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Welcome to a special GQ edition of Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game, but this week featuring two guests - both global editorial leaders of the men's fashion and style title. I'm joined down the line from New York by Will Welch, global editorial director and from London by Adam Baidawi, deputy global editorial director. Will and Adam both recently won the top two leadership roles at GQ - under publisher Conde Nast's new global digital first strategy. GQ is now led globally by Will, who was formerly the editor of American GQ. Adam was named as his deputy, and was previously editor of GQ Middle East, moving from Dubai to London to take up the role. Will and Adam immediately made their mark with a special September issue of GQ - in which 17 of the brand's international editions joined forces, to simultaneously publish a cover edition featuring pop's most compelling act, The Weeknd. Will and Adam, thank you for joining me.

[Will]

Thank you so much, Paul. Really a pleasure to be here and thanks for the beautiful introduction. That was great.

[Adam]

Thank you Paul, it's great!

I'm very excited to talk to you both. I mean, congratulations on a hugely successful GQ Awards in London recently, getting Prince Harry to speak on vaccine disparity, a great coup. I mean, you two couldn't be taking over at a more exciting time.

[Adam]

I had the pleasure of attending the awards. Obviously the British GQ team has had a long history of throwing incredible parties, bringing incredible people together. And the vibe in that room, especially after 18 months or so of being locked in our houses,

not seeing one another, it was a very, very special night and definitely a lot to be proud of.

Will, were you watching it on Zoom? That's one of the perils of being based in New York. Is it not?

[Will]

Totally! I was cheerleading from afar, texting everybody and letting them know good luck. But that was kind of the extent of my participation, but yeah, very exciting to see the huge success and yeah, I was following along like everybody else online.

Well, I mean we have plenty to discuss, but we have got nearly an hour to do it, so there's plenty to get through, but I mean, let's start with the elephant in the room. GQ, what an iconic brand. It must be an incredible opportunity for both of you guys. How did it come about? And frankly, what are your plans for it?

[Will]

Like there's just this new moment that we're in.

Absolutely. How did he take on the top two roles in, I mean the most prestigious two roles in men's magazines in my view?

[Will]

Thank you, Paul. Definitely doesn't feel that way when we're just grinding it out every day, but kind of you to say. I've been at GQ since 2007 at US GQ and yeah, I became editor in chief in America in 2019 and then had the opportunity to jump into this role at the beginning of the year. And that's something that Adam and I have been leading together and frankly, it just feels like it's time for change and not time for little tweaks or just fiddling with the dials. It was time for a real overhaul. And what happened is globally, this is already a very global brand GQ, there are 21 additions around the world and for the most part we're focused on incredibly global industries. So that's the fashion industry, that's culture, Hollywood, music, cars, all this stuff, watches, all these things are completely global industries. And we had this incredible global network of 21 additions around the world, but the truth behind the scenes was that none of us were really speaking to each other, none of us were collaborating, none of us were sharing stories. And in fact, we would often find ourselves competing with one another for some of the same stories in this kind of global marketplace. And it just seemed like as we all know over the last, you know, 10 to 15 years, the media industry in general and magazines in particular have been massively disrupted by the incredible force of the internet, which we are of course simultaneously a part of, and we've been disrupted by it. And so we just thought well, it's time for a big move. And of course the move is to sort of harness the superpower of these 21 additions, which frankly was like this kind of superpower that we had access to, but had been lying dormant for all these years. So rather than it being 21 siloed additions around the world, all just kind of like loosely agreeing on what GQ represents, but otherwise like calling their own shots and maybe to some extent, like wandering off in different

directions, it was like, let's take hold of this thing, get it organised, do this with great intention, get unified and build our future. So that's the project and that's what's underway. And the launch of it was in August with, as you mentioned, the September issue, starting the weekend with participation of 17 of the titles around the world in that big cover moment. So, it's an incredibly exciting moment for GQ.

I mean, Adam, you were saying that previously the brands were kind of working against each other and sort of almost like silos. It sounds to me like you're harnessing the power of global unity.

[Adam]

Yeah. I mean, we always said that we're in the business of shaping culture and culture moves and evolves and we had to move with it. We weren't really in a position to shape culture with 21 siloed businesses in great part centered around print products. And like multiple times a week I just remember that it's a pretty wild thing that we never really spoke to one another. I mean, we'd say hi, we'd bump into each other at fashion week, we were friendly, but we never collaborated. And we were actually much more incentivised to compete with one another than to collaborate. So we competed, it was all about the thrill of the big exclusive, who's going to have the sickest cover this month, who is going to get the big cover star. And were all extraordinarily proud of the brands who were building it out in various markets. But none of those cool local moments or local successes really translated to a global impact or to GQ's overall power increasing, it felt like a zero-sum game. We're all very proud and protective of what we had built in our individual markets. But now that we've put that old way of working to one side, it's become super clear, super fast that there's this much bigger prize that we can win together. And that's crazy exciting.

Will, it seems like the new structure is designed to secure bigger scoops, more groundbreaking storytelling, just working together, reflecting the fact that as you've said, GQ is a global brand.

[Will]

Yeah, absolutely. You know, there's kind of two things going on at once here. One, yes when we're all working together and we can sort of synchronise around chasing big stories whether that's a cover star, like The Weeknd or Matt Damon, or Will Smith, which has been our last three months since we launched as a global brand, absolutely greater power. When you can talk to some of those big stars about a global reach instead of just individual markets. So there's a huge advantage there. But the other thing is that, I mean, there's really no such thing as a global story, all stories begin as local and then it's a matter of what you do with them. So, you know, whether it's like a piece of long form journalism that is set in a small town, like wherever it might be somewhere around the world, or it's The Weeknd being a kid from Toronto who now lives in Los Angeles, you know, those are still like local stories. And so what we've done is just built this network where you have the ability that anytime you have a story that's going to resonate in one or several of these 21 markets around the world where you just have the ability to sort of seamlessly publish that story there. And one thing that is incredibly important that Adam briefly

touched on, he said that when these 21 additions were mostly siloed and working on their own, the vast majority of the energy was going into the print product. And print is absolutely essential to GQ. I don't know if this metaphor means anything to anyone other than me, but it's like the shining diamond at the center of what we do. And it radiates all of this energy out of it. And that was true in the past and that's true today and that's absolutely going to be true in the future. But as we know, increasingly audiences and revenue both, are moving or have moved towards digital. So what building this network and sharing content, especially print stories, is doing is allowing us to refocus and reinvest in local digital storytelling at each of these websites around the world. And that is really just us catching up to the state of play. As I said, a lot of the activity, whether it's readers or clients, is really, focused on digital. So, you know, web, social, video, et cetera, all of these digital platforms. I mean, we're talking to you on a podcast right now, these are the platforms where there are huge audiences and you can get the network effect and so on. So now we're built in a way to focus digitally, which is the medium of our time. So I think it just makes so much sense.

Adam, you heard Will there, “radical local storytelling on digital.” How would you actually deal with that then? How would you ensure that you've delivered this? That you've got national differentiation and that thrives within the new global structure? I mean, one of the things that sprung to mind for me is, what is a GQ reader? Is there something that a GQ reader has in common with other GQ readers wherever they are in the world? Is there something that marks an American GQ reader different from a British GQ reader?

[Adam]

Actually, the great big secret here is that the data showed us that our readers are ahead of us in all of this. It turns out that people don't consume culture within hard geographical boundaries. We saw that around 40% of our global traffic crosses international borders. And a lot of this transformation is about us meeting our readers where they are. And as Will touched on just before, there was an opportunity cost that comes with print. Print really, really matters to us, but yet you notice that print takes a monstrous amount of time and energy and blood, sweat, and tears and money. And it's an incredibly resource intensive medium, and it's admitting that we hold ourselves to incredibly high standards. We were competing over and over again to secure the same cover stars and photographers and writing very similar features on the same subjects. So by uniting to create a global GQ that will, and I think will be the most compelling and urgent and beautiful men's fashion magazine on the planet. We're unlocking this enormous brain power we have around the world, all these resources we have around the world to pour into the platforms that are fans of living on and local storytelling is going to be pledged to all of this. One of the things we have perhaps not done the very best at so far was explaining the way in which we're going to be creating and beaming content around the world, our kind of quote unquote “global content” isn't going to be so generic that it just happens to resonate universally, but as well as that, it's about us identifying the most ambitious and urgent stories in local markets, and then elevating them to a global level so they can travel across borders and really resonate from market to market.

[Will]

The key with local relevance is just strong journalism. And we have great confidence in ourselves in this global network that we've built in terms of just the quality of the local journalism in each of these markets. So that is what will be key to that local resident.

I mean, one of the things I love about GQ is physically holding a tactile physical glossy magazine, Will.

[Will]

God bless you Paul, thank you!

Is there a future for someone like me, will there always be a print magazine? Because obviously I subscribe to our newsletters. I read the website as well. I suppose I'm both. But when I asked you to imagine a GQ reader, I suppose they're going to be a consumer aren't they now, because they're going to touch on podcasts, rich multimedia online, as well as the magazine. Do you have an idea of what the touch points will be with your readers or consumers going forward?

[Will]

Yeah, I mean, we're so blessed that we have this incredibly long print history. And like I was saying that isn't going anywhere, but at the same time, it was time to recalibrate how we were invested across this global network and print versus digital. And there's no question that we need to move greater attention, greater resources by which I mean, the efforts of our journalists, production people, all of that needs to be pointed more at digital. And that means our budget too, that needs to be pointed more at digital as well, but we are never letting go of print, like point blank. It's absolutely essential. And one thing that print does is it services a lot of readers like yourself and like me. I have this kind of catchphrase on social media, which is "print is good." And that's just something I really believe in. And I think it's proven to be a huge differentiator between GQ and the other Conde Nast titles and so many sort of upstart digital brands over the years. Many of which have been kind of lauded as, that they were going to make the legacy print titles irrelevant and that just hasn't happened. And I think that's partially because we do have print there. The other thing is that writers, photographers, talent, all of them still want to be in print even as they become more and more open to shooting video with us, doing digital exclusives, especially when they have something happening fast and so much culture is currently happening on tight turnarounds now, and it can't meet print deadlines. So, these huge talents are increasingly open to digital first collaborations with us. But at the same time, the magnet of print is still incredibly powerful. Everybody wants to send their print GQ story to their mum. That's just the way it is. I didn't get the laugh I was hoping for!

[Adam]

I wanted to laugh!

[Will]

I'm going to tell myself that you guys were both on mute, out of respect and that's why I didn't get a chuckle!

Adam, I was going to bring you in there because I do think fondly of print. And I think one of the reasons I like it is, I like to have a linear experience. I like to read the cover and then be taken through the order of the magazine in which both of you as the editors decide is the most important way. I think of it almost as like a platform game like Sonic the Hedgehog, whereas the website is a bit more sort of like Grand Theft Auto where you can kind of just hope that something attract someone's attention, they get a clique, but if they don't, then you're not going to go anywhere are you?

[Adam]

That's tight. I like the video game analogy for us. Look, print is such an incredible experience because like you said, it is linear. It's so carefully curated. I don't want to let go of that experience. I don't want our brand to ever let go of that experience, but like Will said, we also have to recognise just how much of a laser focus we had on print. And we were hurting ourselves, with the folks that are going to become the next generation of readers, of consumers, of fans, of whatever you may want to call them. Print is just another platform for us to do our storytelling. And some people really, really, really dig that. And so we're going to continue to do that at a very, very high level. But we just want to make sure that we're meeting everyone else as well and doing that at the same high level and not letting those other emerging platforms be an afterthought, they should be just as polished, just as sexy, just as cool and we feel like with this new model, we're kind of firing on all cylinders in that way.

[Will]

The other opportunity here is to evolve print so that it meets needs for our readers, including young readers who don't have this kind of early learned love for the print medium. We need to attract them in a new way by transforming print itself. So that a younger reader who just does everything through their phone, sees value in it. And I think a good kind of metaphor for that, or not metaphor, but another industry that we can look at is the way that vinyl has taken on a new resonance in the music business, vinyl sales are playing an absolutely crucial part and the overall view of the music business, which as we all know, is focused on streaming. And I think that's something that we can look at, but if we didn't evolve print, if we kept doing it the way that we used to and then try to just turn up the dials on digital, we're evolving everything, changing everything. We have another catchphrase that we have that came from a big project that we did in 2020 is 'Change Is Good.' And I think in the media right now, if you are stuck in the past or hanging on to what worked or hanging on to what you loved when you first, any of us loved when we first discovered magazines as teenagers or whatever the case may be like you're going to die, you just are. You have to keep pushing forward. And so that's what we're up to. And we

love that. I mean, one of GQ core values going back to its founding in 1957 was just leaning in, being on the cutting edge. What's next? From a fashion perspective, it's not about classicism. It's about what's happening now. What's coming around the corner. What's next? And so we think that, just being open to, and sort of like aggressively pursuing change, isn't just right in this environment, to be that and to do that and to operate that way and to run this brand that way is to be GQ

Adam. I mean, you guys made a statement with The Weeknd as the cover star. That was your chance as a global editorial team to plant the flagpole and say this is the new way going forward. What was the thought process in putting The Weeknd on the new global cover? I imagine you had lots of stars that would be desperate to get on the cover of GQ. So you've obviously chosen him over others? So, why him?

[Adam]

Will has this fantastic saying that, "music is a universal language." And we The Weeknd, if you look at the consistency at his releases, the long, long, long tail of the performance of his songs, the fact that he's a truly global star, he can travel to any country in the world and sell out shows. We just felt that Abel had built something so deliberately and so of our era that he epitomised what we wanted GQ to be globally, he felt like a really phenomenal first star. There was so much enthusiasm from our peers, our colleagues around the world for having him on our first global cover. And I think it just rang true. It felt just right. He is the embodiment of the modern musician. And he's had a great deal to say about where culture is headed.

[Will]

The other thing I would add there is that we know him and he's a great collaborator. So we felt that creatively that there was something, a real partnership that we could create there and sort of like we wanted to reinvent him. And then he would also sort of like help reinvent us. And that's what a true collaboration is about. It's like we do our thing, you do your thing. But when we come together, we wind up in a new place that neither of us would have been. Mark Anthony Green's great profile of The Weeknd. Dan Jackson, just a fantastic fashion shoot style by George Bertina. And I think it's The Weeknd as you've never seen him before and September GQ, as you've never seen it before. And that's what we always are going for with those kinds of collaborations.

Do you have a shopping list of the biggest fish that you'd like to catch to be the cover stars? Is Prince Harry a target, for example? Do you have a list of icons of masculinity that GQ readers want to read more about?

[Will]

We definitely have ongoing conversations between us and all of our global leadership about who's on the list. And it's been really exciting. We formed what we call the GQ global leadership committee. So that is the leads from each of our markets when we all come together. And you know, it's a new process for us, but we're starting to have

this really kind of like dynamic idea sessions. And it's cool because when you bring up somebody's name, all the leads from around the world will weigh in with how that person is, or is not resonant to their readership. And for me, it's just also this exciting, you know, as a global citizen it's really exciting to be learning about the world through the lens of GQ from these conversations we're having with this new team that we built. It's just fascinating, like who will, and won't resonate in Taiwan or Japan, you know, Mexico, India, Germany, Spain, Italy, the UK, the US I mean, it's fascinating and that's a brand new process to us. So we do kind of have, I'm not going to name names, but there are some names that hang around as people that we would like to go after, especially now that we have this kind of new global firepower to offer. But the conversation around that is totally new and just really cool.

Well, I'm available if you are ever short of a cover star, if someone backs out at short notice, and you need someone reasonably attractive for the cover. I'd slip both of you £50 pounds \$50 in your case Will, when needed.

[Will]

Your Zoom headshot looks very much like a GQ cover! We just need to drop the logo behind you there.

Yes please! Why do you think that I chose that as my Zoom headshot, of course. This whole podcast is just me desperately trying to get on your radar as a cover star. Adam, GQ stands for progressive values. I've read that several times. I liked that, but how would you define that? And also isn't this the worst time in the world to be standing for progressive values given how divisive culture wars are? Surely can't we just to the niceties?

[Will]

This is the best time!

[Adam]

There's never been a more important time. I think progress is the key word for us. Will talked a little bit about how 'Change Is Good' came together last year, but when we all sat down, I think it was like July 2020, like the summer of 2020 and said right, really what are we about? All of those values, just distilled into change and embracing change, embracing the new, embracing what comes next in the culture, embracing change in society. And I'm not the slightest bit scared of us staking out our territory in that space and us being completely comfortable and open and saying that we're a magazine that's about progress. We're not going to be a particularly useful fashion magazine if we're about looking back, about being too classic, the thing that makes GQ GQ is newness. And so we're always going to be embracing that. And I don't think it's a particularly controversial statement to be embracing change and embracing progress.

Will, I mean, Adam mentioned there about the GQ 'Changes Is Good' manifesto. It's been agreed by the editorial teams all around the world. How will those values, diversity and so on impact editorially?

[Will]

It's about storytelling, you know, it's about real journalism, so we're very aware of that publishing manifesto and the four values that we agreed upon are diversity, gender equality, sustainability, and mental health. It's not enough to publish a manifesto that says yeah, we believe in these things, like, that's fine, but what are we doing in an ongoing way to continue to explore these topics? I mean, for me, that's what GQ does powerfully. So when we published the new masculinity issue, it was an exploration of the ways that masculinity is evolving. And the same is true for these core values. It's about assigning stories that really move the ball forward rather than just like yelling from the rooftops that you care about sustainability. Like, of course we care about sustainability and we're having an issue next year that will be dedicated to what we think is a very us, like when covering a topic like sustainability, that is so huge and important right now. What you wouldn't get from us is 'the GQ sustainability issue.' Like we're going to do something really specific and very particular to GQ and its worldview very resonant with GQ and its readers around the world. That's going to move that conversation forward. So that's what that moment was about. It's like, it's the beginning of something. It's a statement of intent rather than being complete in and of itself.

I mean, Adam, you're based in London and in the UK GQ will definitely get a new direction after Dylan Jones. I mean, he stumped his personal style on the title as editor for 22 years. Are you sitting in his chair right now? Are you sitting behind that desk? How does it actually work? And do you feel that the weight of wanting to keep what's good about that era while also wanting to define the new chapter that you guys are creating for yourselves?

[Adam]

Well, I'm not sitting on Dylan's chair, but it needs to be said just how remarkable a brand and a product that he and his team built over the past two decades here in the UK. Sitting at the Tate Modern a few weeks back at the GQ awards is just a reminder of the ambition and influence that we've built in our territories around the world. And one of the most exciting parts of all of this, Will kind of hit on this before. It's just for the first time we're going to be able to share all these collective learnings, all this collective wisdom, all this collective influence, and actually click together as a global brand, rather than being remarkable in entirely different ways that don't add together and kind of build something more than that. So this is a particularly cool moment for us globally, but also here in the UK, because there's a lot to be shared out of the UK. And a lot we can learn from what's been built here for a long time.

Will?

[Will]

Just echo what Adam said there. That GQ has a proud history around the world. And now we're getting ourselves structurally in place, structurally modernised and ready to push this thing into the future. So we are grateful to the many great editors, Dylan absolutely included who kind of like got us to this place and excited to push ahead.

How is it going to work on a more corporate level at Conde Nast with a global digital first strategy? Are you going to get to work more closely with editors like Anna Wintour, Edward Enninful at Vogue and the teams at Wired and Conde Nast Traveller for example?

[Will]

Yeah, I would say overall, there's just a new level of communication and collaboration. The ability and the will to sort of share learnings about what's worked and what hasn't. It has led just like a total transformation of the culture here in terms of editorial leadership talking to each other. And I've recently begun speaking more frequently to your question, Paul, to Edward who is not somebody I knew in years past. And then Anna, as chief content officer of the global company, you know, a leader to all of us in addition to her role leading Vogue. So yeah, absolutely the whole new culture here of collaboration and conversation. And as we all know, this is a data led marketplace. So when I can be speaking to the leads at Wired about what they're seeing in our data, sharing with them, what we're seeing in our data and comparing that back and forth, that's a huge advantage. So not only to your point, do we have access to what's happening across the GQ network. We also, in a way that truly is new since Roger Lynch became CEO and Anna Wintour took on a global corporate leadership position, just new conversation, new collaboration, new shared learning. So, that's a huge opportunity.

I mean, Adam, back in the day, an editor would only have one metric as to whether something was working or not. The news standard sales, or for example, the subscriptions and you tinker with two or three things and sales would either go up or down, but you wouldn't really know what caused what. I mean now as Will was saying with the advent of digital metrics, you know exactly what people are looking at, how they got there, the dwell time and so on, what kind of insight does that get you? Does it drive the editorial decisions you make or is it something that you just use to tweak it? Because it's good journalism, isn't it, what attracts readers? But how do you balance that between giving them what you think they want in terms of the creative process versus sort of slightly being a slave to the data, sort of playing catch up and feeding the data behemoth?

[Adam]

We're positively blessed by our audience development teams globally, who feed into us everything we need to know about the health of our brands and every data point that would help to inform what we're doing, but to Will's point earlier, we're storytellers, that's where everything starts. And we know that as soon as we start

deviating away from our journalism, our storytelling, and to a certain extent our gut instincts, we're going to lose a little bit of the magic that we've built up over many, many decades. It's also really, really exciting to exist in an era where a majority of our advertising revenue is now digital for the first time. And we can also look to diversify ourselves away from pure advertising plays and build our consumer revenue, which is looking like it'll double in the next few years, and also build out really exciting new parts of our business like GQ Recommends and really just diversify what we offer and who we're partnering with to deliver it. That just feels a whole lot more modern, a whole lot more flexible, a whole lot more impactful than it did when my career first started. It feels like a true global media brand, as opposed to a print magazine that happens to have a website. And a few digital channels.

Let's give each of you the spotlight for five minutes, if we can. I'd be interested in sort of your career journeys as to how you both got from, you were born at an early age now you're where you are. We'll start with you Will, if we can. Did you always want to be a journalist? How ambitious were you? You're now global editorial director at GQ. How does someone go about doing that? We have a lot of people listening to this podcast that aspire to success in the media, they're starting their careers and they look to someone like you to see, how did you really make it?

[Will]

I would say that when I was graduating from college with an English literature degree at around age 16, 15, 16, I really started to love being a writer and feeling like that's where my gifts were in school, sort of recognise that yeah, around 15, 16, and started to pursue that. And I was finishing at college and I was like, well, how do I get paid to be a writer? Like that was my only goal. Like it seemed to me at the beginning of a writing career was to just find someone who would hire me to write. And the way that ended up working is I got an unpaid internship at an independent music magazine in New York City called The Fader. And so I was working as an unpaid intern, and then I was bar backing, taking out the trash washing dishes at a local bar here in Manhattan. And then did that through the summer and eventually got put on as a very junior editor at The Fader, ended up there for four and a half years. And then in 2007, got a call about an opportunity at GQ. I think I'm fairly unique for my generation, I'm 40 years old. I've only had two jobs in my career. I was at The Fader for four and a half years, and now GQ for 14 years. And I would say that my career has been marked by working really hard, being kind to people, that includes my colleagues, my bosses, the people who have reported to me over the years, the collaborators and the media industry, the talent that we interact with, that is just like a core principle to me. And then always being myself, I think sometimes young, ambitious people think that they have to change or modify who they are or the way that they act in the world in order to emulate successful people that they've seen come before them. And I have found that myself and my generation, we do it really differently than the generation before us. And we didn't have to imitate the sort of Titans of media who came before us in order to be successful. In fact, what we needed to do is represent for a new generation, a new way of being, a new way of doing business, a new way of interacting. And that is what has made me and my peers successful. But at the beginning, end and middle of the day, I just think it's

about hard work, going with your gut instincts, doing what you believe in. There's just a difference, especially in this era, audiences can just smell anything that is contrived. I think that one of the most exciting things about our time is that the real stuff rises to the top and the imitation sinks. And so you just have to do what you believe in and see where that takes you. And I don't know, what an incredible time. And then the other thing that's so exciting about our time and all of these different fast moving platforms. So if there's a young person who's interested in media now, there's so many outlets, so many forms that creativity can take on. You know, if you look at the differences between YouTube and TikTok, and Facebook and Instagram, Instagram, and print. The way that different journalists who have different skills are able to kind of find their footing in different platforms. I've seen so many journalists who in addition to being talented journalists are just really good at Twitter, and that has given them these huge audiences and allowed them to be very successful very fast. So I think it's an absolutely incredible time. The other thing I would say that I've learned in my career is just staying really open to developing new skills. Like I began at GQ as an associate editor. I was writing and editing small what we call front of book stories, you know, short pieces of content for the first section of the magazine. And then, you know, by 2018, I was working as the creative director. So I was just doing visuals. And over the course of my career, the visual component became increasingly interesting and something I increasingly got good at. And luckily I was at a place which was at the time US GQ that really nurtured that evolution. And so I went from doing all words to doing all fashion and images, and I've since been able to combine the two. So yeah, working hard, allowing yourself to be kind. That's all I got.

You're the top guy, you've got a great team behind you, but does the responsibility weigh heavily on you? Because I don't want to sort of be a Debbie downer, but that would weigh heavily on me that you've got to get this right. That it's an amazing opportunity, but you also have, frankly, you don't wanna mess it up?

[Will]

Yeah. I think if you spend too much time thinking about messing it up, you're way more likely to mess it up. So we just go for it. I have the metabolism for this era. I have an appetite for change and newness and trying things, because like right now, Adam and I have the trust and backing of our company and the leaders at our company and our teams. So what that means is you can try things as we've already acknowledged, we're in this incredible era of all this data and audience feedback, you know, on social media. If we try something and our audience thinks it sucks, they tell us.

They're gonna come back and say "you suck."

[Will]

Yeah, they'll be like "you guys rule, but that sucked." And we're like, okay, cool, good to know. And the data does the same thing, like all day, every day. So it's this

incredible time where you can experiment, try new things. Some of them will work. Some of them won't, we're not going to kick ourselves in the teeth when a few things don't work. We're just gonna keep playing with it until we find the magic formula. And I think that's what it's about. And so I believe in that and I don't know, so far so good in terms of sticking to our guns, focusing on what we believe in and being willing to, to kind of adjust as we get feedback. So I'm not scared of failure, I guess.

So walk the tightrope, but don't look down, focus on the tightrope walking and the tightrope ahead of you rather than worrying about what happens if you fall off. Because that's gonna make you fall off. Isn't it?

[Will]

Yeah, I think so. If you're saying, "oh man, are my feet beginning to quiver a little bit and it sure is dizzying up here." No, you just keep putting one foot in front of the other. Absolutely.

So, Adam, I mean, you were born at an early age, you're now deputy global editorial director of GQ. How does one go about achieving and doing that?

[Adam]

I would say I definitely took the scenic route to where I am today. It took a good minute and it had a lot of twists and turns. It looked like they didn't have much to do with one another. I grew up in suburban Melbourne, Australia. After graduating high school I did some tennis coaching and basketball coaching at my old school. And one thing that I was always pretty decent at was writing. I was obsessed with Australian bulls football at the time. And so I kind of reached out to people at my favourite football club until they let me start writing for their website. And then, I got an appetite for that and I started pitching local music street press magazines. So back in the day, the magazine would just be on the floor at the train station, you could pick one up on the way home free of charge. And luckily for me, the editor at a local magazine in Melbourne called Beat, took a liking to me. I was like 17 or 18. And he was like, cool, I've got all these musicians that need to be interviewed every single week. Can pay you almost nothing, but I can give you all these opportunities. So I kind of kept up my tennis coaching and basketball coaching but essentially said yes to every single interview opportunity that this editor would send out. And I've still got copies of my first few stories and my writing was god-awful and I was extremely lucky that this guy, Nick Snelling was so patient with me, because what that opportunity allowed for was a whole lot of reps. So I did like a thousand reps at interviewing people. I did reps at diving into genres of music I wasn't overly familiar with, like I interviewed DragonForces' music. I'd never listened to it before that interview. I interviewed bloody Shaggy and Maroon Five and a whole bunch of independent Australian musicians and just the act of repeating the whole story process over and over again from interview prep to the interview itself, to transcribing, to shaping the story. I think I just accelerated my development much quicker than had I simply stayed picky and on the chosen projects that suited me at the time. After a year or two of doing that, I got a job as an editor of one of those straight person magazines and moved to another state in Australia. That was a really formative year and a half

for me, learning about production processes for print. And we relaunched the website, then towards the end of my university degree in Australia, I saved up some cash and I came over to London of all places. And I did work experience at both British GQ and British Esquire. I watched a lot of very, very talented people do their thing. And I actually stuck around London a bit longer and I worked with British Esquire. I went back to Australia and I just kind of figured that what had worked for me so far was deeply understanding a magazine or a website, and then finding just the right person to pitch. And so I did that with GQ. I saw that Australian GQ had hired a new deputy editor and I pitched her on her first week. Her name was Gary David, and she was incredibly kind. She gave me a whole bunch of opportunities. She gave me my first cover story in Australia, and I ended up writing on and off for them for the better part of a decade. Then it was in 2000, I'd say I saw Conde Nast were going to launch GQ into the Middle East. And I thought, well, I'm a rocky that grew up in Australia. And I've been writing with GQ for the better part of the decade. I think I have a pretty good shot at getting a senior role here. And I was lucky enough to become the first editor in chief of GQ, Middle East. I moved over to Dubai in 2018. It was an absolutely wild and incredible experience to launch a new title in the region where my family's from, and we had just a killer team and you got to discover this new generation of creatives, photographers, writers, stylists in the Middle East who were desperately hungry for opportunity. And we kind of built a community and a family around that magazine. And after a few years of that, I was lucky enough to get a call to take on this job and here I find myself in London and having to go out and get a coat sometime soon. Because it's the first time I'd been in real winter for probably ten years.

Wow. What an incredible journey both of you had, I'd be interested for both of you to talk about how you work together really which brings into focus the wider question, What do the top two editors globally of GQ do? What is a typical week for both of you? And is it like the president and vice president when Will's away, do you sort of step up Adam and vice versa? Are there shared responsibilities? Do you have any sort of silos in it? Because you don't want to both be doing and repeating the same work. How does it actually work in terms of putting an issue together? And how do you two work together?

[Will]

As you know, Paul, there's no such thing as being away in 2021. Your iPhone is always with you. So there's always the opportunity to jump in. Adam and I, it's a constant all day, every day, like multi-platform collaboration, including DMS on Instagram, including WhatsApp, including email, including phone calls, including groups, thousands upon thousands upon thousands of group Zooms, as you know. What's cool is that my virtue of me being in New York and then Adam being in London, it really helps with the time zones, and by the way we're both new to this. You know, this is a very new structure, these are very new roles for both of us and we're certainly figuring it out as we go. But having a little bit more coverage between the two of us in terms of time zones is really a help because we do have titles across the world. And there's urgent feedback needed all the time and so on. But in a way we're just still getting our rhythm together, both like dividing responsibilities and ready to jump in with the other camp, I would say.

[Adam]

That's spot on. I feel like so much of what Will and I have done together this year is just to start to architect everything. And from there really open up all these markets that are so used to borderline antagonising one another and just helping people realise that it's totally cool to collaborate and to share and to open up. And we have these incredible people everywhere from Taipei to Mexico city and a huge part of what Will I do on a day-to-day basis is just making sure we can get the very best ideas that they have and really get their participation and make sure that we're capturing all the incredible energy and it's in all those different markets. And that can be a slow process. Like one thing that we say to each other pretty often is that we're playing a long game. This is not a pivot or a band-aid, it's not a temporary brand. What we're going through is a really radical overhaul of how we build stuff and then beam it around the world. So it's going to take a good minute. We're really comfortable with that. And we think so far it's so far it's coming along together pretty well.

[Will]

I think a lot of it is about there is a really clear vision here and a really clear strategy. And then I think we've also drawn an organization, this global network that we keep talking about, we sort of draw on that and we've begun to articulate how exactly that's going to work. But then the reality is once you actually start doing it, it's very different from drawing it on paper and presenting it in meetings. So now it's really about refining that vision, refining that strategy, making tweaks to that org, and how it's all supposed to work. But that I have to say is like a joy because every time we launch a new global story, we're learning more about our way of doing it, where it's really working and where it needs improvement. And you just take those learnings and feed it back into the system and do it a little bit differently next time. And if all is going well, and so far, it is, you're just going to keep getting better and better at it.

What's top of your to-do lists gentlemen? And I don't mean take the laundry to the laundrette. I mean, in the big ticket to do list. Like, it's almost like a job interview question, where will GQ be five years from now, but I appreciate you two have already got the job. But like you must have an idea about the direction of travel about where you two want to take things?

[Will]

The thing that's top of mind for me right now is I mentioned before that we have, I kind of love the grandiosity of the title, the GQ Global Leadership Committee. And that's the head of editorial content, the leader in each of these markets around the world, this committee is when we all come together. And one of the things I'm focused on right now is how we can create a unity and a rhythm, a cool flow, a charismatic exchange between that crew. Because I think when this gets really exciting is when that global leadership committee that has representatives from all around the world is working together like a tight knit editorial team that we used to have just here in New York or just in London, or Adam's little team in the Middle East.

Like if we can be leveraging the technology that we've all gotten so good at using, through the COVID-19 pandemic to have this really tight knit crew that actually has representatives from all around the world and we're having a really dynamic and frankly, the most important thing to me is a really creative kind of generative ideas discussion about all the exciting stories we want to tell. Like that to me is the key to our future. I think we've got the strategy piece. We understand where our revenue is today and where that's headed. We understand the vision is clear now we need to just come together as a team and get really good at the creative piece. And I think, if we can do that, we're going to be successful. So, I've been waking up in the morning and going to bed at night, thinking about how we can make the most of the meetings where that committee is coming together.

Adam. What's the most fun part of your job? Or what do you anticipate once you get stuck in what you think will be the most fun part of the job? What do you enjoy most?

[Adam]

By far, so far, it's the opportunity to meet with and collaborate with all these incredible people around the world. At the start, it kind of felt like going to a new school and no one knew each other, but then you realise you got this really cool and intelligent class and we're building a vibe and chemistry every single day. But it can't be said enough, how much of a thrill it is to log on to a meeting with colleagues in places like Madrid and Tokyo and Mumbai altogether, and the sheer potential that has to help shape the storytelling we do, the journalism we do, and the people we put on our platforms is incredible. I don't think we've come close to realizing that potential just yet. But as things continue to click into place, I think that's going to be a very real, super power. The second thing that is really, really exciting is the fact that for the first time, in a long time, I feel like GQ and all of us can ask ourselves much bigger questions. As recently as 12 months ago, the biggest question I was asking myself was who is the biggest print cover star I can get on GQ Middle East for my September issue. And now we can all come to work and be like, how can we dominate global culture for a week? And how do we architect that moment together? And it just feels for the very, very, very first time that GQ instead of being this disparate concept that existed in many parts of the world. Now it feels like we're a legit global media brand and that feels very, very cool to walk into every day.

Adam, it feels a bit like the end of Back to the Future part one where Marty says to Doc, "we don't have enough road to get up to 88" and he says "roads where we're going, we don't need roads."

[Adam]

I actually walked past the theater where they're doing the Back to the Future musical the other day. I'm quite excited that that's a thing. It's a really, really cool moment because for a long time I have to list out a strategy and a lot of media outlets has been, let's kind of keep trying to do things the old way and hope that eventually the world and culture bends to our will and our historic legacy and maybe there are solicited people who believed you can just dust off an old machine and ride it around

the block again, but what feels so cool and so modern about what we're building without our colleagues around the world is that none of this is about chasing the past or trying to recreate all glories that we had. It's like, no, where collectively building a new paradigm, we think it's fit for the modern world. And we think it has a boatload of potential. That is cool.

Will, what's the most fun and enjoyable part of your job?

[Will]

If you can dream it, you can build it here. It's amazing. So like anytime we have a big idea, absolutely we have to be creative about how we're going to get it done from a resource perspective. But yeah, any ideas that we have, we can chase after them and with a little creativity, hard work and luck, we can make them happen. And that is the thing I love the most. We're able, editorially speaking, storytelling wise, in terms of photo shoots, interviews like long form reporting features. If we have a great idea, we can go do it. And now we have this really modern platform through which we can share it. So that to me is like the thing that still makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up.

Gentlemen, that was a hugely interesting conversation. I wish you the very best of luck with what you're going to do with GQ. Thank you ever so much for your time.

[Will]

Thank you so much, Paul, it was a pleasure.

[Adam]

Cheers Paul!