

MAYER MIZRACHI RUNNING A STARTUP FROM COLOMBIAN PRISON

DEFIANCE #017
WITH PETER MCCORMACK



DEF017 - MAYER MIZRACHI INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

RUNNING A STARTUP FROM COLOMBIAN PRISON

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Peter McCormack: 00:02:02

Mayer, how are you?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:02:05

I'm good, Peter. How are you?

Peter McCormack: 00:02:07

I'm pretty good. Thank you. So, I've obviously read a lot in your story. There's a lot of articles out there. Can you update me on where you are at the moment and where you are within the legal process?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:02:22

Sure. So, I am in hot and humid Panama. I've been here for the last two years. Currently, I am days away from a preliminary hearing of which we will be absolved entirely from everything I've been living through in the last four years, I would say.

Peter McCormack: 00:02:46

What do you mean by a preliminary hearing and you will be absolved? Is that a confirmation or this is a confidence thing?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:02:53

So, basically, there are process through any type of investigation. So, there's the investigation period, then there's a hearing, whereby the judge will analyze the findings of the prosecutors and establish the need or not of an actual trial. So, in this hearing, they're going to define whether there's need for this case to go to trial. Luckily, two weeks ago, the case was shut down by another judge. It's funny because this is a case of double jeopardy.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:03:27

So, given that already a judge has ruled that there was no wrongdoing, that there's no cause for trial, there's a very low likelihood that another judge is going to say, "Well, we're going to take this to trial," but this is the tropic, so welcome to Banana Republic. Things can change.

Peter McCormack: 00:03:49

Right. Okay. How long have you now been in Panama?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:03:53

I've been in Panama for two years in September.

Peter McCormack: 00:03:59

The restrictions you have? Are you imprisoned within the country?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:04:03

I am imprisoned within the country. I have my passport, which is as useful as a paperweight, but I can't travel. I can't move residences, and when this all began, the lawyers, they stated my residence was at my mother's home. So, I am living the Jewish prophecy of being 30, unmarried, and living in my mother's home. So, that's the restrictions.

Peter McCormack: 00:04:34

I'm guessing you don't have your place in New York anymore.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:04:37

No. No, no, no, not my place, not the company's head office either. We basically had to move away from our physical operations in New York. I'm basically set up in Panama where my development team is still and always has been in Ecuador.

Peter McCormack: 00:04:57

Right. Okay. So, it's been quite a journey to this current point and, obviously, I

would like to talk to you and ask you about the future and what's going to come, but I think we should probably now go back and look at the chain of events that's led you to be in where you are now. Can you take me back to when you first agreed a contract with the government of Panama?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:05:22

Sure. Yeah, sure. So, the government of Panama met me through an incubator program in Miami. So, I had left Panama in 2013 to start a story company, what we know as stories today in Instagram. Well, I was building that in 2013 with a different format, and the company was called Hash. I left Miami to this incubator called Venture Hive. A week into the incubator program, Susan Amat, the program director, she invited me to come to Panama with her as she was about to meet with the government for a potential Venture Hive Latin America based out of Panama meeting.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:06:10

So, I went with her. I went with her, and she basically used me as the poster child of Latin American innovation and the brain drain that's happening because of the lack of incubator program.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:06:28

Then they asked me in this meeting, "So, what is it that you do?"

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:06:31

I said, "Well, we're doing messaging, and what's going to be unique about this story messaging app is going to be that it's encrypted."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:06:43

They said, "Oh. Well, that's interesting. Well, we would like to have a meeting with you afterwards. We have some needs of our own."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:06:49

So, long story short, they asked us to build a custom messaging app just for them, exclusively for use of the Panamanian government. That's basically it. That was in I would say October 2013. So, we started collecting requirements, and then building alpha versions, and testing. By February, we had agreed upon a contract whereby we would deliver them through a SaaS model the service.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:07:24

So, the app would be available in the app store, but you could get access to the app or have an account if the government issued an account for you through a web admin panel. They had a hundred licenses. For these hundred licenses, we charged them \$200,000. The goal was that after this, the first

contract was a little steeper, and then in the renewals, well, you would get \$30,000 a year program, and the hope was that we could sell this to other governments or other private enterprises.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:08:02

It was working fine. By April, we delivered the software. We even demoed it at the demo day of this Accelerator in Miami in April 2014. Well, they weren't really impressed because they really didn't understand encryption or the need for encryption back in 2014, but it worked really well. The government started using it. They issues a hundred licenses. We, of course, because it was our platform, we could oversee the activity, not the content of the messages, for example, but we knew that messages were being sent, that users were being created, and accounts were being logged in to.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:08:46

So, we were happy. They were happy. We even took this in May 2014 to TechCrunch to Disrupt New York. We demoed it there. Well, that's when we realised that no one really wanted an app with those requirements. No enterprise really wanted that software, but we're locked into a contract. So, we couldn't make changes to the app or to its functionality.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:09:10

So, we just stuck to it, but we realised that if we were going to grow as a company, we had to look at a different vertical in our expertise. So, we started looking at secure email using our encryption for email purposes. Then things got interesting because 2014 was also an election year in Panama. By August 2014, there was a new government in place. The new government was headed by the ex-vice president of the then government when I signed the contract.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:09:50

Apparently, they had a big fight. They had this big falling out, the president and the vice president, and they were just hateful enemies. This guy won the presidency, and it was a big oh my God in Panama. I had no idea. I was really never politically conscious at the time because I hadn't lived in Panama for a long time.

Peter McCormack: 00:10:16

Was there a handover procedure with the software in that as the-

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:10:21

Yeah.

Peter McCormack: 00:10:21

So, were you passed new contacts from one administration to the next to speak to?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:10:28

Right. Yeah. So, there was never an official handover process from one government to the other. Instead, I had to make the approach. I made the first step into contacting this guy, Irvin Halman, who's the let's call it the Minister of Technology. I had to press for this meeting. He came into the government in July. We didn't get the meeting until September. We had to push for it.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:11:01

The meeting went really well. I introduced myself. I explained the software from scratch. I assumed that he didn't know a thing. So, I started from zero. After that, I went back to New York. At this time, I was already living in New York, and we never heard back from him for over two weeks. So, I emailed him back and I said, "I've noticed that there's diminishing activity in the platform. Let me know if we can introduce your new team to this platform, so you guys can make use of it."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:11:34

I got I think it was a three-word response like, "Okay. Thank you." That was it. I would then later emailed him with interesting articles about privacy or security. I tried to build a relationship with this person, and I would never get a reply. In fact, I emailed this guy nine times. He only replied about four times with a total of about 21 words. So, there was a clear disinterest to engaging with a contractor at this point.

Peter McCormack: 00:12:11

Disinterest in the project is at the time is fine. In some ways, it may have been beneficial as there wasn't anyone else to sell the product until you realised it was a single case. So, at what point did you then realise it wasn't just the case that they're using it? Was it when you received the subpoena?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:12:32

Well, I mean, I got worried fundamentally. Morally, it was incorrect. I wasn't ever comfortable with the idea that there was a changing government, and then all of a sudden, this software, which was paid dearly for with taxpayer money was no longer being used. So, in October, I emailed him a very strong email. It came from my heart. It was a very sentimental email.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:12:58

I said, "Our contract is about to come to an end in December, but I don't care about a renewal. I really don't care. I don't want to talk about that. What's not

right is that this software, which you paid dearly for is not being used, and that doesn't sit well with me because I'm the provider of the software. I'm going to go ahead and assume that you lost a lot of time because of the transitioning process. So, what I'm about to do is give you six months for free. Extend the contract for six months for free, and in exchange, you let me instruct your people on how to use the software, so you can benefit from it like the previous government did."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:13:38

I never got an email, a reply from this minister. That was it. That was the last email I ever sent to him.

Peter McCormack: 00:13:47

Is there anything in this related to administrations not wanting to have use the same communication tools almost in fear that one would be aware of what the other one had said or one would be saying because, obviously, these administrations aren't friendly? Therefore ... Do you understand what I'm saying?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:14:09

I totally understand where you're coming from. The problem is that they didn't look for an alternative. They were just using WhatsApp. At the time, WhatsApp wasn't secure. It wasn't encrypted. So, it would have been fine if they had an alternative platform that they had chosen or that they preferred. That's understandable, but the fact is they just didn't care for the project or the premise of the project itself. So, privacy was not of their utmost concern or security.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:14:41

I would have never imagined at the time when I sent that email on October, I would have never imagined that this was going to turn sour because at the end of the day, everything was done Kosher. We could not have gotten paid for the contract had we not given proof that we had delivered on the contract, and they had signed off on accepting that they have received the licenses and the software for the contract.

Peter McCormack: 00:15:10

So, in January 2015, you then received a subpoena.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:15:15

Yeah. Yeah, and I was-

Peter McCormack: 00:15:16

To what? To New York?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:15:18

No. Actually, I didn't receive it because the way I found out about it, I had spent New Year's in Panama, actually. I never received a subpoena. I found out about it through the news, through I would say government-sponsored news outlet. It's called La Prensa. They have had a track record of breaking news before subpoenas even get delivered. It's just amazing.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:15:48

So, they basically worked hand-in-hand with the journalists at this La Prensa to investigate, and create these cases because they can start an investigation out of just any report that's published on a Newspaper. So, that's the mechanism that they created. I found out through this article and I was living in Panama. I wasn't living in Panama. I was visiting Panama at the time, and I laughed. I found it funny because I said, "Well, this is going to be a boomerang to the guy because he was suing me, personally."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:16:36

I said, "Well, this just doesn't make sense. I should be, as a Panamanian citizen, as a taxpayer, I should be suing him because I know for a fact that he was negligent in using the software." So, I feel that I should be the one suing him. So, I never thought that this case would have any legs, much less walk or run. Boy, was I wrong.

Peter McCormack: 00:17:01

So, you heard about the subpoena in the news. You're in Panama. What is your next action? What happens next?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:17:10

Well, my next action is this is clearly a misunderstanding. As soon as I give them screenshots and explained to investigators how this works, then I'm going to be quickly let off the hook because this is very transparent. It's black and white. So, I went back to New York. I had hired a lawyer. My lawyer was taking care of everything, and I was providing all the necessary evidence for my lawyer to supply the investigators and the prosecutors, but overtime, fast forward five months later, I'm still part of the investigation.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:17:46

So, that's when I started getting nervous because there had already been, by this time, they had opened over 50 or 60 cases against ex-government contractors. It made it for a very scary environment in all of Panama. No one wanted to sell a single thing to the government, and that's the case today.

Peter McCormack: 00:18:12

Why do you theorise they were opening these investigations into other contractors?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:18:18

There are huge allegations about corruption and misuse of government funds from the previous government, and I'm sure that some of them have a good legal basis, but I think they overreached when it comes to me. I think they've also ... Fast forward four years after that, a lot of those cases, most of them, I would say 80% of them had fallen apart because they happen to be just created for the sole purpose of going against political enemies of this government, and such is the case with me. I believe that the case wasn't built to get back the money that was "stolen from the government", but rather to make life impossible for our political enemy of the president, which is not Mayer, by the way. Mayer is a nobody. Mayer is just a pawn in a game of chess.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:19:17

The enemy here, really, is the ex-president Ricardo Martinelli. My father is the brother-in-law of the ex-president. So, my parents are divorced. I've always theorised that they've always wanted to go against my father for his closeness to the president, the ex-president, and they couldn't get to my dad, so they used me as bait. It's created a terrible president in Panama for future political prosecutions.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:19:54

At this point, lines have always been drawn. It's not new. I think in every change of government you see the justice departments get active with prosecutions against previous administrations, but in this case, there had never been a case where they lock up. They go against the children of their enemies. That was a game-changer.

Peter McCormack: 00:20:26

Right. Okay. So, towards the end of 2015, you're obviously getting a bit drained by New York and stuff at life. You're thinking of heading to Colombia for New Year's, right? Your mom is not keen on you to go, but it doesn't cross your mind as any threat to you by traveling to Colombia.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:20:50

Well, it's 2015. By this time, the contract with the government ended, but we had thoroughly invested in this email vertical, this secure email vertical. So, we decided that Criptext would build this extension for Gmail, that would enable people to send encrypted emails that end-to-end encrypted, but they were more secure than standard Gmail emails.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:21:13

We raised \$500,000 with that project. We launched, and we got some coverage by Business Insider. We were in cloud nine. We really felt the wind on our backs, and we thought 2016 is going to be an amazing year. So, with Star Wars being rebooted at the end of 2015, I said, "Well, I'm going to go to ..." I couldn't find tickets in New York.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:21:39

So, I went to Miami. I got tickets in Miami, and I went to Miami. Since I was in Miami, my friend said, "Mayer, why don't you come to Colombia. We're going to spend New Year's here."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:21:49

I said, "Okay, guys. It's just one short three-hour flight from here. So, let's do it."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:21:54

So, mind you, before I went to Colombia, I had spent two weeks in Jamaica. So, I'm Jamaican, and I went to Jamaica to get my investor visa. That was back in November. I got my investor visa. That was a reassurance was everything was fine because there's no greater vetting process than going through an American immigration system.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:22:20

So, I went to Colombia knowing that I had a case, but not thinking that it was going to get more complicated than just a case because I had been abiding with every single request by the prosecutors. In fact, the last time I went to Panama was in July, July 2015. I voluntarily went to the prosecutor's office first to notify myself, to have the prosecutor see me, and I said, "Would you like me to answer any questions because I'm here right now and I have to be travel back to New York. I don't live here, and I'm happy to answer any questions."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:23:03

She said, "No. We don't need you. Everything is fine."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:23:08

So, I had never expected this to get any more complicated.

Peter McCormack: 00:23:15

Right, but you get on the plane, you're looking forward to seeing your friends, and Interpol awaiting for you, and have a red notice.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:23:23

Man, it's funny because I'm in immigration line in Cartagena, at the airport, and I'm on bumble. I am swiping left and right. I'm getting prepared for a fun weekend in Cartagena for New Year's, excited to see my friends, and it's my

turn to go up to the counter, and I go through the process, and they say, "Do you have a pending case open?"

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:23:48

I said, "Yes, in Panama."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:23:51

Says, "Well, there seems to be an Interpol red notice to your name. So, we're not going to be able to admit you into the country. In fact, we're going to have to detain you."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:24:04

I said, "This is not happening. This is probably a joke. Welcome to Cartagena. Have fun."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:24:11

No, I was wrong. I got very nervous. I got very nervous because I had the voice of my mother in the back of my mind saying, "I don't want you to go. I have a bad feeling about this." I don't know if it's that my mom can predict the future or she calls it upon me, but she always gets it right. So, they detained me in Colombia. They put me into this Cherokee, this Jeep Cherokee.

Peter McCormack: 00:24:40

I've seen the video.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:24:42

Well, what you saw was when I got to Bogota because I was detained in Cartagena. I had to spend one night in Cartagena in a prison, in a local jail. We had friends that knew people in the government. We said, "Well, this is probably a misunderstanding. They're going to be able to clear this up." So, I always had hopes that this was going to be quickly fixed. I was wrong.

Peter McCormack: 00:25:18

What kind of prison was that? What kind of prison was that?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:25:19

I would say it would be the local police station. There were about six cells and there was only one guy in the entire jail. We had separate prisons. So, I had to sleep on a slab of cement that night, and there were cockroaches all over. What's funny is that throughout all of this, I got to keep my suitcase with me, my hand luggage.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:25:48

So, I've always had two phones. One is an Android, and one is an iPhone because I do a lot of testing for my apps. They took my phone away, but little

do they know that in my bag I had another phone. I had an Android. So, I kept on communicating with my relatives while I was in prison. This allowed me to basically sleep that night because believe it or not, throughout this entire situation, I never lost one minute of sleep, but it really helped that I had a communication medium with my family and friends because I wasn't allowed to speak to anyone at this point.

Peter McCormack: 00:26:29

I'm guess that, correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm guessing your mindset at this point is, "Okay. Well, we'll get this figured out tomorrow. It's not going to be a big deal." You've got to go to Bogota for it. Is it when you get off the plane in Bogota and they pick you up again? At what point did you start to realise, "Okay. This is really serious"?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:26:57

So, the moment that I feel the heat was when I get off this flight from Cartagena to Bogota. I remember the only thing I was feeling sorry for was that I had left my New York Yankees hat in the back of the police car. Then as I walk out of the airport, gates opened up. The automatic doors opened up, and cameras. Oh, my God! It was like Hollywood but in a bad way, okay? Paparazzi, at least 30 photographers, and video recorders and reporters. It was crazy. It really was crazy, but I kept a very straight face because I was very confident that this was just a shame that was happening, but it was just going to be that, just a shame, and it will be resolved within hours, but it wasn't.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:28:00

I was put in the back of a police car, and I was taken to this FBI jail, exclusive jail of Colombia. In this jail, there were 12 cells. There were 12 cells that fit two people per cell, but they were fitting four people per cell at this point. It was a small joint. It was an L-shaped. I mean, the cells were an L-shaped, the arrangement. So, you had six cells on one side and six cells on the other side, and then a little patio in the center.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:28:36

It was very private. It was very intimate, I would say. There were about another 32 people there from ... There was an Italian guy. There was a lot of Colombians. Most of them were Colombians. This was the holding cell for people who have Interpol problems, okay? So, whether you are arriving from an Interpol extradition or awaiting an Interpol extradition, that's your limbo, okay?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:29:08

They call that ... What's the name? I never knew the name of that prison until I

left that prison. So, I spent three weeks in that prison. I lost about 25 pounds because-

Peter McCormack: 00:29:21

You were aware of the charge at that point.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:29:25

Yes. By the second day, I was able to speak properly with my mother and my family, including my lawyers. They were able to look me into everything that was going on. Their number claim was that, "Well, this is illegal. This is against Interpol procedures."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:29:45

Interpol requires it for a red alert that the person be charged with a crime. I hadn't been charged nor convicted at that point. I was being investigated. So, it was a clear violation of the Interpol's rules and procedures. Secondly, Panama approved the request for extradition. So, basically, when a person is apprehended with an arrest warrant, an Interpol warrant, they have to ask the requiring country whether they confirm that they want this person to be extradited or not.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:30:23

Panama had accepted. They had verified that they did want the extradition process to go through despite the fact that our lawyers and our contacts within the government had reached out to the minister of foreign affairs, which is the vice president, to tell them that Panama cannot extradite Mayer because it's a violation of the 1932 Convention of Montevideo, where, basically, a lot of countries signed an agreement whereby no person can be extradited if they haven't been convicted or charged.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:31:03

So, it was illegal in many ways. I was confident that this would all get cleared up. As you can tell by this point, I'm a very optimistic person. I had never had-

Peter McCormack: 00:31:15

Yeah.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:31:17

Well, I mean-

Peter McCormack: 00:31:18

You're there for three weeks. It doesn't sound like a prison that's designed for longterm-

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:31:26

Yeah. No.

Peter McCormack: 00:31:26

What facilities did you have within that prison?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:31:30

Well, the facilities, well, they were very poor, but at least it was intimately. So, it wasn't a jungle. It wasn't mayhem. So, the cell was small. It was a 2x6 cell in meters, of course. There are bunk beds. Actually, yeah, there were two bunk beds. My "roommate", my cellmate was a guy by the name Arias, Arias. It was his last name. I only knew him by his last name. Everyone calls him by his last name, but he was an ex-cop and he was wrongfully convicted for something or whatever.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:32:06

He was a very nice fellow, very pleasant fellow. He was about 56 years old. He was just a very warm, very gentle person. Every morning, we had to do cleanup duty. So, every morning, we had to wipe the floors and clean up the entire prison cell, the entire jail. Basically, they would assign two cells per day. So, whenever it was my duty, Arias, he would pick up my slack because I was really bad at it, and he would basically cover for me because I could have gotten in trouble for not doing the work properly. It wasn't work, but let's just call it a responsibility.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:32:54

That's how the morning started. It was very cold. Listen, I packed for Cartagena beach, okay, not for Bogota, which is high up in the mountains at about 10 degrees Celsius, especially in the mornings. Then there's the water. The water situation, ooh. Okay. So, there's no hot water, but at least there is water. Because there was no hot water, I was always ... We had to shower in the mornings at 5:00 in the morning. That made no sense to me because it's coldest in the morning. Why would you want to shower with cold water in the morning? It's not like we have anything else to do during the day. Why can't we shower in the afternoon?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:33:40

So, throughout the entire time, I was debating with the custodians, the guards about how to improve their processes and how to better prison. They all agreed. It made sense, but there are cameras and you got to do things because they'll get fired or get called upon. So, I played ball. You have two toilets and two showers. You had to basically wait till the showers were available, and you had an hour for the entire prison, for the entire jail. So, for

the 32 people, you had an hour for everyone to shower. It wasn't that bad. It was okay. It's not a relaxing shower. It's a quick shower.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:34:31

Food was bad. Food was very bad. Food was very bad. I was Kosher. So, they were serving a pork, and I had eaten bacon, but I wasn't a pork eater. I didn't like white meat. So, I had a tough time with the food, but once you're hungry, you'll eat whatever you have, and I got to that point, believe it or not. This was very much a test to the human body.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:35:02

I learnt to live on I would say half of a good meal per day because that's what it was. You would eat at 7:00 in the morning, at 11:00 in the afternoon, and at 4:00 in the afternoon, 11:00 in the morning.

Peter McCormack: 00:35:20

You ended up losing a lot of weight.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:35:22

Yeah. I lost a lot of weight. Portions were limited. The food wasn't very nutritious. What can I say? I wasn't the only one losing weight. Everyone would lose weight. So, it wasn't exclusive to me.

Peter McCormack: 00:35:38

Did you have access to your family, to see your family or were you in touch with your family while you were there?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:35:46

I was. I would say that these three weeks were the toughest of all because I could only have two calls per day for three minutes at a time. I could only call one person, which meant that I had to pick. There were times where I would call the person and for XYZ reason, they wouldn't pick up. You wouldn't get a second chance. The anxiety, think about this, you're living through this torment, you're living through this situation that you're unsure about, that is really tormenting you every second of the day, and that call is the only thing that can give you peace of mind until the next call, and then they don't pick up the phone.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:36:30

That was the worst. I mean, that was very difficult. It really got my anxiety to peak point, but I have to say that you really do learn to manage yourself and to manage your own expectations, and to hear yourself, to hear yourself think, to anticipate how you're going to feel and avoid any pitfalls of self-inflicting pain or I would say psychological traps.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:37:03

So, we had the calls. I could see my family once a week on Saturdays. Only three family members could come in, and they would come in at 8:00, and they could leave at 11:00. They were able to bring in food. That was a relief because they would bring me quite hearty meals, and what I would do is I was starving, but I wouldn't eat it entirely. I would eat only a little bit, and I would put it away and hide it, and I would make that meal last until the next visit because at this point, it was the only way to keep myself healthy. I knew that you have to basically pace yourself, and that's a very difficult thing because you are fighting against your own humanity.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:38:01

I almost felt like I was not a human, but rather I was thinking as an animal. The only objective is to survive. So, yeah, I would make these meals last a week.

Peter McCormack: 00:38:14

So, it sounds like your life then starts to become about very micro important issues, the phone call, which is three minutes, the small amount of food that you would have everyday from the meal your parents would be bringing. They sound like micro moments of pleasure in a very difficult time in your life.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:38:38

Oh, no doubt, no doubt. You've hit the nail on the head because the smallest letter with the fewest words would mean the world to me. At that point, I wanted some entertainment. I wanted books. There were no books in English, and I don't read in Spanish, but they got me books in Spanish, and for me, that was, oh, my God, the world just got bigger. It was amazing. You just tend to appreciate the little things, and I think it's normal.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:39:14

Anyone that goes through a situation of pain, anxiety, of depression or even financial distress, you tend to appreciate the little things. You make things last longer. I think it's innate in human nature. That's the reality.

Peter McCormack: 00:39:35

Okay. So, at what point did you then realise you were going to end up at La Picota prison? Is that the one?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:39:44

Oh, I never ended up. Yeah. So, I never thought I was going to end up there because they had approved bail. They had approved bail for my liberation, and it was set at \$100,000. Bail is traditionally set at 10% of the value of the contract. Mind you, this was-

Peter McCormack: 00:40:07

20,000.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:40:09

So, 20,000. They went up to 100,000, which is crazy, but thank God my family came through for me, and they posted bail. At that point, I was saying my goodbyes to everyone thinking next morning I would wake up and go to the four seasons with the rest of my family and enjoy. No. I was wrong. I was woken up the next morning and sent to the maximum security prison of Colombia. That was a game-changer. That was a game-changer.

Peter McCormack: 00:40:46

So, you woke up and you didn't realise you were going.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:40:49

No.

Peter McCormack: 00:40:50

Then somebody comes in and says, "We're moving you."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:40:53

"Pack up. Here's a plastic bag, a plastic trash bag, and put your stuff there. We're going to a prison."

Peter McCormack: 00:41:03

That's pretty serious there, right?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:41:06

It is because no one gets alerted, and they do this for security purposes. They don't tell relatives. They don't tell anyone because it's very common in Colombia that prisoners transports get hijacked by drug cartels or mafias, and this and that. So, I very much felt like I was being kidnapped. I wasn't able to call my family to tell them what was going on. I wasn't sure whether they knew where I was going or where was I going to be once I was there. It was a game-changer.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:41:40

For three weeks, I had struggled to get accustomed to this prison life. I managed to get accustomed to it, and then all of a sudden, they pulled the rug under my feet, and all my letters got left behind. I wasn't able to take any of the letters from my girlfriend at the time, from my relatives, from my family, from my co-founders, my employees, my team members, everyone. I would read them everyday. It gave me peace of mind, and it gave me hope, and strength, and it was left behind.

Peter McCormack: 00:42:14

The traditional view that everybody has whether it's films or documentaries of South American prisons is that they are crazy, scar places, something I couldn't myself even imagine preparing myself for. Was that crossing your mind when you were being taken there?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:42:37

Yeah, yeah, yeah, very much. That was what I had in mind. Listen, I watched all seasons of Prison Break, and probably the one that most stuck to my mind was Prison Break Panama, when they had a whole season about escaping in a Panamanian prison. Yeah, that's what exactly what I had in mind. I had imagined Prison Break meets Shawshank Redemption. That's what I had in mind.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:43:05

I said, "Shit, man! Here comes the real test, the real challenge."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:43:11

While I was being transported, I couldn't see where I was going because I was in the back of a bus and the windows were covered. I only knew that I had arrived after an hour when I heard the yelling and screaming as if there was some type of riot going on. I said, "Is there a riot?"

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:43:38

They said, "No, no, no. That's just daily life."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:43:40

I got scared.

Peter McCormack: 00:43:43

Oh, shit!

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:43:43

I got shit scared. Yeah.

Peter McCormack: 00:43:45

Okay. So, they walked you into the prison. They checked you in.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:43:48

Walked me to the prison. While they're walking you, there's a big fence. The prison, it's not laid out horizontally, but rather vertically. There are 12 floors per building, and in the building where I was taken in to, you had all the prisoners looking at the new bait from every floor, and everyone was banging on the fence.

Peter McCormack: 00:44:14

Is it nuevo? Is it nuevo?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:44:18

Well, they had nuevos, nuevos, nuevos, but they were saying mono. Mono in Colombian, in Colombian slang, mono means blonde. So, they were specific. I wasn't the only one that was being taken to prison. There were about 12 people behind me, but mono was the one that everyone was pointing towards. So, that got scary.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:44:41

Number two, the news media really destroyed me. They put a target on my back because when this whole situation started and I got detained in Cartagena, news reports started saying that I had stolen \$12 million from the government, that the contract was worth \$13 million or \$12 million, that I was the nephew of the ex-president, and I was this White, pale white face with blue eyes and blonde hair. Listen, you got a target on your back when you're going into prison. That didn't make it any easier at all because what I've-

Peter McCormack: 00:45:26

So, you're worrying about the risk of both violence, but rape.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:45:35

Well, rape was the last thing I was thinking about. I was thinking about extortion. I was thinking about how could this get more complicated in the sense that if the architects of this entire case are behind this, it's very easy for them to make my life even more impossible within prison.

Peter McCormack: 00:45:55

Okay. I see.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:45:57

It's actually ideal, I would say, because at the end of the day, my father was living in Miami at the time and he said, "I'll go to Panama and I'll turn myself in. I don't know what they want with me, but I'll go if it gets you free."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:46:13

I said, "There's no guarantee that they're going to set you free. So, you know what? Please don't do me any favors. It's bad enough to have one family member in prison, worse to have two. So, thank you, but no."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:46:25

So, what they wanted to do was squeeze me. They wanted to squeeze me and squeeze my family into rendition. That's why they sent me to La Picota. I was expecting that I was going to last maybe a week in La Picota before I was

liberated because of the bail, but through a technicality, well, not a technicality, an arbitrary decision of the judge in Panama, they decided not to give me my liberation though I had bailed because liberty, liberation was meant to be done in Panama.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:46:59

That is, I am not detained in Panama, therefore, I cannot be freed in Colombia, which was a stupid argument because the status of a free person is universal. That is, if you're a free person in your country, you're a free person everywhere else you go. That's a fundamental human right, but it didn't matter whether they were right or wrong. As long as they had any argument to delay the process, then due process would extend this martyrdom for another two to three months.

Peter McCormack: 00:47:40

Still, you ended up in ... Was it five or six months you were in La Picota?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:47:45

I was in La Picota a total of five months, total detention, total arrest prison sentence was six months. I just said the word sentence, and that's the keyword because everyone I was in prison with had a sentence, okay? They all knew how long they were there for. For me, I had been living with no timeline, and with the cycle of hope and dismay, hope and dismay.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:48:19

I was very certain I was going to leave next week, and then next week comes and if it's not one thing, it's the other. You know what? Next week, and then I'll be let down again. It made it very difficult. It's like death through a thousand paper cuts.

Peter McCormack: 00:48:35

Okay. So, go back to your first day. You checked in. You go through the due process. You're paraded. You're what? Taken up to your cell?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:48:47

I wish I could ... I don't have the picture with me, but I'm going to send it to you. I'm taken up to my cell. Immediately, my stuff, the few stuff that I had with me gets stolen. They got taken away. Everyone's banging on their cell, on the doors of their cells. So, these aren't bars, but rather they're big metal doors with just one square hole through which they can look out, and they were banging on the doors, and shouting stuff about who had first dibs on raping the blonde kid, "Isn't that the kid with the \$12 million. We're going to extort him with the Medellín cartel." No. I mean, it was scary. It was scary.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:49:39

What was even scarier was that I wasn't put into my prison cell when I first came in. I was taken into the head honcho cell. I said, "Shit!"

Peter McCormack: 00:49:51

What? The main prisoner?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:49:54

The guy, yes. Yeah, the guy.

Peter McCormack: 00:49:57

The guy in the films, who's always the main guy.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:49:59

Yeah, the guy who was in control, right? So, they take me to his cell. His name is El Negro. He was actually a quite pleasant fellow. He welcomed me and said, "Everything's going to be fine." With him was his cellmate, which was called El Buho, the owl. They were both from Medellín. One was the leader of the criminal gangs of Medellín, the El Negro, and the other one, he was just one of the leaders, but not the main leader, but he had about 600 deaths under his belt, and he would laugh at the fact that the subpoena from the US says that he's wanted for six deaths, if only they knew that there's 600 bodies buried under such and such and such place. They would brag about this.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:50:51

So, I was scared but I was keeping a poker face on because it was the only thing I had going. My face, this White face, I was the only White kid in this prison, okay? I was the only kid.

Peter McCormack: 00:51:07

It must have been pretty surreal. You've come from New York. Were you living in Manhattan on the island?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:51:15

I was living in Soho, yeah.

Peter McCormack: 00:51:17

So, you come from living in Soho, doing a startup to essentially that thing we've seen in the film where the guards are taking you to the main guy in the prison, and they're pulse apart. I'm wondering what's going through your head at this moment. Are you panicking? Is it too surreal to comprehend?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:51:45

It was so surreal that I always felt it was something that was bound to end quick because it was too surreal to be true. We read, we hear stories about

people that have been in prison illegally or wrongfully imprisoned, and we watch movies, and we always say, "Well, it's just movies." I'm one of those guys that says that. All of a sudden, I'm living the moving. I'm living the story, and I couldn't believe it. It was very hard for me to believe.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:52:25

I was also very worried about what people were saying about me, what were my friends thinking. How is this affecting my company? What are the VCs going to think? Are they going to drop out? What's going to happen. I was very nervous. I was very worried for the ripple effects of the situation. Even if it was resolved with the day, I was very worried about that.

Peter McCormack: 00:52:50

So, this head honcho guy, you've met him. What's the structure of that meeting? What's it for? Is it to set you up?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:53:01

It's not to set me up. It's an initiation meeting, okay? So, there are basically two head honchos in the cell block. The cell block has 32 cells, and it fits three people per cell. This is exclusively the extradition cell block, which means that this is where they put the people that are so bad that they're wanted internationally, okay?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:53:29

This guy, he wanted first dibs at having me in his clan instead of having the other guy lure me into his clan. He was very nice, very pleasant. He lent me his phone, so I could WhatsApp with my mother. I hadn't used WhatsApp in four weeks almost. I hadn't used a phone in four weeks. I hadn't listened to music in four weeks. It was the most disconnected I've ever been since being born I think. I mean, unbelievable.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:54:01

So, I got the phone, and I sent a selfie to my mom with these two guys. I'm smiling. I said, "Ma, everything's fine," except I don't know that on the other side, they're shitting their pants because there are these two thugs beside me, and I just came in to a maximum security prison. They're thinking, "Well, there goes his virginity."

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:54:23

No. I spoke to my mom also. Thank God for WhatsApp calling because I was able to call and I was able to speak to her. My focus was really transmitting peace of mind to my family because they were my support system. If they would break, then I would have no one to support me. So, I had to transmit even if it was not entirely true.

Peter McCormack: 00:54:47

So, how does the initiation end? Are there any conditions to you? Are there any warnings?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:54:55

Yes. Warnings included don't be stingy, share your meals, share your funds, share your assets. They also said, "If you need anything, come to me. If you get things on your own, then that's going to be a call to war. That's going to show me that you're not loyal to me. If you speak to the other people from the other clan, then I'm also going to assume that you're not being loyal, and you don't want to not be loyal to me." Then he gave me some example about a guy who got sent to a solitary confinement by his request because he wasn't loyal. I didn't know if that was true or not, but it definitely felt true. The guy, he didn't flinch when talking about this.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:55:46

What was most weird about the entire situation was that the Buho guy, while I was talking to El Negro, he was just sitting there looking at me and slicing an apple with a marble knife. So, they have marble knives in prison because they wouldn't get detected in the metal detectors. It was unbelievable. I mean, I was shocked. Knives are normal. Forget about makeshift knives. These are actual, legit sushi knives.

Peter McCormack: 00:56:21

The slicing of the apple was there to intimidate you, right?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:56:25

Oh, no doubt. It's exactly what you're picturing. It's that. That's how I'm feeling. That how it's being emitted, and I got the message.

Peter McCormack: 00:56:33

Right. So, then are you then taken to your cell?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:56:37

Then I'm taken to my cell, and I'm introduced to my two cellmates, Alex and Cuba. They were both Colombians. They were both very short fellows. Cuba was short and thick. He was the muscle of the cell. They call him Cuba because he had spent eight years in prison in Cuba. So, they just gave him the name Cuba. The other guy, Alex, he was a very pleasant guy, very courteous fellow, unassuming, nonthreatening, and he was about in his 40s. Also, Cuba was around his 40s. By far, I was the youngest person in the cell block.

Peter McCormack: 00:57:24

Do you as a cell then become a unit, as a pack together?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:57:29

Yes. Yes, but no immediately.

Peter McCormack: 00:57:32

Then at what point are you essentially, I don't know, I'm trying to think. Imagine you're going into a courtyard and everyone's together. Does that happen on the first day or do you have to do a first night sleep?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:57:48

No. I had to do the first night sleep because they only bring new inmates at night for security purposes, when everyone's locked up. So, that night, they gave me the run of the mill, my roommates, roommates, my cellmates. They gave me the run of the mill, and they explained how everything worked, but they were also very hesitant because there was a second factor that everyone was scared about, that didn't play to my favor. My complexion made me look like a CIA operative. People thought I was an insider. So, people weren't open to me. In fact, I was the elephant in the room.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:58:35

So, they weren't upfront. They weren't very welcoming, initially, but eventually, I gained their trust, and they still tease me even till today. They say, "You think you can talk to your friends at the CIA to loosen the noose on me?" They'll joke about it.

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:58:54

So, yeah, that was the initiation. The first night was fine. I slept well. I had no problem sleeping. Mind you, I did sleep on a slab of cement. That was it. I didn't have a mattress or anything, but next day, that was supposed to be provided, and that's a different story. That got stolen.

Peter McCormack: 00:59:17

So, when are you first thrown in to the mix of the jail?

Mayer Mizrachi: 00:59:23

That morning, next morning. They break everyone up at 4:30 in the morning. This jail is not intimate. This is not private, and this is not nice. Everything is methodical. There's a structure. There's a process to everything, and that they start with showers. So, water, there's only water, running water for three hours a day, one hour in the morning, one hour at midday, and one hour in the afternoon at around 4:00, which means that you have about 96 people that have to shower within three hours, but the problem is, actually, no, you can only shower in the morning. That's the other problem.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:00:10

I could get away with showering in the afternoon in the other jail, but once I was hear, everything was under control. If I were to shower in the afternoon, then hey would rat me out, for example, and I would get into trouble with the guards, and this and that. It was a problem.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:00:28

So, showering was a problem. I used to shower every other day, maybe every three days, including, because you didn't sweat, you didn't move that much. There was really no reason to shower. You aren't going to see anyone. I didn't stink. So, I hedge my risk at the shower by one-third or two-thirds, sorry. So, that's how the day started, and that's how everyone started looking at me. We had to line up. They would count all the prisoners every morning, three times a day.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:01:09

So, in the morning, the first thing you do when you wake up is stand outside your prison cell and they're supposed to count everyone in every cell. Everyone started looking at me, even the guard. When the guard goes around, it was in the shape of a triangle, an isosceles triangle. When he went around the parameter counting every cell, he stopped and looked at me and said, "Well, you guys got new beef. Very good for you," as in like, "You guys are going to have fun."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:01:39

So, that's when I realised that these guards weren't fucking around. These guards were not nice guards. They weren't respectful guards. They're probably as bad. I could say that today. The difference between the guards and the prisoners was the uniform. That's it.

Peter McCormack: 01:01:56

So, when was the first bit of intimidation where somebody started? Were you pushed into a fight early on?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:02:06

Yeah. The first one was when I got my pillow and my mattress. It was taken away. So, they'll take away pillows and mattresses to sell them to other people whose pillows and mattresses have been stolen from. So, they artificially create the man, which is magnificent.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:02:23

So, they stole my pillow, and I walked up to the guy who had my pillow. I said, "Give me that pillow."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:02:29

The guy says, "That's not your pillow. It's my pillow."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:02:31

I said, "No. It's my pillow."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:02:33

He says, "Then why is it in my hand?"

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:02:35

I said, "Yeah, you're right. Why is it in your hand?"

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:02:37

So, I took it from his hand and he immediately punched me. I punched back. I got into a fight. That was my first fight. My nose was broken, no doubt about that. I was bleeding, but I demonstrated that I was no pushover. That was a very important event.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:03:01

At that point, I'm feeling so low emotionally that, "Do what you will to me, I give zero fucks, okay? I'm already getting fucked by my own government. What do I care about a fist fight? Come on."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:03:15

So, that was basically my attitude. I'm a guy who has nothing to lose at this point to the point that I even got into a fight with a guard because they ... So, they would do these random searches. They would call everyone to the center of the cell block, and they would do searches inside the rooms.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:03:38

When I came back from the search, everything was destroyed, but I didn't find my calling cards. It turns out the calling cards are the currency in prison, and I didn't find them. So, I said, "Okay. Who searched this room? Who searched this cell?" With all the authority in the world, I started questioning the guards, "Who was there with you?" Then when I identified the right one, I pushed him and I said, "You give me my calling cards." He pushed me back. I immediately punched him. I got into a fight with the guard.

Peter McCormack: 01:04:14

That doesn't sound sensible.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:04:16

No, not at all, but it was very much necessary because by that time, I was three months in, and I had demonstrated "no loyalty" to El Negro. So, I had to

demonstrate that I didn't care for their rule of law, that I was not there to play the game. I was just there to do my time. I didn't want to play on the novela.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:04:40

So, for all those who don't want to do novela, there's me, okay? I'm a very fair guy. I don't get in trouble with anyone. I don't get into fights with this and that, but if you cross the line, you'll pay for it. That's New York attitude. I was very New Yorkish when I was there.

Peter McCormack: 01:05:00

When did you start to feel like you were settling in into a normal life within prison, a routine, "I know what's going. This is just normal life now"?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:05:11

Yeah, when I started joking to my mother. So, I got this phone contraband into prison. Everyone had phones, but they all had these disposables because these phones would get picked up by the guards, and immediately taken away. I had an idea to bring a phone in that could be in a way where no one would find it. I considered the Samsung Galaxy S7 because it could go on-

Peter McCormack: 01:05:38

Because it's waterproof.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:05:40

Exactly. It was waterproof, and it was a smartphone. I didn't just care to speak, I wanted to interact. That was a game-changer. Everything changed the minute that I got that phone in. I would hide that phone in water, and the minute we had the first search, it was the moment of truth. Everyone knew that I had that phone. So, everyone was looking out to see if they found my phone or not, and when they didn't, it was eureka for the entire prison block. Everyone said, "Guys, the game is changing. We're now going to get waterproof phones, and now we're going to be able to see movies, use WhatsApp, speak with our relatives at no cost," because calls would cost you about \$2 a minute. So, can you imagine-

Peter McCormack: 01:06:25

So, how did you get the phone in?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:06:27

Ah! You can get anything into prison. Remember, guards are no different than the prisoners themselves. At the end of the day, they're there for 48-hour shifts. So, they learn, they behave, they interact, and they start to befriend the prisoners. It's part of their daily life. So, they're not favors, but they'll take money for it.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:06:52

Typically, what's brought into prison is drugs, right? So, you pay per weight and volume like DHL, but scarier. So, anyhow, there's a great story about bringing something in. The first thing I actually brought, it wasn't a phone. The first thing I brought in was a GMAT book because all my Sudokus were stolen. Everyone kept stealing my Sudokus.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:07:19

So, I said, "I'm going to entertain myself with something that no one else can find entertainment in." So, I got a GMAT book in, and when I told the guard how much it weighed, he said, "Are you bringing a container of coke? What is this?" So, that cost me about \$2,000 because that was the going rate for a three-pound block of cocaine.

Peter McCormack: 01:07:44

How does the money transfer happen?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:07:46

Yeah. That's interesting. So, you go to basically a Western Union. Someone outside goes to Western Union and deposits money in the name of somebody else. So, it's third-parties of both parties.

Peter McCormack: 01:08:03

So, you've got your phone. You're starting to build friends. You're starting to get into prison life. Also, you still got this company going on at the same time in New York. I mean, who was carrying that on? How did you have any communication with them?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:08:19

So, I was able to speak on the phone. It was dear and expensive, but I was able to communication over the phone. Luis, my co-founder at the time was running Criptext, but he was the CTO. He wasn't very much the business developer or the face of the company to the investors or to our client, but he did a great job.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:08:46

So, he was holding the helm. No one in the company at the time left the company. No one left the company. Everyone was very close, and everyone was very supportive of what was going on. I wanted the phone because my utmost concern at this point was not that I wasn't going to leave prison. I knew that I was going to leave eventually, but what was I going to leave towards, what's going to be there for me when I leave prison. So, I wanted to take care of Criptext, so that when I left prison, there'd still be a company to go to.

Peter McCormack: 01:09:26

So, were you still making commercial phone calls from prison? Were you product testing from your phone?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:09:34

So, the problem with the currency being the calling cards is that currency could be consumed. So, a calling card that had had the pin number on the back scratched off was no longer a useful currency. So, people were using cellphones, and my goal was to no longer use a calling card other than to exchange for goods and services within prison. I got the sim card from a Colombian prepaid data provider, cellphone provider, and it turns out I mistakenly found a hack that if I reset the data usage analytics on the phone, on the device, I could have unlimited data.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:10:20

So, basically, they were using the device physical memory to peg the data, to limit your data consumption, which is so stupid. I hope they're listening to this because they are losing money left, right, and center because of prisoners.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:10:34

So, I found that out. I started with popcorn time. Yeah. That was number one. Got my popcorn time, started downloading movies, catching up with Civil War, Captain America Civil War, and Deadpool. I was very excited for that. More importantly, I got my WhatsApp back, and my pseudo name on WhatsApp was Scofield, which was great. So, I would message-

Peter McCormack: 01:10:59

From Prison Break.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:11:00

That's right. That's right. I was half as cool, but very much Scofield, although-

Peter McCormack: 01:11:06

Let me ask you something then. This is going down a slightly separate track, right? You've seen the film. Sorry. You've seen the series Prison Break. You've called yourself Scofield. Just out of interest, did you start to have a look and considered, "If I was going to break out, this is how I would do it," did that stuff cross your mind at all?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:11:29

No, no, because up until then, I hadn't done a single thing wrong. I hadn't done anything illegal. So, if I were to do something like that, then-

Peter McCormack: 01:11:40

No. I mean, what I'm asking is not whether you would-

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:11:43

Consider, right.

Peter McCormack: 01:11:44

Did you have a look, say out of interest, "If I could get out, this is what I would do"?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:11:49

Peter, no doubt. I mean, remember, from day one, I started telling prison guards how they could improve on their prison system. I could see faults everywhere. In the changing of the guards, they would leave literally doors. I have a video. I have a great video of me leaving my cell block going into the electricity room of the cell block and shutting down the breakers and unlocking all the doors to the cell block. I couldn't believe it.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:12:21

Then I end the video going back into my cell saying, "Who's a good boy? Who's a good boy?" Laughing about the situation that I could escape, "There you go. I just did something that could lead to an escape, but I'm going back into my prison because I'm a well-behaved boy. What can I say?"

Peter McCormack: 01:12:40

Okay. So, anyway, you got your phone, you've got your popcorn time, but, specifically, for the company, what role essentially were you doing then for the company?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:12:52

So, my role was in directing, repurposing of Criptext, the app that we sold to the government for consumer use. So, the one thing that I had in mind was when all this started, it very much reminded me of when Zuckerberg denied the million dollar offer from Microsoft to buy his Synapse software, and he gave it away for free. It was my moment to do something of great impact.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:13:27

So, what better way to draw attention to the illegalities that are going on than to launch this app for free. It was also a big way to say fuck you to the government. "Nobody pays. You paid, nobody pays from now on."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:13:44

So, my goal was being the pixel Nazi and not the architect, but the director of the development process. So, we would get on Skype calls every morning, in the afternoons. They would do screen shares. I have to say, from an Android phone, you really don't need a computer. I can unzip files and everything. It was great. I could do everything except for a Photoshop, but it was great.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:14:14

My partner at the time, Luis, was very nervous that drawing more attention to the situation would negatively impact the company. I said, "Once you've hit rock bottom, the only way to go is up. So, at this point, let's just go up." That was the whole premise of this because we had done nothing wrong, and it was just shocking that we had gone through this.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:14:42

Lo and behold, serendipity takes place, and all of a sudden, the story breaks with Panama papers. That was icing on the cake. Now, anything with the name Panama on it would sell in terms of PR.

Peter McCormack: 01:14:58

Okay. How did that affect you, though, specifically?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:15:03

Well, in that, a lot of criticism was drawn upon the government's response to the situation. I wanted to capitalise on that criticism by saying, "Hey, that's not the only illegal thing that these people have done. They're doing this, this, and that, and the other."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:15:21

I fit the profile. I didn't fit the profile of a corrupt official because, by the way, they were investigating me for embezzlement, which means that you have to work for the government. I never worked for the government. So, how could they be investigating me for embezzling funds if I wasn't employed by the government? It was all too crazy. I wanted to draw, to shine a light on this.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:15:52

Thank God, the story was picked up by Dell Cameron, who was at the Daily Dot back then. He's now at Gizmodo, and Tom, Tom Fox-Brewster at Forbes who writes on cryptography and security. Yeah. I mean, they were keen on the story, and I would have calls with them over Skype from that phone while I was in prison.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:16:18

Dell and I really built this personal relationship through that situation, and I have great amount of respect to him for having the balls to write a story with someone who's in prison, who hasn't been proven innocent. I think it takes a lot of guts to do that.

Peter McCormack: 01:16:34

Was there any part of the prison life you actually did enjoy?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:16:40

Yes, of course. Well, explain something to you, Peter. People take sabbaticals after a life of hard work. I was not even 30, and I wasn't in my sabbatical. I had nothing to worry about. Just think about it from this perspective. There's nothing that could go wrong because you're already in the most wrong of situations, okay? That's it.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:17:04

Number two, I could replay all my video games that I used to play when I was a kid in Nintendo 64. So, I had an emulator, and I was catching up with all those games that I've always wanted to play. I was catching up on my reading. I was studying from the GMAT even though I didn't want to go to business school. I said, "I would have never had time to do any of this."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:17:31

I think of that as, believe it or not, it was a blessing in disguise to just be able to sit back. Life is so structured. The life that everyone lives these days is so structured. We go to preschool, we go to school, we go to college, and then we go to work, and then we get married. Life is very structured. All of a sudden, this was a break. This was a break from life.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:17:59

Though it was a pretty pain to pay, I did find happy moments and things to laugh about because listen, man. I think humor is number one. It's very important. For every situation, you can find something to laugh about. So, for example, my mom wrote to me one morning and she says over WhatsApp, "Hey, my darling. How did you wake up today?"

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:18:22

I said, "In prison."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:18:25

I thought that was hilarious. I took a screen shot. I published that on Instagram. I thought it was great because, also, if you're having a fun time, if you're joking about it, that means everyone else can joke about it.

Peter McCormack: 01:18:38

Have you stayed in touch with anyone from the prison? Were there any personalities, friends you made?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:18:43

Yeah. So, Alex, so my roommates, they're ... Oh, my God! So, two things. So, Alex, he's still there, and his story is unbelievable because he used to build boats, fiber glass boats, and his family was kidnapped by the drug cartel. He

was forced to build these semi-submersible submarines for the drug cartel. Otherwise, they would kill his family. So, he did it, and he built plenty of these submarines for them, and then he got his family back, and he left. He left Medellín. I think he was somewhere else. He went to Barranquilla or somewhere.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:19:26

Then when they caught, when the US coastguard caught one of these boats, they interrogated the guy, "Who built it?" He said, "This guy built it." He's got no defense to prove his case because there's no proof that his wife was kidnapped, but he also doesn't fit to build. He's never been related to drugs. He was just a humble guy that worked on the docks. The guy, he's kept in touch with me. He writes to me from different phones all the time. Sometimes I'll write to him and I won't get a reply because they found his phone, and now he has to get a new phone.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:20:07

We're very much in touch. It makes a big difference for these people who are in prison to just speak to someone that's outside. You tell them what you're doing, what you've done in your day, and they live vicariously through you. They really authentically feel happy that you went for dinner with your girlfriend, that your birthday is tomorrow night with all your friends. They can really be happy for you. You feel it.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:20:35

Now, here's a funny bit. Cuba, the other guy, he was extradited to Miami, and this story is unbelievable because he was put in a prison cell with Ricardo Martinelli, the ex-president of Panama. That is unbelievable. That is unbelievable. Yeah, that was hilarious, and that's how I got to know that Cuba was in Miami because Martinelli's relatives told me that Cuba was with him. It's crazy.

Peter McCormack: 01:21:12

Okay. So, you settled into prison life, you carry on building your company, you're getting along okay with people. Legal process is carrying on. Then June 22nd, you're thinking you're going to be released, but, actually, it was a trap for immigration offices, right?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:21:36

Well, I was woken up that morning, and it was just a normal day, any other day. By 9:00, a guard comes in, the worst of worst guards. He was a Nazi. The guy says, "Pack up your stuff. You're leaving."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:21:52

I said, "Oh, shit. Not this gain," because they never say where you're going. Remember, when they took me to La Picota, they just said, "You're leaving," and they said the same thing this time around, "Pack up your stuff. You're leaving."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:22:03

I said, "Well, this means I'm going to Panama. Okay. Extradition process is on."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:22:11

So, I said, "Give me five minutes. Let me put my things together, and I'll meet you outside."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:22:16

He says, "Fine."

Peter McCormack: 01:22:16

Is there where you had your turtle outfit?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:22:20

That is correct. So, there's a great story to the whole turtle outfit. So, the president of Panama has for a long time been called the turtle because he's slow and gets nothing done. I considered this guy had a laugh of me. I think it's about time I have a laugh at him. If he's going to extradite me, then I'm going to get there with a ninja turtle outfit. That's how I left prison. I got my ninja turtle outfit on. I took one last picture with all my cellmates, and I went on. I took my phone with me, and it was hidden between my clothes, and then they were checking my clothes. I had two bags, two separate bags.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:23:03

On the way down, going down the stairs they say, "Well, how do you feel now that you're going to be a free man? What's your first meal?"

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:23:11

I said, "Wait, what?"

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:23:13

They said to me, "Yeah. You're going free. We couldn't say anything up there because it might put you in jeopardy, but, yeah, you're going free. The judge issued your warrant for your liberation."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:23:25

I said, "Wow! This is amazing."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:23:28

I was shocked. I could not believe it. I mean, I had been living for six months with just recurring letdowns to a point where I didn't lose hope, but I stopped hoping. I learnt to live comfortably with the situation I was in. So, it was very hard for me to believe that I'm finally leaving.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:23:51

So, I'm being taken out, and with a quick hand, I changed my phone from one pocket to the other, and they don't realised that I have a phone with me. I'm leaving prison and there are these guards, these immigration guards. I thought it was part of the process. They started having a quarrel right outside the building. I'm still in the compound, but outside of the building where I was locked up for six months, this was the first time I have felt the sun, by the way. There was no outside in this prison. There's no such thing as outside time. It's like the Las Vegas casino.

Peter McCormack: 01:24:29

There was no courtyard.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:24:30

No courtyard. It's like the Las Vegas casino. It looks exactly the same in the day as it looks like in the night. There's always lights on, all fluorescent light. Well, God knows, man. I was very happy to feel the sun, and then I'm hearing a quarrel go on between the prison guards, and immigration.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:24:50

They quickly pulled me back into the prison building, and then I'm surprised to find my lawyer. My lawyer explained to me what was going. He says, "Mayer, they're not supposed to be here. They want to take you into custody and put on a plane to Panama. This is illegal, and this can't be done. So, they started talking with the guards about what can they do about this."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:25:18

He said, "The only thing they can do is they can kick immigration out of the prison compound because they really had no legal right to be there."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:25:25

So, they did that. At this point, immigration is waiting right outside the fence of the main prison gate. They're looking for the guy in green, the little green guy. My lawyer cleverly says, "Mayer, we're going to do something. You're going to think I'm crazy, but we're going to walk through that front door, and you're not going to be detained. You're going to walk into a cab immediately."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:25:50

I said, "You're crazy."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:25:52

He says, "Yes. Just put on normal clothes. Put on some jeans, sneakers, and a hat."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:25:57

I said, "Okay. Well, if you say so."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:26:01

So, I packed up my stuff. I changed my clothes, and I shit you not, I passed through the main gate and these guys are still staring inside looking for the guy in green. At that point, I go to a sushi restaurant to meet with my family, and we're all excited, and we're all hysterically happy. I mean, I cannot-

Peter McCormack: 01:26:22

So, that must have been a great moment.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:26:24

Oh, Peter, you have no idea, man. Honestly, it's the happiest moment of my life, probably, of the life of every one of my family. Every one was so happy, so excited. It was like the culmination of months of suffering, and sleepless nights. What was funny was that-

Peter McCormack: 01:26:48

Look.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:26:49

What's that?

Peter McCormack: 01:26:49

I'm looking at you now and you're saying it's the happiest moment of your life, but your eyes, I can see in your eyes it's obviously hugely emotional as well.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:27:00

I do look back at it, and I cried only once through the entire experience. I'm very much a person who's in control of their emotion. When I saw my family, I didn't cry then, but every time I remember that moment, I do tear because it just reminds me that we live a daily life where we're focused on news, on work, on technologies, on the next big thing, and it's really family that creates value around our lives because when shitty things like this happen, whether it's health, monetary, legal, you name it, it's family that sticks by you, that makes you feel that there's a purpose to live for, and not all is lost. That, honestly, every time I think about that, I think about this.

Peter McCormack: 01:27:54

Right. Okay. So, next up, you applied for asylum, right?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:28:00

I applied for asylum because it was the only way to get immigration out of our backs. Under the asylum process, you cannot be deported from a country, but the important part wasn't actually getting asylum. I wanted to go back to New York. I want to go back to my daily life. The important thing about the asylum process is once the asylum process finishes, whether it's denied or accepted, you can willfully take a plane and go to wherever you want, okay?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:28:33

So, I was there for three months. I come out of prison in June, and then it's September now. I'm walking down the streets of Colombia, and I am picked up by a policeman, and put in a back of a truck. They are flooring the car as if they had stolen a bank. I didn't know what was going on. I called my lawyer and he said that they had denied the petition for asylum.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:29:11

I said, "How can they be deporting me? This is arbitrary. This is illegal. It goes against the UN's asylum treaty or whatever."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:29:20

He says, "It's completely illegal, but it's happening. So, we have to just look for a solution."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:29:29

They spoke to everyone in the country from the president to the owner of the airline that they were going to take me into Panama. Honestly, I was just disconnected. I had no passport with me. I had nothing. I had one phone this time around because I was walking around. I didn't have the two phones with me, and they had taken the phone away. So, I was disconnected for about four hours.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:29:58

Then I'm put on this plane that's going to Panama. They sit me in the back of the plane with two custodians. Yeah. They sent me to Panama. We arrived at around midnight. They wait till the entire plane deplanes, and then two Panamanian policemen come in and they take custody of me. They take me through some backdoor, down some stairs into the actual tarmac, and they put me in the back of a truck.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:30:28

They leave the airport through some weird gate, and they take me to a

detention center in Panama. At this point, Panama's going nuts. Everyone knows what's going on. I had filmed this entire situation on Facebook live. So, as I was being taken to the airport in Colombia, I was filming it, and I was telling people, "This is what's happening. This is crazy. I can't believe it's happening. This is the definition of Banana Republic."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:31:06

By this time, everyone was waiting for me at the airport. You had protestors, you had supporters, and you had relatives and friends, but little do they know that they were going to take me directly to the detention center. This was completely illegal because at this point, there's no warrant for my arrest. There's absolutely nothing for which they can arrest me for, but they did it. They made me sleep for one night in a prison, in a jail in the city of Panama.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:31:35

Then the next morning, they took me to court to see the judge. The judge took a look at my face and says, "You can go." Literally, that was all that happened. It was basically as if they were making a statement like, "You see what I can do? Now, you can go." We were shit scared because there was no guarantee that they would protect my basic human rights or my constitutional rights. In fact, all evidence pointed towards the fact that they would violate my human rights even further than they had already. So, it was very scary. It was a very scary situation.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:32:14

Of course, my mother, she had to say to me, "I told you so," because at that time, I was living at the hotel. I was living at the Four Seasons, and she had rented an apartment. She says, "Well, I think you should come and live in the apartment."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:32:29

I said, "Ma, I've had roommates for about six months. I'd like to live on my own. I know you're a good company, but I want to live on my own."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:32:38

She said, "If only you had been living in my apartment, they wouldn't have gone to the hotel."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:32:43

So, she had to go with the I told you so thing. So, the first thing I said when I saw her because she wasn't even in Colombia or Panama when this all went down, she was in Miami, and the first thing I said was, "Ma, I'm sorry. I know you told me so."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:32:59

She said, "I told you so."

Peter McCormack: 01:33:03

That's a mother's job, right?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:33:04

That is. I wouldn't expect anything other than that.

Peter McCormack: 01:33:08

I can imagine for your mother this has been a very stressful time for her as well.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:33:15

Oh, you know what, Peter? I think she's the one that suffered at the most because think about this. I am living with the reality, and I know what it is, right? I'm in the prison. I know what I'm living through everyday, but people outside, they're imagining how bad it is. They're using their imagination to maybe picture what I'm living through, and they're expecting the worst.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:33:41

So, it really does torment you, especially when you're a mother. In the case of my mother, she saved me from an illness when I was child. So, this was like she has a very special bond with me that she feels that she should protect me as she once did. For her, it was very tough to not be able to do anything for me, and to feel that it was her fault. Everyone will try and blame themselves, will try and find blame in their own selves.

Peter McCormack: 01:34:17

Right. So, you're let go. So, what's happened between then and now? I mean, I'm aware new charges were brought, right?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:34:26

Yeah. So, basically, they could no longer detain me. There was no reason to bar me from traveling or there's no way that they could constrain me to Panama. So, what they did was they opened up a new investigation, a new case on the same fact now alleging money laundering and corruption. The sole purpose for that was so that the prosecutor could request what are called precautionary measures.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:34:57

So, because of that case, I can't travel, and I'm forced to stay in Panama, and to not move residences, and because of that case, my life in Panama, it's not just life in Panama, but it's impossible to live with because a money laundering case, an investigation where you have money laundering will basically will tap

your knees. You can't open a bank account. You can't sign a lease. You're basically nonexistent financially.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:35:28

Thank God, thank God that things have been resolved. I mean, two weeks ago, they haven't been exactly resolved, but two weeks ago, finally, a judge ruled to shut down the case because of lack of evidence against me. So, there were-

Peter McCormack: 01:35:44

So, when are you expecting final judgment? When do you expect to finally know that you're free?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:35:49

July 30th.

Peter McCormack: 01:35:50

July 30th? Wow! So, that is nine days.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:35:53

Yeah. So, maybe by the time you're publishing this, yeah, by the time you're publishing this, maybe the story has already been said. I don't know. Who knows?

Peter McCormack: 01:36:03

What are you going to do? Are you going to fly straight to New York or to Miami? Where are you going to go to from here?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:36:09

The first thing I have to do is I have to go to Jamaica because my family is Jamaican and have very strong roots to Jamaica. So, after all of what I've been through, I feel like I want to go back to my roots and remember where I come from, so that I can move forward, and not forget this, forget this ever happened, but stick to the path that I've always been on in spite of what I've been through.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:36:38

That's my goal. I want to go back to New York, probably spend time between New York and Silicon Valley. So, we now have investors from Silicon Valley. So, it now warrants more time in San Francisco. So, I do hope to spend more time over there.

Peter McCormack: 01:36:56

What is the status of the product itself? Where are you at with that?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:36:59

So, it has evolved. I have to say you hear these stories about serendipity in Silicon Valley about the coffee shop meeting that turned into an investment, that turned into a multimillion dollar exit. The story of Criptext is really beyond another level because that story that was published by Forbes, the title was Meet The Entrepreneur That Launches A WhatsApp Competitor From Prison.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:37:29

It caught the attention of many people, including Marina Acton, who is a very prominent investor in Silicon Valley. She got in touch. She ran into the story. It was sent to her by a friend. She got in touch with my lawyer. My lawyer introduced us.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:37:46

November last year, she came to Panama, and we had a meeting. I can't leave, so she had to come here. Even though I'm toxic, no other VC would touch us, would even come near us. Marina came to Panama, and we had a discussion about where we wanted to take this company.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:38:04

I said, "Because of what I've been through, many of the things that I went through could have been avoided had I been using a more secure email service. So, what I want to do is I want to build a more secure email service, something that really protects people's privacy."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:38:21

She shared the vision, and she decided to invest in our company. So, in November, she invested in our company. Since then, we have been building the new Criptext. So, we rebranded the Gmail extension to Criptext for Gmail. That's a separate product. We've basically built Criptext as a standalone email service that uses the signal encryption to provide the utmost secure and private email service ever.

Peter McCormack: 01:38:54

So, is it like a competitor to ProtonMail?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:38:57

It is. It is definitely a competitor to ProtonMail being that ProtonMail is pretty much the only service provider out there for people who seek privacy. If you're in the crypto world, you definitely have a ProtonMail account, but one of the things that we went through in the prison, in the prison cycle was that the government and the prosecutors were always a step ahead of us, and the reason was because they were collecting our data from Google from our lawyer's service provider, email service provider.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:39:33

I said, "This is amazing. I am sending them encrypted emails with the Gmail Criptext, and they're still a step ahead. There's no privacy."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:39:43

So, that's when I decided, "You know what? We got to do something different."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:39:48

The most different thing that you can do out there, the most transparent thing that you can do out there to promote privacy is not collect any data at all. So, we set in mind how do we build an email service that is transparent, trustworthy without having to beg people for trustworthiness, without having them to know about technology or encryption or any of this.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:40:11

We said, "Well, let's just not store any data. Let's just have users store all emails locally on their devices."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:40:18

Then we started looking into the signal protocol, and it turns out that the signal protocol works exactly like this, and even better than what we had envisioned initially for our own email service. It's never been used in email, but implemented correctly, it's the perfect way to regain your privacy in email-based conversations.

Peter McCormack: 01:40:45

When do you think this will launch?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:40:46

So, we're launching in beta on August 8th, and I have to say, I use it everyday now, and it's great. I don't feel it's secure. I don't feel it's any different than a normal email app, and that's exactly what we wanted. We wanted an email app that felt normal, that felt easy to use, similar to WhatsApp. When WhatsApp went encrypted, you barely realised that it was encrypted. There's no friction to the end user at all. That's what we want to do. We want to focus on a great app, a great email service that you want to return to everyday.

Peter McCormack: 01:41:31

You're essentially getting a chance to start your life again.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:41:36

Yeah. I mean, listen, if it hadn't been for that situation, for that prison event, if it hadn't been for the whole prosecution that we've lived through for the last four years, we wouldn't be building this for the world. I mean, I don't know what kind of ripple effects will Criptext have on the world, but it wouldn't have

happened without any of the shitty things I've been through, and that's why I wouldn't change a single thing.

Peter McCormack: 01:42:05

Right, because that was about to be my next question. Is it all worth it? Has it all been worth it?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:42:12

Totally. Think about it. I'm a nerd, okay? I'm a nerd. I've been bad at sports my entire life. I look like a nerd. I love computers. I dress nerdy, and all of a sudden, I'm now like a badass because I went to prison. That's great. That's awesome. It's been great. I paid the price. Now, I can have fun with it.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:42:37

For example, I'll be at my house and my sister will have friends over and I'll be, "Hey, girls. You never came to visit me in prison, but guess what? I'm still taking conjugal visits. So, hello?"

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:42:51

I'll laugh about it, make it a joking matter. In that sense, I think that no one should ever regret whatever they've been through because it doesn't guarantee that they won't go through similar shitty situations in the future. I think a better way to lead life as an entrepreneur is always making the most out of the worst situations, trying to capitalise on the negatives, and try to grow seeds from even the poorest of soils.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:43:27

I think it's possible. If I could do it with Criptext and all the shitty press attention that we had, I mean, anyone else can do it. Think about it. It's hard to build a startup. It's full of negatives. Everything is against you, but in the case of Criptext, we didn't just have everything that a normal startup has against you, we had an entire fucking government. That was tough, but we still got through.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:43:54

So, I think that it's an interesting story for startups who find it hard to cling or to grasp to hope or optimism when competitors are copying your ideas, when VCs are shutting doors at you, and when no one else believes in you. There's still family. There's still people that trust you, that believe in you. So, capitalise on the bad situation to convert it into a positive situation.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:44:26

The Criptext story, if I were to told you the story a year ago, it would have been a sad story. Today, it's a good story. It's a positive story. It's success story, but back then, we could have never projected it to have been this way. I think it's

due to the attitude that my team and I took, that we implemented when we affronted the situation.

Peter McCormack: 01:44:51

Well, I mean, I find the whole story fascinating. I've read a lot in the build up to this, and talking it through with you. It is fascinating. Look, I just want to say thank you so much for giving me your time. I wish you all the best. I hope we'll meet up at some point in person, and have a beer soon. Look, finally, just to close out, can you tell how people can stay in touch with you, if you want to hear from anyone, what you want to hear about?

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:45:19

Yeah, sure. Listen, I love to hear from people. I love to be able to be of help to those who are going through similar situations. Anyone that tweets me, I reply to them. If you noticed, my Twitter is mainly in Spanish. That's because very much I'm still in Panama, but I'm available through Twitter. You can tweet me. LinkedIn is boring, but, yeah, sure, you can try that. So, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Peter McCormack: 01:45:51

I'll share that out in the show notes. Mayer, I wish you all the best. I mean, I've run two startups, both very unsuccessfully, but I don't think I've been through any challenges anywhere near what you've been through. I can imagine almost anyone I know who's going through a tough time with their startup to say, "Well, listen to this story, then tell me how hard you've got it."

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:46:16

Right. Right. Well, listen, thank you very much for the opportunity to tell the story. I really hope that it adds value to your listeners. I love what you're doing, and I'm pretty sure that there are more stories like this to be told. I hope to hear of them in your podcast.

Peter McCormack: 01:46:35

Thanks, Mayer. You take care.

Mayer Mizrachi: 01:46:37

Take care.