



**SPI Podcast Session #196
How to Level Up Your Life
With Steve Kamb**

Show notes: smartpassiveincome.com/session196

This is the Smart Passive Income podcast with Pat Flynn, Session #196. "Next level achieved."

Intro: Welcome to the Smart Passive Income podcast, where it's all about working hard now so you can sit back and reap the benefits later. And now your host, who first recorded his voice on a cassette tape when he was only 6 years old, Pat Flynn.

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Pat: What's up everybody? Pat Flynn here. Thank you so much for joining me here in Session 196 of the Smart Passive Income podcast. I hope your 2016 journey is off to a great start, and speaking of journeys we have a great one to share with you today, an incredible story with a lot of great advice for helping you build your brand and level up your life.

We're talking with Steve Kamb from NerdFitness.com, the author of the brand new book, [*Level Up Your Life*](#). Steve and I have become good friends over the years and I've admired what he's been able to do with his business, and we share similar origin stories. We both started in and around the same time. We both started by monetizing with an ebook, when we started to monetize at all. And we've both been able to build these massive fan bases.

The level of support he gets from his audience, his amazing community, which he calls the Rebellion, is just incredible, very inspiring, and something I look up to as well, so I look forward to having Steve share his story with you, along with all the tips and advice. We're going to dive into his book too and what that's been like, and all that other great stuff that Steve always brings to the table.

Without further ado, here is Steve Kamb, the owner of NerdFitness.com and author of *Level Up Your Life*.

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Pat: What's up everybody? I'm so incredibly excited to welcome Steve Kamb from NerdFitness.com to the show today. What's up?

Steve: Pat, what's going on, dude? It's always good to talk to you.

Pat: Always good to talk to you, too. We were just talking right before recording here. I had asked you when you started your blog, and that was when?

Steve: I started in January of 2009. I think I'd actually written my first blog post in November or December just before that, so at the very end of 2008, beginning of 2009.

Pat: Smart Passive Income started at the end of 2008 and here we are. We're launching a book right around the same time in our journey. This is so crazy.

Steve: Yeah! I wrote a book and it's done and people can buy it and it's a thing. That's so weird to me!

Pat: I'm holding it, your book. It's really cool. We were both talking about how crazy excited but also nervous we both are. By the time people are listening to this, Steve, it will be a day after the launch of your book, so hopefully there's at least 2 or 3 reviews of your book at that point, and hopefully we can get you a few more.

Steve: Two – one of which will be my mom, and then my mom masquerading as somebody else. Like if you see a review from Luke Skywalker that gives it 5 stars, then it was probably my mom. Or maybe it was Luke, I don't know.

Pat: The crazy thing is I know you're not going to have just two. You're going to have a gazillion because you've built over time the most amazing community that I've seen. You've placed yourself in a very competitive space, which is the fitness space, but have niched yourself so well within that that you've become the quintessential example for niche-ing down in a crowded niche. Every time I talk to people and every time I'm at a conference and everybody talks about niche-ing down, Steve Kamb always comes up.

Steve: Really? That's cool! I've got to start going to more conferences, I guess. It would be good for my self-confidence.

Pat: You've been so busy lately, and I would love to start at the beginning in terms of even before you bought the domain NerdFitness.com. Who were you, what were you doing, and why did you start this?



Steve: Long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away I grew up in Massachusetts, and as a young kid I kind of lived a dual existence, a kid that loved video games. I felt like I kind of grew up alongside Link from the Legend of Zelda. I'd play these video games and then I'd go out in my backyard and act out scenes from the game or make my own bow and arrows and create tree forts and try to stay active. So I spent most of my younger years both playing games and being active.

As I got older, games got more and more complex and the stories got better and the graphics got better and I had to use less and less of my imagination, and I found more and more of my time kind of got sucked into these games, specifically a game called EverQuest, which is this online role-playing game, very similar to World of Warcraft but even nerdier and more old-fashioned.

That kind of got me through high school. I played that all through high school, all of college, and fortunately while playing these games I also started very basically learning how to get fit. In high school I got cut from the basketball team so I was like, "I'm going to go to the gym and get fit and come back next year, and I'll show that coach that he never should have cut me."

I was actually quite terrible at basketball and had no business being on a basketball court, but luckily as I got cut that was kind of the catalyst or call to action for me to take my fitness a little bit more seriously. So although I still played quite a few games, and that occupied a significant amount of my time, I also spent years stumbling through trying to learn how to get in shape.

After college I had moved to San Diego and got a regular job and signed up for a gym membership and they gave me a free personal trainer session out there. I was like, "Dude, I've been training in a gym for 6 years. I know what I'm doing," and they're like, "It's a free session. Just take it. Why not use it?"

So I went and worked with a trainer, and the guy completely changed how I trained, completely changed my diet, and I had more success in like 30 days then I had had in my entire life.

A light bulb goes off in my head and I'm like, "Man, if I've spent 6 years making all these mistakes and then I could get to this solution, there have to be other people out there like me that don't have 6 years to lose," so I started to learn more about health and fitness and started reading and researching and learning.



I was still dumping a significant amount of time into video games and then, like many of us probably listening to this podcast, I stumbled across Tim Ferriss's [4-Hour Work Week](#). He talked about creating an online business or community, and taking a social group you're a part of and something you're good at and combining the two.

At that point I had spent enough time training. I had gotten myself in decent shape and I'd helped some other people, but I also built computers. I was still dumping tons of hours into video games and I thought, "What if I just helped nerds that were beginners at getting fit?" I Googled "nerd fitness" and nothing popped up, so I bought the domain NerdFitness.com.

Pat: Nice, and ever since then you started just to talk about things that you enjoy, right? You were doing fitness and kind of combining your love for video games too.

Steve: Yeah, and it's funny, at the time 8 years ago I didn't know anybody else doing internet stuff. When I started I was like, "I just want to help people and I want to talk to them in the language that makes sense to me, and I want to do it in a way that I'm excited about too."

For me that was simple. It was like, man, I grew up playing these fantastic role-playing games where you create a character and you start out small and weak, and through the course of training and fighting and questing and adventuring and leveling up, your character gets bigger, stronger, faster, wiser, whatever. I just love that idea, so I think right when I started the tagline for NerdFitness was "Level up your life," which is the name of the book that was just released.

The whole concept was built around the idea of gamification of life, taking the same games, books, and movies that I loved as a kid, and instead of using them as an escape – which is what most people do, I think, use them to escape from a life they're not truly excited about – instead, using them as inspiration and motivation to get fit, to start living out the things you've only been dreaming about, through the eyes of a character that you've read about or that you've played at as a game.

Pat: I think that's why it works so well, because nobody talks about fitness in that sort of way. A lot of people who are in your audience aren't really able to make a connection with other people in this space because a lot of the other people in the space are very much about just the regimen or bulking up or all these other things that aren't very exciting or attractive to somebody who is a nerd and plays video games all day, but there's definitely a need there. You've been able to really tap into that niche.



At the beginning when you started what was it like? Was it quick to take off or did it take a little bit of time?

Steve: It was bad. I bought the domain in the summer of 2007. Remember, I didn't launch it until January of 2009, so I actually sat on it for a good 8 months before I even considered thinking launching anything.

Pat: I think a lot of people can relate to that.

Steve: I sat on it for a lot of months and then I got a personal trainer certification, because I assumed nobody would take me seriously on the internet unless I had a piece of paper that told me I passed a weekend training course, so I got a certification as a personal trainer. Eventually I learned that nobody cared. They really just wanted to get results and learn how to get those results from somebody that spoke their language.

I started writing articles, and I did it in the exact wrong way. I looked at every other fitness website out there and saw that they were posting 5 times a week and they were short articles because "nobody has the attention span to read a long article," so I started by writing 5 short articles a week while working a full-time job.

I did that for about 9 months, and in 9 months I had 90 email and RSS subscribers. I don't even know how many email subscribers I had because I didn't even build an email list. I just used Google Feedburner. I used that for like a year and a half until I finally was not too cheap to spend the \$20 to get [AWeber](#), which is comical that I wasn't willing to spend that money, even though I was dumping all this time into it.

So it took about 9 months until I stumbled across a mutual friend of ours, Pat, Adam Baker, who had run a company called Man Vs. Debt. He wrote an article that was called "How to not suck at blogging," and I read the article and realized I sucked at blogging and I had to completely change.

The themes of my articles didn't change. The type of content didn't change, but how I was presenting it to my community changed. I went from 5 articles a week to 2 articles a week. They went from short to very long. I started putting Lego photos in each article because I grew up playing with Legos along with video games, and I just injected my kind of Steve Kamb humor.

I met somebody recently who was like, "Hey man, I've been reading your site forever and it was great to meet you," and at the end of the night they were like, "You know



what, you're exactly what I expected," and I was like, "That is fantastic." We'd never met before, we'd never talked before, but just by reading my content they felt like they knew me and that they knew how I would be in real life.

I just injected my personality, nerdy metaphors, Lego photos, and the things that Nerd Fitness is kind of known for today, because they just felt right to me. I stopped trying to be like those other fitness sites and kind of carved my own path. It was like, "This feels right to me and this feels more exciting, and I think this is going to help the type of people that I'm interested in helping." As soon as I made that switch, things kind of started to take off.

Pat: Yeah, I think that switch was critical. I made a similar switch in my journey in terms of just injecting more of my personality too. I remember specifically reading a lot of your articles even before I knew who you were, and very much enjoying the content and feeling like we would be able to get along really easily.

Steve: Too bad it never worked out. [laughing]

Pat: I know, right? Like I hate your guts right now.

There's one article I remember, I have it up right now, called "The Definitive Guide to Bacon." This was a few years back. Just the way that you add these little elements that make it so nerdy but so good at the same time. For example, in this article you write "However, there's more to bacon that meets the eyes, like Transformers but with pigs, and we get a lot of questions...." and so on and so forth.

Those little things matter so much and they just make me smile and they're making other people smile, and you know what, they're going to turn a lot of people off, too, but that's not who you're targeting.

I'm curious to know, have you struggled with wanting to please everybody versus pleasing your people?

Steve: Totally, and that is I think one of the biggest problems a lot of people probably struggle with. When you're thinking of building a business you're like, "I need to get the most customers possible, so I should appeal to the largest number of customers to give me the greatest possible chance of helping those people." I went about it a different route.



I think if you go to NerdFitness right now it still says "I am not a fitness expert" on my About page. Even though I've been doing this and studying this and living and breathing it and helping thousands upon thousands of people get fit, I still consider myself somebody just like everybody else.

When I started, instead of trying to appeal to the greatest number of people, I was like, "I want to talk to my people. I want to talk to the people that speak this language, that feel like they're part of something special."

I remember about a year and a half into starting the site, everybody was just kind of interacting with me via email or via blog comments, but they weren't interacting with each other. It was like, "Man, if this is going to become something we need a community and we need a name for that community," so we launched the NerdFitness message boards.

I was like, "Hey guys, if we're going to have a community and we're building something here, us together, do you guys want to build an empire or do you want to start a rebellion?" thinking of obviously Star Wars. All the responses came in like, "We want to start a rebellion," and I think I Googled the Rebel Alliance logo from Star Wars and realized it was very similar to what the NerdFitness logo had already looked like.

I was like, "Oh man, this is perfect. We're going to go with the Rebel Alliance color schemes. We're going to call ourselves The Rebellion," and then I wanted to come up with things that were important to me and kind of a way for people to qualify themselves, whether or not this was something they were interested in.

We called it the Rules of the Rebellion and it's a list of 10 things that we stand for as a community and as a group of people. It's like, "Hey, if you can go through this list of 10 things and nod your head, we'd love to have you. And if you go through these 10 things and think we're stupid, cool! This probably isn't for you and go somewhere else."

We get plenty of emails from people saying, "Hey Steve, love the idea of Nerd Fitness but wish you would do things like this," and I'm like, "I appreciate the feedback, but we're going to keep doing things this way."

If somebody is like, "This is stupid. Why would you gamify the workouts? I just want to learn about push-ups," I'm like, "We're building a back story for all these things and this is what we do, so if this isn't for you, that's fine, man. Go out there and find the community that is for you."



Although it's terrifying to turn potential customers away or potential community members away, I think it really galvanizes those that do check off all 10 boxes, and it makes them feel part of something special and gives them a chance to take ownership of it.

I think that was truly a turning point for Nerd Fitness, when it went from Steve and a blog to a worldwide rebellion of nerds that are helping each other get fit and have taken ownership of what this community can become.

Pat: I have two Nerd Fitness t-shirts and I wear them all the time because they're very comfortable, and every once in a while I get people who come up to me and we start talking about you. Pretty darn awesome, and I was saving to share that with you till now.

Steve: Thanks, man! That's so neat to me. Seriously, this is all still just so exciting to me. I remember the first time I ever saw a guy in a Nerd Fitness t-shirt. I was on a bus in Portland and the next bus wasn't coming for an hour, but I saw the guy walking down the street so I jumped up and pulled the emergency thing and jumped off the bus and almost tackled the guy.

He thought I was like trying to assault him but I was like, "No, no, no, man. I just love your shirt," and he's like, "Cool, thanks." I'm like, "No, no, I'm the Nerd Fitness guy!" and he's like, "Oh Steve! I love your site!" Then I had to sit on the corner and wait an hour for the next bus to come, but I was so excited about it.

To this day anytime I see anybody in a Nerd Fitness shirt I run up to them and tackle them like, "Can I get a photo?" They're like, "Uh, yeah, okay Steve. This is weird but sure, why not." The fact that you run into them, that's so cool to me, man.

Pat: You've created an amazing community, like I said, incredibly supportive who go out of their way to help you and share you and spread the word about the Rebellion and what you do, which is why I'm sure this book is going to be a massive hit for you and I'm very excited for you.

You also do a few other things with your community, too, actually a large number of other things that you do to enhance the experience that people have with Nerd Fitness. Can you talk about what some of those things are?

Steve: My favorite thing is essentially my opportunity every year to act like a giant child and relive my days in summer camp, and that is called Camp Nerd Fitness, which



takes place every year. Our third year will be coming up this September. It takes place in Clayton, Georgia. We take over this beautiful corporate retreat up in the mountains of Georgia with waterfalls and a lake, rock climbing walls and ropes courses.

We bring in 15 instructors and it's a 4-day event with 300-400 of our most passionate Nerd Fitness community members, and they learn everything from parkour to cooking, and there's costume parties and martial arts and team building ropes course activities.

This past year we had an entire quest system built out where campers had to complete a series of quests in order to earn certain merit badges, and if they earned all the merit badges they earned a super secret merit badge, and we had people up until like midnight the last night trying to cross certain quests off so they could earn all the badges.

It's just a fun celebration of what Nerd Fitness stands for. Like you said, it's a really supportive group of people that are not afraid to make fools of themselves if they try yoga for the first time or try tricking or parkour and fall on their butts. Everybody's laughing and having a good time. For a group of people that are naturally very introverted it's kind of cool to see them all come out of their shells and dress up in costumes and just have an absolute blast with it.

The first year we did it was certainly a risk. We weren't sure if anybody was going to show up, and I had to cut a giant check a full 12 months in advance before the camp even happened, so it was like, "You know what, I think there's something here. There's something powerful with this community and I want to see what can happen when I get us together in person."

It was the greatest weekend of my life, that first weekend. I remember driving home from camp and just crying my eyes out for like a good 6 hours. "I can't believe we pulled it off and I can't believe that happened." It was so much fun to watch these people just have a blast, so that's probably the thing I'm most proud of, is taking this Nerd Fitness online community and bringing it out into the real world.

Pat: I've been following along with Camp Nerd Fitness through a lot of the Instagram accounts that I follow who were campers at your event, and it just looked like a blast. I'd love to attend one time.

Steve: We had a good time!



Pat: Nerd Fitness is also a business, and can you talk about how you're running it as a business?

Steve: Sure. When I started I had absolutely no idea how I was going to make money with it. I stumbled across Tim Ferriss's *Four Hour Work Week*, I bought NerdFitness.com and wasn't sure I was going to turn it into a business. Then I stumbled across Chris Guillebeau and his free book called *279 Days to Overnight Success*. He talked about how he had written articles and then kind of polled his readers and asked them what they wanted, and then he would build products around what the audience was interested in, so I was like, "Maybe I'll just do that."

So I started with just writing articles, like I said, for about 18 months, and then eventually quit the day job, even though I hadn't made any money yet, but had a really strong plan in place and then a really strong back-up plan in place as well – kind of – if NerdFitness didn't actually take off or work.

I spent the first month after I'd quit putting together an ebook which was like 10-12 different 6-month workout programs and diet advice and a whole diet strategy, and sold it for like \$29 or \$39 and just hoped I could sell a few of them to kind of prove the proof of concept.

Because I'd been working on the site for over a year and a half and had built up a decent sized audience, I sold enough of them to buy me a month or two of income, and from there it allowed me to grow the audience even more, which brought in more sales and then freed up my time to create a second ebook.

I actually ended up doing 3 ebooks that we survived on as a company for a few years until 2013, I believe, when we launched the Nerd Fitness Academy, which is now this online course. It's got a one-time fee and it's an online course with gamification elements mixed into it, where you can create a character and there's quests to complete to level up your character.

We actually took the ebooks down and moved onto the Nerd Fitness Academy, so now we have the Nerd Fitness Academy, which is the first 6 months of your fitness journey. We're going to take you through the entire process and give you missions and quests to complete so that you have a path to follow.

We also have Nerd Fitness Yoga, and then we have Camp Nerd Fitness, and now we have this book, *Level Up Your Life*, that hopefully introduces a whole new group of people into the Nerd Fitness community.



Pat: I love it and I do want to get into the book, but before that I have to ask you, what was your back-up plan?

Steve: I had already cut all of my expenses to the bare minimum. I think I was living on like \$600/month maybe, \$600-700 a month. So in addition to the very, very low expenses, my back-up plan was to become a bar back or a production assistant. I was living in Atlanta at the time and I actually did pick up some odd jobs after I had quit, just to help kind of pad the bank account a little bit.

My production assistant claim to fame is I spent 2 nights from 1 am to 5 am painting the sound stage floor for Drake's music video back in 2009. I walked in and there was this 50-yard sound stage and my job was literally to just show up at 1 am and paint the entire thing white, and then come back the next day and paint the entire thing black.

I can't remember the name of the song, but when I watch that music video it's like, "Yeah, you see that floor? I painted that. What's up?"

Pat: I'm wondering because I've seen his latest video.

Steve: It was a set like that but it was from 2009. I pushed sound stage equipment around. The company I quit actually hired me as a contractor to do one thing, so I had some back-up plans but I was like, "Nerd Fitness is it. I don't know it's going to work but this is what I'm meant to spend my life doing. I'm helping people and I love it. If this ebook doesn't sell then maybe I'll try the route of advertising."

I was a certified trainer so I was like, "I'll get clients in person, but I will do whatever it takes. As long as I can make more money this month than I'm spending, I don't care if it's \$1 more, if I'm barely treading water, if I can find a way to do that then I know I have something, and at that point all I need is to scale it."

Fortunately the ebook sold well enough that it bought me like two months' income, so then I could spend those two months just focusing on scaling the business and growing and getting more people into signing up for the email list, which then brought them to the ebooks and things like that.

Now it's a little bit more complex. People come in from different avenues, but back then it was like, "I have an email list, I have an ebook, I'd love for you to check it out, and if not okay, I'll figure out something else, but this is what I'm going to be doing and this is the community I want to be a part of for the rest of my life."



Pat: That's cool, I love it, and you are making change. I'm just remembering a whole number of articles that I've seen that you've posted that are really just featuring a lot of community members and highlighting their transformations. You actually have the side-by-side before/after pictures of them, which is so clear-cut in terms of what you've been able to do for them, so literally congratulations.

I love the way you're actually featuring and highlighting them, too. I think that just gets everybody excited and pumped about their journey.

Steve: Thank you. I want NerdFitness to be something that has already wildly surpassed my expectations for what I thought this could become, but I knew if it was going to become something it had to be about something more than just me passing out advice. For that, I wanted to highlight members of the community that had transformed, and bring on team members that could present a unique perspective on the topic on something that I personally couldn't give an accurate opinion on.

We have a member on our team, Staci Ardison, who found NerdFitness through one of my Legend of Zelda articles, and then fell in love with the idea of strength training, and picked up a barbell and completely transformed her life. She actually now works full-time for NerdFitness and writes occasionally.

At Nationals this past fall she dead-lifted 406 or 407 pounds, and she weighs about 150 pounds and looks like every woman wants to look, so it was pretty cool to be able to share those stories and present this kind of contrarian view of how you're encouraged to get in shape. You don't have to spend all day on a treadmill and starving yourself. You can get fit in the way that speaks to you.

For me, that's strength training. Pat, I know you run marathons and half-marathons and love it. We have other people that do parkour or martial arts, so it's become a really diverse community of people that are now segmented into Warrior Guild and Scout Guild and whatever, depending on which training archetype they fit into. It's been fun to kind of diversify the community and make it about way more than just me.

Pat: I love that. You said that this woman who had gone through this amazing transformation who dead-lifted 406 pounds, which is amazing, she works full-time for you. How big is your team and how has it grown over time?

Steve: We now have 8 full-time people, 8 W-2 employees. Level Up Enterprises is the name of the company.



Pat: What do they do?

Steve: They do a little bit of everything. We have a product developer, somebody who helped us develop the Academy and yoga. We have Staci, who does operations. And Baker from Man Vs Debt is our product developer.

Pat: I heard he's writing with you now. That's awesome.

Steve: I stole him and convinced him to come work with me at NerdFitness, and that's been a really great experience. Then I also have Lauren, who I used to work with. This is really funny. My job in Atlanta, she was part of the team that hired me there, and she told me that they almost didn't hire me because they weren't sure if I could write. [laughing]

I recently stole her and now she works full-time with me at NerdFitness and leads up the events part of NerdFitness – the book tour, Camp Nerd Fitness, and we're looking to expand what we can offer as far as in-person NerdFitness experiences.

We also have Taylor, who's our managing editor. He helps me edit content and gather those success stories, recipes, if there's any guest posts or things like that. Then we have a designer named Darrell. If you see anything on NerdFitness like some really fantastic character drawings, depending on how you want to train, and any site design stuff, that's Darrell. Then Alec does our programming.

We have Noelle, who's our chef correspondent, so she writes a recipe a month for NerdFitness.com, and then she's also our customer service or Rebel Support Specialist, so it's crazy.

I started and I just wanted to do the solopreneur thing like, "I'm just going to start a business and I don't want to hire anybody. I'll do it all myself and travel," and I did that. I spent all of 2011 living out of a backpack and traveling around the world and crossing a crazy number of things off my bucket list. I call it my Epic Quest of Awesome list because I thought that sounded way nerdier than bucket list.

I came back from that and I was like, "You know what, I want to turn this into a business and I want it to be something that endures and sticks around and continues to help people long after I'm gone. I want it to become something powerful and really kind of put a dent in the universe from a health, fitness, and living a healthier life perspective."



I started small and just brought somebody on part-time, then a second person part-time, and then made one of them full-time, then a second person full-time, then really kind of ramped things up in the past year and a half or two years as I was writing this book and as we were developing more products and building out this whole character creation creating life missions and leveling up system.

I knew I couldn't do all this stuff by myself, and if it was going to look as cool as it did in real-life as it does in my head, then I would need a lot of help because I don't know how to program anything. I'm a less than stellar draw-er and all these other things that my amazing team members can pull off. I'm not good at 99% of the stuff that they're doing so it's been really helpful to have some other people that are as excited about NerdFitness and this community as I am.

Pat: I think that's really awesome and actually a very important lesson because it's something I had to learn recently, is that I had to essentially become CEO of what I do. For a while I was just a scrappy entrepreneur like you. I wanted to do everything myself, and now that I've been building this team alongside me who really believe in what I do and are wanting to serve the audience in the same way that I do, it's enabled me to serve my audience even more now, which was always the purpose. I've found that building a team, like you, your guild, is extremely important.

Steve: It's helpful, man. It is really helpful. Like you said, it allows you to do the things that only you can do. There are some things you think only you can do, and then you hire somebody and they do it way better than you were doing it and you're like, "I'm so stupid. Why did I wait that long?"

Pat: Absolutely. Let's talk about your book. When did you start writing it, and was it always a part of your mission to create?

Steve: You know, when I started writing articles for the website I assumed someday far down the road that I could put a book together. I guess my whole journey started with a book. *The Four Hour Work Week* was my call to action and it got me started down this path that transformed my life, so I think in the back of my mind there was always a book that I wanted to write. I wasn't sure what it was, and years and years went by.

I had been approached by a number of people that were like, "Hey man, you have this great site and a big community. You should just take your best content and turn it into



a book, or take NerdFitness and just make NerdFitness the book,” and I just didn’t get excited about it.

I was like, “I’ve been writing all this content online, and videos and these other things. This seems like a better medium for that particular type of advice that I’m providing, but I do want to write something.” I wasn’t sure what it was until I realized that I had been truly living my life like a video game.

I had taken my bucket list and gamified it. I had transformed the world into my video game world. I was the main character in this adventure story I was trying to build, and I had missions to complete. Anytime I completed a certain number of missions, my character leveled up.

I think that resonated with a lot of people that had probably gone through a lot of the similar things that I did. I wasn’t truly happy in the profession I was in, and I was consistently using games and books and movies and going out and drinking too much or whatever it may be, spending too much time doing these things to escape from a life that I wasn’t excited about.

As I developed NerdFitness and this concept of leveling up, I thought back to these games that I used to play and the games that occupied all of my time, and thought “What are the behavioral psychology reasons why I’m getting hooked on these games? What is the science that is going into why I’m hooked on these games, and what if I can take that science and apply it to my own existence, and I can use those things to level up my own life?”

That involved traveling, volunteering, becoming financially independent, and learning to play a musical instrument. I actually learned to play the violin while I wrote the book, as a testament to how it doesn’t matter what you’re looking to learn. If you put a decent system in place to set yourself up to win, it doesn’t matter how bad you are when you start. You can make consistent progress.

I was like, “Not only am I trying to run a company, but I’m also writing a book and I’m going to learn to play the violin at the same time to show like, ‘Hey, this stuff works!’” I wanted to share this concept of gamification, NerdFitness, and the Rebellion with a wider audience, so I approached a friend of mine who had a book agent, probably about three years ago.

I was like, “Hey man, I think I finally have the idea I want to write this book about. I want to kind of tell my story, and I want to share stories of my community. I want to



tell people how they can use those same games and books and movies as education and inspiration instead of just as an escape.”

We bounced ideas back and forth, and I spent probably a good six months working on a book proposal, and then in February of 2014 is when I finally finished the proposal. He started shopping it around to publishers and we went back and forth, and I think I signed the book deal in April or May of 2014.

They gave me about a year to write it, and then there was another 6-8 months of back and forth, and then it came out. So this is truly like a 2-1/2 to 3-year odyssey for me, from the initial idea of, “Okay, I’m ready to write a book” to where I am right now.

Pat: That’s crazy, I love it.

Steve: It was a long time!

Pat: Why go traditional versus self-published? I’m curious because mine’s coming out self-published.

Steve: Great question. I don’t know. I think I just wanted the challenge. I knew there were certain doors that would only be open to me if I went the traditional published route. That may or may not be true as things move forward, but I wanted to get NerdFitness in front of a wider audience.

I feel like we’ve been hiding, kind of diligently working away in our little corner of the internet for 7 years now. We have this giant email list, but by and large we’re still pretty unknown I think outside of this internet space.

I’ve seen how much NerdFitness can help people and how it has changed people’s lives, and I think it’s just a net-positive. The more people I can get this in front of, the more people can decide if this is for them or not, and if they do decide it’s for them I know it will make their lives better.

I love the idea of just being able to walk into a Barnes & Noble and pick up a book. That is so cool to me. As somebody that had walked into a bookstore and bought *The Four Hour Work Week* and how that book changed my life, I’m hopeful that this book can have a similar effect on at least one other person out there. Hopefully it’s more than one, but if it’s at least one then I think I’ll have done my job properly and consider this a success. Okay, maybe not one copy. Maybe we need to move a few more than that.



Pat: You have 3 reviews already, remember.

Steve: [laughing] Thanks mom!

Pat: That is so awesome. What were some of the challenges you were facing or had faced while writing?

Steve: Company growing pains were probably the biggest ones. I had no idea how to be a leader of a company, or an owner or a manager. I had done everything myself for so many years and had only been an employee prior to that, so to suddenly have a group of people that could help me do things – to make sure they were in the right seats doing the right things, and making sure I was giving them the tools and the support that they needed, it was kind of tough.

I built the team and then I was like, “Okay guys, every morning until 11 am I’m going to write this book, so don’t bother me.” I got the book done, but we definitely had some struggles as a company. The earlier part of last year it was tough. I remember certain days where it was like, “Gee, building this company – is this worth it? It’s frustrating, it’s challenging, the pressure’s a little bit higher now that I’m having other people learning things, other people that I’m now responsible for. Is this worth it?”

After a few days and as we kind of turned a corner as a company I learned how to be a better manager and a better owner and a better CEO. There was a better opportunity for me to make those decisions and step away and do the things I needed to do, and let them do the things they needed to do.

It was a challenge, man, but I think we emerged as a much better company and a much better team. The community is stronger and we’re now set up in a way where the company is very well-diversified and properly structured and built for growth, which is exciting.

Pat: I love that. I’ve noticed the change. I remember what it was like before, the previous redesign, and it’s just definitely gotten more solid. Everything just fits with each other now, I think.

Steve: To get to that point is rough.

Pat: It is very rough, but there’s always great stuff on the other end of those challenges, as we know through video games and life. If you wanted to share maybe a



little bit of the book – obviously we know each other and you know the SPI audience – is there one particular section of the book, if they had to choose only one, that would be most helpful to them? And what lessons could they learn from it?

Steve: That’s a great question. There’s a chapter where I specifically talk about The Matrix. It’s this concept that I think anybody could be familiar with, but it’s that we’re trying to live this existence where we’re cramming our free time into the before and after of a day job that we’re not happy with.

We then come home from a day job we’re not happy with and drink a case of beer to forget the day job, then we stay up too late playing video games, and then we wake up the next morning kind of hung over and we need to drink a pot of coffee to get to work.

It’s like the system is broken. We’re trying to fix these things and we’re trying to operate within this matrix, when in reality it’s like take a step back and look at the source code and look at what is truly important to you, and then kind of restructure your existence around those things.

For me, I wasn’t very good at being told what to do and I didn’t want to have to go to a specific place and do something, so I had to kind of re-wire and re-engineer my existence so that I could have that freedom to, like you say, develop smart passive income to free me up to do the things that I wanted to do.

Once I made that decision it made it a lot easier for me to say no to certain things, to cut out certain spending habits, to cut out video games, to cut out going out on certain weekends, because I now had this alter-ego version of me, the super hero version of Steve Kamb. By day he was an average-paid marketing assistant at a company, but by night he was a rebel leader of the Nerd Fitness Rebellion and he was helping people get fit.

I kind of had to reverse-engineer and kind of break free of these things that I had initially imagined were 100% true to me, and that was “Well, you have to do this, and you have to do things this way.” NerdFitness was kind of breaking the mold of the fitness industry. The business I built was breaking the mold of the traditional employment opportunity. Me traveling around the world broke the mold of what a vacation was to me, and all these things were done with a very specific hacking of this matrix in mind. I think that’s a good place to start.



There's other chapters specifically on building a bat cave to help you succeed, and by that I mean if there's something you've always wanted to accomplish, be it learning a language, starting a business, or writing your first book, because we're such products of our environment, once you understand how your brain subconsciously deals with the things around you, if you can hack those things and develop them and rearrange your desk, rearrange your office, rearrange your house, whatever it may be, rearrange those things so that they help you succeed, you're going to be far more likely to actually pull those things off.

Let's say you want to write a book for the first time. You're listening to this podcast or you go to SmartPassiveIncome.com and you're like, "You know what, I'm going to make my first ebook. I've already started a blog. I've already followed Pat's 'Build a Blog' course, and I feel good about it. I signed up with BlueHost and I'm good to go, and now I want to make my first product but I can't seem to find the time to do it," identify where your time is going.

See if you can block certain websites. If you need to cancel your cable, if you need to put your TV in your closet, if you need to set your alarm to get up at 5 am and put it across the room next to a glass of water that you throw on your face first thing in the morning, whatever you need to do to set yourself up to succeed – the more steps you can take ahead of time to build that bat cave, very similar to how Bruce Wayne uses his bat cave to make his life better, you're going to use your bat cave to improve your chances of succeeding at those things that you're trying to do.

If it's writing a book, it might be downloading a program like Scrivener that shows you this little progress bar for the number of words you need to write every day to reach your word goal, very similar to a gamification element there.

If it's learning a language, it's converting every program on your computer into that particular language, and speaking with a native speaker from day 1. If it's starting a business, maybe it's setting money aside automatically from your bank account to put into your savings fund towards your business cushion.

It's this whole concept of building a system around you, removing the need to use willpower, because willpower is such a finite resource. We don't realize it but every time we have to tell ourselves no on something that is instantly gratifying, in order to get ourselves to do the thing that is delayed satisfaction, we use willpower. So if we can minimize the use or the need for willpower and structure ourselves in an environment to succeed, we're going to be far more likely to write that book, to build that business, to start saving for that trip, to run that first half-marathon, to play the violin.



For me to play the violin, I'd come home from practice once a week and I'd put it down and I'd go around the corner and I'd wake up the next day and I'd be like, "Well, I have to take it out of the case, I have to tune it, then I have to rosin the bow and I have to do this other thing. I don't have time to do all that, so I'll practice later when I have time." Yeah, "when I have time."

I realized I was making up this excuse to myself, so I came home from violin practice and the first thing that I did was I walked in the door, I put the case on the counter and I opened it up. I already knew it was tuned because I just took it from my violin class. I bought a \$10 violin stand on Amazon and I put the violin in the middle of my living room, so every time I got up from my desk or went to the kitchen or went to the bathroom I'd have to walk past it.

Because I saw it every day, sure enough I'd be like, "Oh, you know what? I could just pick it up and play for one song or 30 seconds or 2 minutes." Making that one change of spending the 30 seconds when I got home to open it up, and spending the \$10 to put it in the middle of my living room, I went from practicing 0 hours per week to probably 5-10 hours a week, and my skill improved rapidly over the course of like two months, compared to very minimal progress over the previous 6.

Pat: Awesome, and we can see a video of you playing.

Steve: Oh yeah, there's videos. If you go to LevelUpYourLife.com and just click on Book Extras I think it's called, you can see videos of me when I started, some videos along the way, to where I am now.

Pat: Very cool. Steve, thank you so much for all this inspiration and the time you've taken to create all this amazing content, to build your amazing community, and of course write your book too. Where can people get access to the book if they want to check it out?

Steve: Just go to LevelUpYourLife.com. I think it's available in Barnes & Noble all over the country right now too, which is pretty cool. So either call your local bookstore or go to Amazon.com. If you want to learn more about the book, there's a sample chapter and book information. Even if you don't buy the book, create your own Nerd Fitness character and your Epic Quest list to assign experience point values and start leveling up as you cross things off at LevelUpYourLife.com or NerdFitness.com.



Pat: I'm super proud of you, Steve, and so thankful that you are in my life and here to inspire me. Because of you I get stopped on the street because I wear a NerdFitness shirt and stuff. Dude, I can't wait to see how this book does. Everybody check it out at LevelUpYourLife.com.

Thanks again and we'll check in with you in the future.

Steve: I can't wait, Pat. Thanks so much for the opportunity.

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I hope you enjoyed that interview with Steve Kamb, the author of *Level Up Your Life*, which you can get at LevelUpYourLife.com. You can also check out Steve at NerdFitness.com, of course. Maybe you're in the Rebellion already, or you can join up with the Rebellion and join forces with making change in this world through both fitness, health, and mind.

Steve, thank you again for coming on and sharing all of that. I look forward to seeing how your book does. Again everybody, go ahead and check it out at LevelUpYourLife.com.

I also want to thank today's sponsor, which is 99Designs.com, making it incredibly easy for anybody out there to get designs done for their business, whether you're doing something small like a logo, or a complete website. Whatever you need designed, head on over to 99Designs.com.

What happens is you put a description of what you're looking for, and within hours you're going to get a number of people from around the world designing for your favorite design, and you get to choose the one that you like. If you don't end up with something you like, you can get your money back, which is great, and the turnaround time is incredibly fast, around 7 days typically.

I've done this before with some of my niche sites, and I know Tim Ferriss has used this for some of his book covers. It's a great service if you can't afford that one designer that you should have in your business for yourself. Go ahead and check it out by going to 99Designs.com/spi. That also gets you a \$99 Power Pack of services for free, which you can put towards your next design project.



I also want to mention that I have a book coming out, as I mentioned on this episode with Steve. That book can be found at WillItFlyBook.com, and it's about how to test your next business idea so you don't waste your time and money.

There are a lot of books out there that are great in terms of finding inspiration for an idea to build a business about. There are a lot of great books out there on how to build your idea, but this book, Will It Fly, is the missing link in-between those two because once you get an idea, how do you know if it's actually going to succeed or not? That's what this book is about, so go ahead and check it out at WillItFlyBook.com. I look forward to hearing what you think about it.

You can pre-order it if this is before the time it's launched, or you can even check it out now if you're listening to this in the future.

Thank you all so much for your support. I can't wait to serve you not just through this book, not just through the podcast here, but everything else I have planned for 2016. My goal is to make it your best year, and hopefully you're approaching your business and your audience and serving your customers in the same way, too.

Again, until the next podcast, thank you so much for your support. I appreciate it and I'll see you in the next episode. Bye.

Outro: Thanks for listening to the Smart Passive Income podcast at www.SmartPassiveIncome.com.

Links and Resources Mentioned in This Episode:

NerdFitness.com

[Level Up Your Life](http://LevelUpYourLife.com)

LevelUpYourLife.com

[The 4-Hour Work Week](http://The4HourWorkWeek.com)

[279 Days to Overnight Success](http://279DaysToOvernightSuccess.com)

[AWeber](http://AWeber.com)

WillItFlyBook.com – Pat's new book

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