



HOW AN AVERAGE MAN BECAME AWESOME BY ASKING HIMSELF ONE SIMPLE QUESTION.

Interview between Nicole Dean & James Dering



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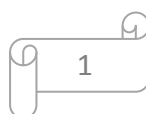
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About Nicole Dean:



Nicole Dean is a Published Author, Popular Speaker, Successful Blogger and Podcaster, and a Business Consultant to really smart people.

She is frequently asked to teach about the topics of Blogging, Outsourcing, Passive Income, Working from Home Successfully, Content Repurposing, Running a Profitable Affiliate Program, Creating infoproducts (as she's released hundreds of her own), Productivity, and List Building – among other things.

Nicole has been featured in several books, and has [published her own books](#) as well. One of her greatest talents is getting other successful and talented people to write content for her – for free. In fact, her book series “Expert Briefs” is mostly written by her colleagues.

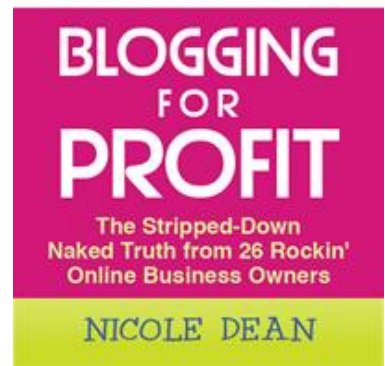
She teaches her students to set financial goals, but to also write down their lifestyle goals, as well. This ensures that they are building a business that aligns with the way they want their lives to look in 5 or 10 years, rather than creating a job where they are working for a crazy person – themselves.

Her Mission is To Make the Web and the World a Better Place – and, Hopefully Have a Lot of Fun While Doing It.

She enjoys work very much, but lives to spend time with her much-adored husband, her two silly children – and also her two slightly neurotic puppies, Einstein & Luke.

Want to know which tools Nicole uses in her own business? Check out this page:

<http://www.nicoleonthenet.com/essential-tools-for-an-online-business/>



About James Dering:

I'm a jazz and contemporary pianist, composer, music teacher, and former music professor. I'm passionate about helping others to create their own music at the piano, especially in "improvisation-based" styles like jazz, blues, and pop.

I've taken my experiences online with my site, BetterPiano.com (which offers a free book, online lessons, and email tips) and my podcast, "[The Better Piano Podcast](#)."

My goal is to truly help as many people as I can, and to build a solid business around offering a full line of products and services related to my niche.



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Nicole: Hi. This is Nicole Dean of NicoleontheNet.com, where I get to share amazing people who are making the web and the world a better place. Today I have something slightly different for you and I'm really excited about this.

I haven't done a lot of podcasts lately because I haven't really felt inspired to, but this person that I'm going to talk with today inspired me greatly.

I was at an event in Atlanta and I had met this gentleman at a previous event and chit-chatted a little about his business, then I wanted to make sure I said "Hi" to him. I didn't catch up to him until Sunday, and we had a little five minute conversation that impacted me greatly. He is very modest. He doesn't think that he did anything special, but I can tell you that he did.

I would like to introduce you to my new friend James Dering of BetterPiano.com. I'm going to have James tell his story in his own words and then we can go back and forth a little bit about how he impacted me and what has changed in my life after we talked.

Guys, this is James Dering of BetterPiano.com and he has had an amazing transformation / evolution in the last – was it 18 months, James?

James: That sounds about right.

Nicole: Tell me about it.

James: Okay. Hi and thank you so much for having me on. That's quite an intro, I feel like I need to give a disclaimer or two.

First off, I am having a blast and I do feel like I've made some really big changes in my life, but I definitely have so much more to do. I wouldn't call myself a great success story or anything like that. I'm definitely on the way, but I haven't got it all figured out just yet – I'm working on it.

I mention that because we were chatting a minute ago and I was saying that I still feel like a small fry in this whole world of successful internet marketers. It's amazing how big this whole transition can be. I guess it depends on where you're coming from, but where I was coming from it feels like such a large journey. But it certainly is fun and I'm learning all the while and just having great fun.

I could give you a super long version, but I'll try and keep it short as far as my back story.

I'm a musician, I'm a jazz pianist by training and I'm also a vocalist as well. For about six and a half years I was a professor at a college in the north Texas area. To make a long story short, I began to feel toward the end of it that I just wanted something different, for a number of reasons.

I tend to say that I feel like I have three pillars of what I consider to be my professional vocation, my calling. I feel that it's important for me to create music, to perform music, and to teach music. The reason I make a distinction between creating music and performing it is because on the side of creating it I'm including things like writing music for other people, like if someone wants string tracks for their album then I can compose them, or even things like trailer music or bumper music, lots of stuff – and we can talk more about that I detail if you want.

Nicole: Let's start with where you were 18 months ago compared to where you are now and what sparked the transformation.

James: About 18 months ago I was still working at the college and I was feeling this sense of disconnect and imbalance. I was very stressed out at my work. Truth be told, I think I was a grumpy dad and a grumpy husband, and I was probably not in the best of health.

I was doing what so many of us do, just trying to keep it all balanced. I went through a period of not really being excited about going to work, but still having that inner dialogue, "Look, a lot of people aren't crazy about their job, but you do what you have to do. I'm trying to provide for my family," and so forth.

Eventually I reached a point in January of 2013 where my wife and I had talked about this a lot and we finally decided it was time, so I pulled the plug and I quit my job. I had a short term plan and a long term plan. I certainly didn't have all the answers.

The short term plan was that as a musician there are various things that I can do to bring in income on the short term. For me that means teaching piano lessons, playing for weddings and parties, funerals, and composing jobs. Plenty to keep me busy. In fact, there were a lot of things that I had to say "no" to when I was at my full time job because it kept me so busy. I was able to keep things moving in the short term by doing these little one-off things.

The bigger picture, the long term was to do something online. I had actually already started this before, I had started a website awhile before. My main website at BetterPiano.com I actually

started in 2010, but it was just a little site and I didn't really know where it was going. I eventually had written my first book, and we can talk about that more in detail.

Going back to the time that I quit, the plan was "I've got this little site, but it's not going much of anywhere yet. Let me see if I can really make something out of it." I had studied enough, read enough blogs, and listened to enough podcasts to become convinced that somewhere in there was a viable business model that made sense and that could work for me.

In fact, I can comment on that. I wonder to what extent my story might be different from others in that I was never somebody who said, "I want to make a million dollars online and I want to find out how I'm going to do it." Nothing against people who start from that point, but for me it was, "I'm not happy in my current situation, I have a concentrated but kind of obscure skill set. How can I best utilize my skills in this situation? How can I best provide for my family?" Not only in terms of how much money I make, but also in terms of being able to be there more for my family and things like that.

Over time I kept coming back to this internet model. It wasn't that I was looking for the internet thing, it was just "How can I make it work? I'm a pianist and a piano teacher guy, how can I make that work?" I kept finding myself drawn to the internet model.

Having said that, what I think you might be thinking about next is as I quit the job and I was kind of starting over, building a new me, I was looking for some sense of direction on how I could make it all work and take it to the next level, I did several things.

One of the things that impacted me the most was a blog post. This blog post, as far as I understand, said things that have been said in so many words before, but it was something about the way that it was written that really impacted me.

Is it okay for me to tell you what the post and where it is and all of that?

Nicole: I'll have it in the show notes, but go ahead and recap it.

James: This [Pick the Brain](#) site, I'm not associated with him or anything like that, they had a business and being assertive and confident and just getting your head straight as far as the approach.

There was a post there that really impacted me that set up this idea that there's this idealized version of yourself, and they said to call it awesome you.

What does the awesome version of you do?

Does awesome you get up early in the morning? What kind of foods do they eat? What sort of books do they read? Whatever it is that describes their habits and their activities. I'm definitely paraphrasing here, but in so many words it said to try and do those things.

That really impacted me. I looked at myself, "What does awesome James do? What is awesome James about?" For me personally, that related to some health things, because I wasn't eating very well and things like that. It also related to, for lack of a better word, assertiveness. Maybe this is a common story, but I was one of those people who had all these great ideas but didn't necessarily implement them. A lot of it came down not contacting people that I know could help me, but either it was awkward to approach them or I thought it would be awkward, or a million other reasons why we don't do these things.

Basically, I said, "Awesome James is successful. Awesome James approaches these moments in life where it's time to make the move, it's time to make that call, send the email, straighten up my own situation, launch the website, start writing the book," whatever it was where I was able to say "this is what Awesome James does." So I started doing it.

This is really bigger than just the internet and just the business part of it, frankly. Among other things, I started eating better and lost some weight, *I lost about 74 pounds in five months.*

Nicole: Wow.

James: That's obviously a pretty dramatic change right there. As people would make comments here and there about it, I would say things like, "*This exterior change is only a result of an interior change.*"

Awesome James doesn't eat the burger and fries all the time.

As strange as that may sound, "I'm writing a book and I'm eating better," as if those two things are actually related. Awesome James eats better. Awesome James takes action.

Between my lack of expertise in marketing and maybe the fact that I tend to be kind of introverted, and throw in a few things there that contributed to the fact that I wasn't taking action, this really helped me to get my head on straight.

Nicole: I love that. We're a lot alike, because I'm an extreme introvert and I have to push myself to be in social settings. It's draining. I love it, but then I have to recharge. I also tend to suffer from lack of confidence, which causes me to procrastinate, as you mentioned.

With me, after we had this conversation I kept thinking, "What would Awesome Nik do?" for every situation. The first thing I did when I was sitting up in the hotel room stuck in Icelanta (during the ice storm in Atlanta in 2014) for a whole week, I thought, "First of all, Awesome Nik would see this as an opportunity to do some brainstorming and get stuff done."

Then I woke up one morning and I said, "Enough. Awesome Nik would have sent her grandmother flowers by now," because every day I look outside and think, "It has to be so cold by Grandma, I should send her flowers," and then a week goes by. So I picked up the phone and I ordered her flowers. Then I thought, "Shoot, it's Valentine's Day, she's going to think I got them for Valentine's Day instead of just because it's cold and I was thinking about her." So now I have to send her flowers again this week. I'm going to send her flowers until it's warm up in Wisconsin because that's what Awesome Nik would do.

I actually also ordered a ring that says WWAND on it that I'm going to wear and think about you and think about Awesome James and all the things that you've accomplished.

I love that your transformation is across the board. You talked a lot about the business side of things and I think that's what started your transformation, but then once you started to evolve, I know that you became a better dad, a better husband, a better version of you.

The thing that I liked about that blog post was that last line you showed me about how you feel like you may be faking it by acting as the awesome version of you, but in fact you're faking by not being that version of you, because you really truly are that version inside and you're not living up to the potential. I'm paraphrasing it, so I'll put the link in the show notes, but it was something like that where you're not faking by making decisions to be the awesome version of you, you're letting down by not living up to your potential.

Is that how you interpreted it?

James: Absolutely. To me, that really carried into some of the other messages that we hear, things like “if you’re not putting yourself out there then you’re doing everyone else a disservice,” the whole idea that you have a unique perspective and unique things that you can offer. As much as we think that it’s just about ourselves, “If I don’t do this, no one will know, no one will care, whatever.” No, you have this special quality that you can put out there.

If that makes sense at all, it was in many ways the icing on the cake or the thing that tipped me over.

Nicole: The other thing that I really liked seeing in you, just the little bit I got to know you between the two events is that they had a “NAMS Jam” at it this past time. They’ve added a karaoke night on Friday, now the Jam Band on Saturday night – and you got up there and you played.

I just thought that was awesome, being an introvert and not knowing if you’re even going to come back after the first one because you were overwhelmed and there were all these new people, you didn’t know quite how you fit in, and then you come back and you just let yourself shine and come out and have that whole experience. I thought that was the coolest thing.

James: Thank you. I can even give you one that went deeper than that for me. I have sort of a strange musical background, it’s part classical voice and part jazz piano, so I don’t sing and play together too often because they’re two different styles. Of course, my main online presence is as a pianist.

At the first one that I went to, which was NAMS 10, there was no jam session and, if I’m honest, there was a part of me that felt like, “I can’t show what I’m all about because there’s not a piano here.” That’s one of my big ways of showing people what I’m made of, to be able to sit down at the piano and play. That’s fine, but I was just carrying that with me in my mind.

All of a sudden I hear that there’s this karaoke thing. Talk about the difference between introverts and extroverts, I do not do karaoke very well or very much at all. I’m not knocking anyone who does and I know that’s just so much fun for so many people, but gosh that is not the way that I’m wired.

Nicole: No, me neither.

James: It's not that I think I'm too good for it or anything like that. Frankly, I don't feel like I'm up to it. To go up there and sing some goofy song and just laugh and have fun, there's something about the way that I'm wired that really struggles with that.

So there I am at NAMS 10 and I hear that there is karaoke. I really seriously had this inner conversation of, "I'm just going to go to the hotel room, that's not for me. Totally not for me." But then I had to say, "I didn't come here to just hang out in the hotel room." Not that I came to sing either, but it was like, "Awesome James makes a mark and comes out of his shell."

I know it sounds corny, but I really had this inner dialogue of, "Awesome James would find some way to sing at this thing, even if it's not in my comfort zone, so I'm going to find something to sing." I know this is a strange pick for karaoke, but I'm going through the different selections, "I couldn't do that. What's in that classical direction?"

I couldn't believe it, but I found Ave Maria on the list. In between all these 80s and 70s pop, and whatever else, I went up there and sang Ave Maria. It was an odd fit for karaoke, and I'm not saying it was fantastic and amazing, but I think it was at least different enough that people remembered it and it was this unusual thing. For the rest of the weekend I would have people coming up, "You're the guy that sang Ave Maria at karaoke."

Nicole: So what happened on the dance floor when you started?

James: There wasn't a dance floor, fortunately, because I don't know what people would have done. Certainly things quieted down, like all of a sudden Ave Maria is happening.

At this most recent one I said, "I'm going to do it again," and I looked for something. I found Old Man River, which kind of works.

There's kind of a lesson in that, and I don't have credentials in psychology or anything like that, but I would say there's a lesson there where at the first event I said, "Awesome James will get up there and no matter how foolish he thinks he's going to look, he's going to sing something." It was hard. My wife and my friends thought it was hilarious, "James, really, you're doing that?" because it was very unlike me to do this.

My point is the second time, it was a much easier sell to myself. You know the things they say about customers that buy from you are more likely to buy from you again? I guess you could say I

bought from myself more easily the second time. It was not easy, I still had to have the inner pep talk, but it was more like, “You did it last time, and you lived. It didn’t kill you. It will be over soon.”

So I was able to that. I still would not say I was “comfortable,” but it was much easier to get into that mindset. That has to be an analogy for so many things in life.

In my lessons with my students we’ll deal with improvising and that’s a whole mental transition of, “What do you mean just play anything? I don’t know what to play.” There’s a whole set of insecurities that sometimes set in and so forth. We often have this conversation where I’ll tell them, “Just do it. The first time, yes, it will feel weird, it will feel awkward. Maybe you’ll hate what you hear, but just do it.”

Sure enough, over time there becomes this gradual sense of it’s easier to do, they take on more of a sense of ownership of what they’re doing, and so on and so on. It’s just amazing how much that parallels so many things in life where you just do it the first time and then after that there will never be another “first time” of that. There will never be another first time James sings karaoke at NAMS. It just goes on and on that.

Nicole: I love that. All the neighbor kids laugh at me, they’ll say, “Miss Nicole, I’ve never done that before,” and I say, “Well, you won’t be able to say that again. Let’s do it.”

James, do you think we touched on pretty much everything that you wanted to talk about?

James: We’ve already talked about this some, but for what this is worth for you and for your listeners, if you were to ask me what decisions I’ve made that have been the most profoundly impacting, what have been the best decisions that I’ve made, I have to say that in the absolute top rankings there would be going to NAMS. I really mean that.

I was at a point where I had gleaned as much as I could just on my own and trying to save money, trying to do my own thing, and that whole process that a lot of people are stuck in, but Awesome James goes and gets help. Yes, it’s an investment, but it’s worth it because Awesome James does what needs to be done. That was part of the dialogue for me and that brought me to NAMS, and of course that opened up a whole world for me.

That whole process happened again the next time around, I’ve now gone to two of them. They’re just some of the best decisions, the best moments in terms of my formation, answering questions, and so on; the best experiences for me. I would definitely throw that out there.

Nicole: I absolutely agree. It can be so lonely at home. Even for us introverts, it can be so lonely. Having that community is everything for me, I know that's for sure.

Once again, you have been listening to Nicole Dean from NicoleontheNet.com and James Dering of BetterPiano.com. If the awesome version of you would like to learn how to play piano or play piano better, you need to go check that out.

Speaking of improvising, do you mind playing us out?

James: Sure. What do you want to do?

Nicole: Whatever you think is appropriate. I want to give you a chance to connect with my audience the best way you do.

James: All right. I have no idea what I'm about to do, but here it goes.

[piano solo]

Nicole: Thank you, James. I appreciate you.

Guys, thanks for listening. James, you're a rock star. Listeners, you are too.

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