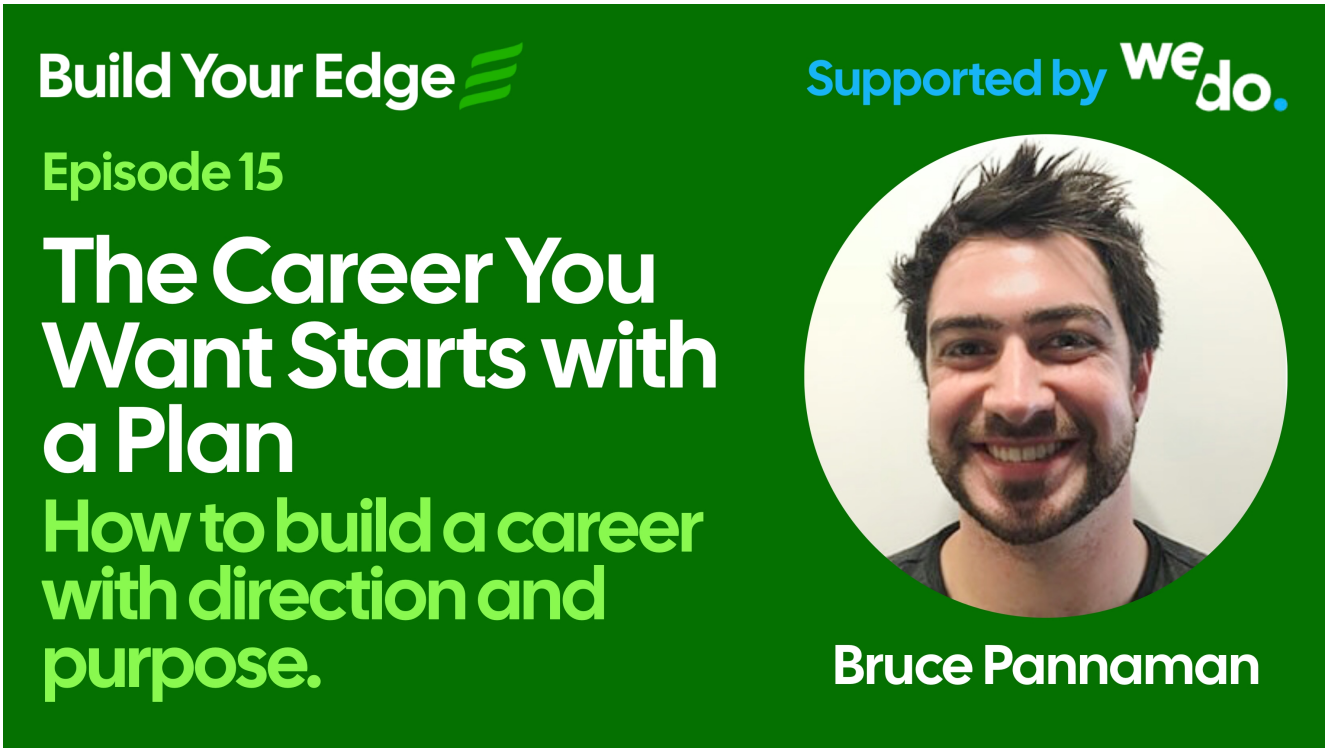
# Tech Career Strategies

Created by Bruce Pannaman and presented by Build Your Edge.

Watch or listen to the episode




*This document complements Bruce's Build Your Edge episode, The Career You Want Starts With a Plan. Start by listening to the conversation, as it brings these ideas to life and provides the context to get the most value from this guide.*

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# The career you want starts with a plan

## From chance to choice

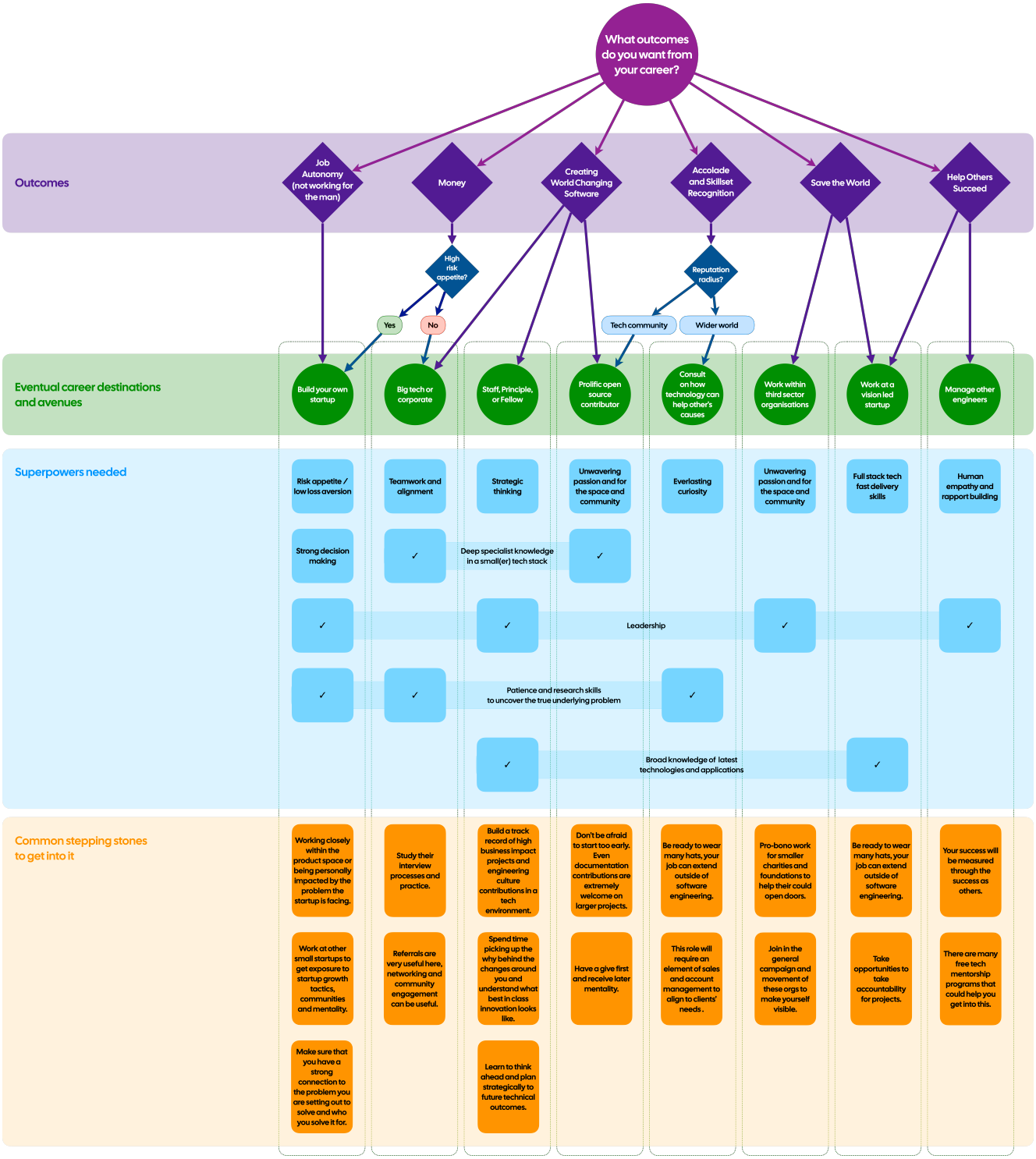
Most people don't plan their careers. They move from one opportunity to the next, hoping each role will open a new door or spark the next big thing. But the truth is, careers don't build themselves; they're built by the people who take time to think about what they actually want and how they'll get there.

This guide expands on the conversation between Jeremy Burns and Bruce Pannaman in Build Your Edge Episode 15: The Career You Want Starts With a Plan. In that episode, Bruce shared a simple but powerful idea: your career should have a strategy, just like a great product does.

He's created a practical framework – a map you can fill in yourself – that helps you design your path, understand what motivates you, and make every role a deliberate stepping stone toward the career you truly want.

This document walks you through that framework. It explains how to use it, what each part means, and how to apply it to your own situation.

## The Tech Career Strategy flow end-to-end



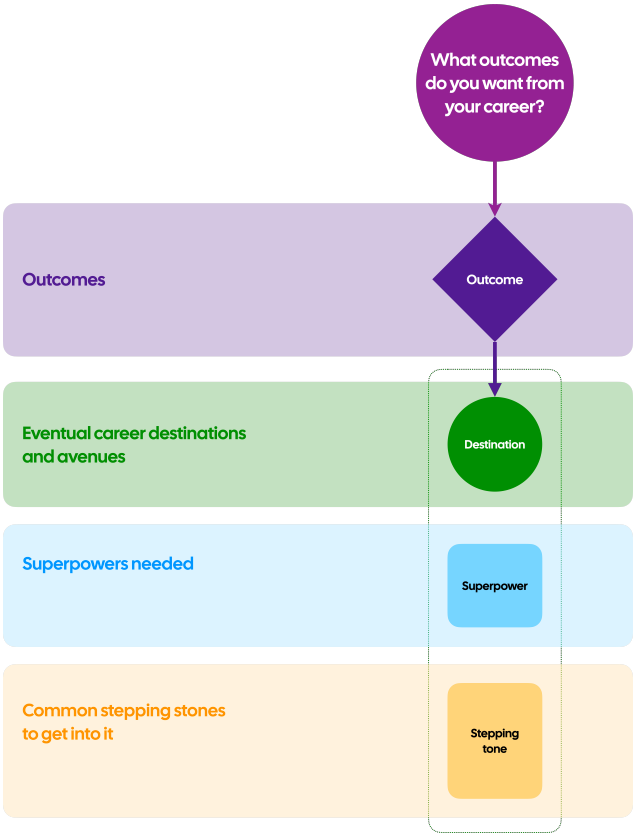

*The end-to-end flow. To see a complete, hi-res image of the entire strategy, please visit this link.*

## How to use this document

Think of this as a guided workbook rather than a static chart. The original diagram shows how different paths connect: from what you want, to where that can lead, to what you'll need along the way.

You can start at the top with a straightforward question:

- **What outcomes do you want from your career?**




*Overview of the strategy flow.*

That question drives everything else. Once you know what **outcome** matters most to you, you can explore the chapters below. Each one represents a distinct **career outcome**: a direction that shapes your eventual destination, the **skills** you'll need, and the **practical steps** that will help you get there.

You don't need to pick just one. Many people combine two or three, adjusting the balance as their priorities change. The goal isn't to lock yourself in; it's to understand what motivates you and plan accordingly.

If you're unsure where to begin, start by identifying what excites you most about your current role or frustrates you most. Both are strong indicators of the outcomes that truly matter to you.

# Introduction

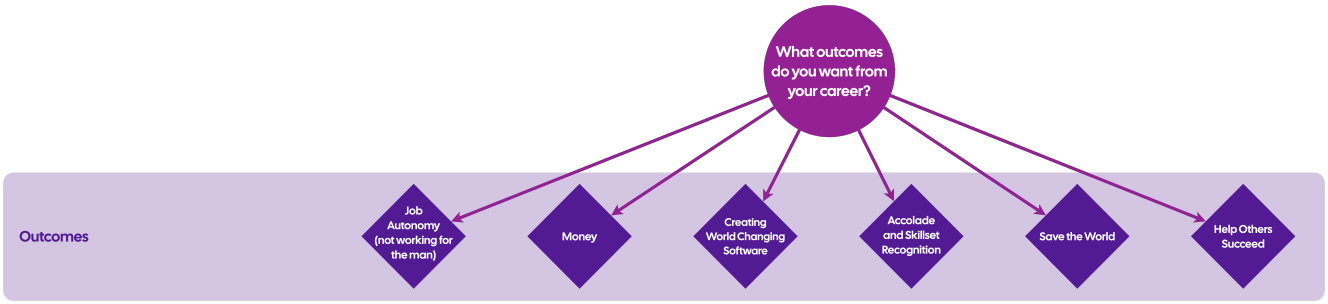
The **Tech Career Strategy** is a structured framework that starts with a single question:

- **What do you want from your career?**

From there, you follow a clear path. Each outcome leads to a set of possible career destinations; the different routes your ambitions can take. For every destination, you'll find the key superpowers you'll need to succeed. Once you've identified the path that fits you best, you can follow the suggested stepping stones: the practical actions and experiences that will help you move in that direction.

The framework helps you connect short-term action with long-term purpose. It's not a static plan; it's a living document you can revisit as your priorities, opportunities, and skills evolve.

# The outcomes




*Start by choosing your ideal outcome.*

Each chapter that follows is a desired **outcome**. Start by choosing the one that resonates most, or read them all to see where your motivations overlap.

This list is not exhaustive, but it can help get your thinking started.

Outcomes aren't about job titles; they're about what success looks and feels like to you. They shape your motivation, influence your decisions, and help you choose work that sustains your energy over time.

Click on one of these outcomes to go to that section:


- Job Autonomy (not working for the man)
- Money
- Creating world-changing software
- Accolade and Skillset Recognition
- Save the world
- Help others succeed

## Outcome:

# Job Autonomy (not working for the man)

**Some people crave control over their work: when, how, and why they do it. This path is about designing a career that maximises independence.**

Autonomy doesn't mean working alone; it means choosing the conditions that bring out your best work. You might prefer flexible hours, creative freedom, or full ownership of decisions. But autonomy requires discipline; freedom only works when you can manage yourself.

The path to autonomy demands both confidence and structure. As Bruce put it:

> *"Freedom only works if you know how to manage yourself."*

## Eventual destinations

- Build your own start-up

This path suits those who thrive on responsibility and are energised by making things happen. It's for builders, doers, and self-starters who value independence over predictability.

## Outcome:
# Money

**If financial success is a core motivator, your path revolves around value creation and ownership. It's not about greed; it's about building something that rewards your effort and risk.**

Money-driven careers reward bold thinking and business awareness. You'll need to understand how your work translates into value for others and how to capture a fair share of that value.

## Eventual destinations

The route to money depends on your risk appetite.

If your risk appetite is high, founding a startup or taking equity positions can offer exponential rewards, but also higher volatility:

- Build your own start-up

If your risk appetite is lower, roles in established tech or finance can deliver substantial compensation through scale and stability:

- Big tech or corporate

Whatever route you take, money follows impact. The key is to solve meaningful problems that people or companies are willing to pay to have fixed.

## Outcome:

# Creating World-Changing Software

**If you're driven by impact – building something that changes how people live, work, or connect – this is the innovation path.**

This path thrives on curiosity, experimentation, and a deep understanding of user needs. As Bruce summed it up during the episode:

> *"If you only build for the sake of technology, you'll miss the customer entirely."*

## Eventual destinations

There are three routes to consider if you want to create world-changing software:

- Big tech or corporate
- Staff, Principal, or Fellow
- Prolific open source contributor

To succeed here, you'll need to combine technical skill with creativity and empathy. Your challenge is to balance visionary thinking with practical delivery, building software that's not only elegant but genuinely transformative.

## Outcome:

# Accolade and Skillset Recognition

**If your driver is recognition and mastery – becoming known for what you do – this path is about craft, credibility, and consistent impact.**

Mastery requires patience, practice, and the willingness to stay curious even after years in the same domain. Recognition follows those who share what they learn: teaching, writing, contributing, and mentoring.

## Eventual destinations

The route to accolades and recognition depends on the scope of your intended reputation status.

If you seek recognition within the tech community, open source is your stage:

- Become a prolific open source contributor

If you want your expertise recognised beyond tech, consulting and thought leadership roles let you apply your knowledge to broader challenges.

- Consult on how technology can help others' causes

The goal isn't fame; it's credibility. Build a reputation for doing excellent work and helping others grow, and recognition will follow naturally.

## Outcome:

# Save the world

**Some people want their skills to make a tangible difference; to use technology for good. This path is about purpose, social impact, and sustainability.**

You'll often work in complex systems where success depends on collaboration and long-term thinking. The work can be challenging, but it's gratifying when you see real-world results.

## Eventual destinations

There are two possible routes to saving the world:

- Work within third sector organisations
- Work at a vision-led start-up

Here, impact matters more than profit. The best people in this space combine empathy with practical problem-solving: building tools, systems, or communities that make the world fairer, safer, or greener.

## Outcome:

# Help others succeed

**For some, the most satisfying outcome isn't what you achieve; it's what you help others do. This path is about leadership, mentoring, and multiplying talent.**

Managers and coaches in tech play a crucial role: they shape culture, unlock performance, and help others see what they're capable of.

## Eventual destinations

There are two possible routes to helping others succeed:

- Work at a vision-led start-up
- Manage other engineers

Great leaders balance empathy with accountability. As Bruce said:

> *"Your success is measured through the success of others."*

# Eventual career destinations and avenues

Once you are clear on your desired outcome, the framework suggests career destinations or avenues that, with the right approach, could help you reach your goals.

Each destination offers a distinct environment and learning curve. The key is to match where you are today with where you want to be, then focus on developing the superpowers that bridge that gap.

To find the right destination, first choose a desired outcome and then read the relevant section below.

- Build your own start-up
- Join big tech or corporate
- Staff, Principal, or Fellow
- Prolific open source contributor
- Consult on how technology can help others' causes
- Work within third sector organisations
- Work at a vision-led start-up
- Manage other engineers

## Career destination or avenue:

# Build your own start-up

Money tracks reward courage and execution speed. As Bruce said in the podcast:

> *"One in ten startups succeed, so make sure you're in it for more than the cash. Build around a problem you care about."*

Startups teach you more about ownership, decision-making, and resilience than almost any other environment. You'll learn to balance vision with realism and energy with patience.

## Superpowers required

- ★ High risk appetite and low loss aversion
- ★ Strong decision-making
- ★ Leadership
- ★ Patience and research skills to uncover the actual underlying problem

## Common stepping stones

- ❖ Working closely within the product space or being personally impacted by the problem the startup is facing.
- ❖ Work at other small startups to get exposure to startup growth tactics, communities and mentality.
- ❖ Make sure you have a strong connection to the problem you are setting out to solve and to who you are solving it for.

## Career destination or avenue:

# Join big tech or corporate

Big tech offers scale, stability, and the chance to work on products used by millions. You'll learn from world-class peers, gain access to structured growth, and sharpen your craft in complex systems.

## Superpowers required

- ★ Teamwork and alignment
- ★ Deep specialist knowledge in a small(er) tech stack
- ★ Patience and research skills to uncover the actual underlying problem

## Common stepping stones

- ❖ Study their interview processes and practices.
- ❖ Referrals are handy here; networking and community engagement can be helpful.

## Career destination or avenue:

# Staff, Principal, or Fellow

This route is for deep specialists; people who think strategically about technology and its role in business success. It's less about management and more about influence, using your technical insight to shape direction and culture.

## Superpowers required

- ★ Strategic thinking
- ★ Leadership
- ★ Broad knowledge of the latest technologies and applications

## Common stepping stones

- ❖ Build a track record of high-impact business projects and engineering culture contributions in a tech environment.
- ❖ Spend time picking up the why behind the changes around you and understanding what best-in-class innovation looks like.
- ❖ Learn to think ahead and plan strategically for future technical outcomes.

## Career destination or avenue:

# Prolific open source contributor

Open-source contributions build both mastery and reputation. It shows initiative, generosity, and collaboration. The work is public, feedback is fast, and community connections can open doors to opportunities worldwide.

## Superpowers required

- ★ Unwavering passion for the space and community
- ★ Deep specialist knowledge in a small(er) tech stack

## Common stepping stones

- ❖ Don't be afraid to start too early. Even documentation contributions are highly welcome on larger projects.
- ❖ Have a give-first, receive-later mentality.

## Career destination or avenue:

# Consult on how technology can help others' causes

Consulting at this level combines technical expertise with empathy and persuasion. You'll need to listen deeply, understand complex problems, and build trust quickly. Success means not just delivering code but helping clients transform.

## Superpowers required

- ★ Everlasting curiosity
- ★ Patience and research skills to uncover the actual underlying problem

## Common stepping stones

- ❖ Be ready to wear many hats; your job may extend beyond software engineering.
- ❖ This role will require a sales and account management component to align with clients' needs.

## Career destination or avenue:

# Work within third sector organisations

These roles place purpose at the centre. The work often involves constraints – tight budgets, limited resources – but the creativity that emerges from those limits can be extraordinary.

## Superpowers required

★ Unwavering passion for the space and community

★ Leadership

## Common stepping stones

❖ Pro bono work for smaller charities and foundations to help their causes opens doors.

❖ Join in the general campaign and movement of these orgs to make yourself visible.

## Career destination or avenue:

# Work at a vision-led startup

Here, passion meets pace. You'll work in an environment fuelled by mission, innovation, and urgency. Expect ambiguity, high stakes, and the satisfaction of seeing your work make a visible difference.

## Superpowers required

- ★ Full-stack tech fast delivery skills
- ★ Broad knowledge of the latest technologies and applications

## Common stepping stones

- ❖ Be ready to wear many hats; your job may extend beyond software engineering.
- ❖ Take opportunities to take accountability for projects.

## Career destination or avenue:

# Manage other engineers

Engineering management is a shift from doing to enabling. Your job becomes helping others succeed: setting direction, removing blockers, and creating the space for great work to happen.

## Superpowers required

★ Human empathy and rapport building

★ Leadership

## Common stepping stones

❖ Others' success will measure your success

❖ Many free tech mentorship programs could help you get into this.

# Putting it all together

When you've worked through these chapters, step back and connect the dots.

1. **Pick your primary outcome(s).** What matters most right now: money, mastery, autonomy, impact, purpose, or people?
2. **List your current superpowers.** Which ones already give you energy? Which needs development?
3. **Plot your stepping stones.** What roles, projects, or communities could move you closer to your chosen path?
4. **Set a time horizon.** Think in 3- to 5-year blocks. Careers evolve, and so will you.
5. **Review regularly.** Revisit your framework once a year; update it as your goals shift or new opportunities emerge.

# Final thoughts

This isn't about perfection or prediction. It's about awareness and intent. Every choice you make – every project you take, every skill you learn, every person you connect with – either moves you toward your desired outcome or away from it.

As Bruce explained in the episode:

> *"It's very easy for your career to just happen to you. The more purposeful you are, the more likely you are to end up where you actually want to be."*

So grab the framework, listen to the episode, and start filling in your own map.

## Watch or listen to the episode

The episode is available in video and audio on all major podcast platforms. Find all the links here.