust you. And once they trust you, they will then do business with you, and once they do business with you, they will then continue to do business with you. So it's not only a great tool and resource to be able to build and elevate your personal brand, to bring in a lot more real-world opportunities, but it's also a great way to attract potential clients and be able to showcase what you do so that by the time they contact you, they're already probably about 60% to 70% the way through their decision-making process in terms of deciding to work with you or not, and you haven't had to do much to be able to reach them. So it is so very important.

And I'll tell you what, the next two to five years, are going to be so important for you to be able to position yourself within the social media space, especially on LinkedIn, which is still relatively new compared to the other platforms. I mean, it started in 2002, yes, but it really only started to build momentum probably about three or four years ago. And it hasn't even reached the stage where it's at the other platforms, right? So it's probably like Facebook of 2012 right now. There's so much blue ocean there, and I urge everyone to take advantage.

[20:30]

**Shawn:** Yeah. So, I love those three gems. And we use three experience design principles with our clients that we work with. But you made it really simple there. Know you, like you, and trust you. It's three really simple things. And then I think you were diving into this last question I wanted to ask you. And you and I have been in business long enough to know that the only constant is change.

And so there's a trend that I want to talk about because, in 1996, Bill Gates said that, "Content is king on the internet." And that was 25 years ago. And online content has certainly changed since then. So, where do you see content heading on LinkedIn in the next few years? Is it text or video, short post or long articles, or is it something that we're not even seeing right now?

**Ahmad:** Yeah, look, we're definitely seeing a trend to shorter, easy-to-absorb content. You're right. And that's why things like TikTok have blown up, stories are blowing up. Anything that is quick, easy to absorb, with a very fast message that people can take in, is working. But there are so many things that are happening at the moment and that will happen in the future, right? We're seeing the evolution of the metaverse, right? We're seeing AR and VR take on completely different levels.

And so, I see that having a part to play in social media. But what we've seen in terms of the biggest transition, I feel, especially for a business platform like LinkedIn, is people are now starting to realize that you don't need to show up on these platforms. Even if you're doing it for work, if you're doing it for business, you don't need to show up with your business persona because people don't care anymore. What people care about is whether or not they resonate with you, whether or not they can relate to you as a human being.

And so the best thing to do is actually to show the human being behind the business persona. The human being behind that professional persona. The human being behind your actual business. And if people will resonate and relate to the values that you exhibit, again, as a human being, they're a lot more likely to do business with you. And especially if we're talking about millennials, for example, millennials don't make big decisions to do business with someone based on seeing a business advertisement. They don't trust that. What they do trust, however, is people. They trust people far more than they do businesses. And that's why the evolution of the personal brand has been so successful. Personal brand now is far more important than a business brand. Personal brand marketing is far more important than branding and marketing for your actual business. And that's based on human behavior and how people make their decisions to trust.

**Shawn:** Great, great, great wisdom and knowledge there for us, Ahmad. Thanks a ton. But it has come to that point where we have to wrap up this episode. But we do these things called the Combustion Questions. And they're three randomly selected questions, Ahmad, that I'm going to ask you. I just got them. And so, are you ready for your Combustion Questions?

**Ahmad:** I'm ready. I'm ready. Let's go for it.

**Shawn:** Well, awesome. Combustion Question number one. If you could choose any vehicle to drive or fly around for a couple of hours, which vehicle would you choose?

**Ahmad:** Well, great question. To drive or fly. Look, if you asked me this question about 10 years ago, I would have had a very different answer. If you ask me today, I would probably have to say a Bentley is my weakness. Right now, I'm getting old. I'm almost at the age of 40. I appreciate comfort as opposed to aesthetics right now. So, the more comfortable the car, the better for me.

**Shawn:** So drive or fly a Bentley. Awesome. I love it. Number two, do you prefer aquariums or zoos?

**Ahmad:** Zoos. I love zoos.

**Shawn:** And tell me why.

**Ahmad:** I love the idea of being able to go to one location and see every single animal I could possibly imagine and get my animal fix for a few months. I love Safari animals. I love elephants. I love big cats. And, you know, I can go to the zoo and see everything from big cats to penguins in the same area. So, yeah, I'm a big zoo fan.

**Shawn:** I love it. Love it. All right, question number three. And this could be your hardest one you've had so far now, Ahmad. What do you think about business cards?

**Ahmad:** Dated. Dated. But I'll tell you what, they still earn a place. But what I like to use personally is, I've actually got a digital card, and so when I go to any networking events, I can actually take this card and just scan it on someone's phone and it immediately pops up with all my details. And so it's just a really easy, nifty way to not only translate the details, but it's also a bit of a talking point. So, look, I personally think cards are dated. I think we all remember having those big folders where we slip all those cards in, you know, and you check it once every six months and wipe off the cobwebs. We need to find a newer way to adapt given the change in technology, given the change in the way we communicate. And this digital card, for me, really helps.

**Shawn:** I think that may be a trend that we might be going to, so, I love it. Well, again, Ahmad, thank you so much for giving us your time on this episode and for sharing so much wisdom with us. I think it's pretty easy to be said, but if people want to follow you or learn more about you, Ahmad, where is the best place for them to go to get in touch with you?

**Ahmad:** Absolutely. You can definitely follow me on social. So I'm on everything, from LinkedIn to Facebook, Instagram, Clubhouse, YouTube. But, if you want to really reach me quickly, I would suggest reaching out to me on LinkedIn. Send me a DM, I would love to hear from you, and I would love to chat.

**Shawn:** Well, again, thank you for your time. And I can't wait for our next conversation. So we'll talk later.

**Ahmad:** Thank you, Shawn. Appreciate it.

**Shawn:** Thank you so much for listening to this episode of *The Combustion Chronicles*. If you've enjoyed this episode, please take a few minutes to subscribe, rate, and review.

Remember that I'm always looking to meet more big-thinking mavericks, so let's keep the conversation going by connecting on LinkedIn.

If you want to discover more about human-obsessed, maverick-minded experience ecosystems, go to [MOFI.co](http://MOFI.co) where you'll discover ideas and resources to help you ignite your own experience revolution.

And be sure to check out my book, *Kiss Your Dragons: Radical Relationships, Bold Heartsets, and Changing the World*, available on Amazon. Then head over to [ShawnNason.com](http://ShawnNason.com) to engage resources, a discussion guide, and information about everything from self-paced learning to personal coaching.

As always, stay safe, be well, and keep blowing sh\*t up!