

The
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The Economic Club of New York

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771st Meeting

Michael Strahan
Pro Football Hall of Famer
Broadcaster, Entrepreneur

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In-Person/Hybrid Event

Moderator: Terry Lundgren
Executive Chair and CEO, Retired, Macy's
ECNY Chair Emeritus

Introduction

President Barbara Van Allen

All right, we're going to start right on time today, which we really like at The Economic Club of New York. So good afternoon and welcome to the 771st meeting of the Economic Club. I'm Barbara Van Allen, President and CEO of the Club. And I'm honored to be here today with all of you.

Recognized as the premier nonpartisan forum in the nation, The Economic Club of New York stands as the leading platform for discussion on economic, social, and political issues and we have a tradition of excellence that continues up to and includes today. I'd like to thank the students who are joining us virtually from Mercy University, the NYU Stern School of Business, my alma mater, and Rutgers University as well as members of our largest-ever Class of 2024 Fellows – a diverse, select group of rising, next-gen business leaders.

And obviously I'm excited about today, and I'm especially honored to welcome our special guest, TV host, journalist, pro football Hall of Famer, Michael Strahan.

(Applause) And I have to say there's so many great things that we can say about him.

He is an Emmy award winner, Super Bowl Champion, Peabody award-winning journalist, currently co-anchoring ABC's "Good Morning America," serves as an analyst

for Fox NFL Sunday, and of course hosts ABC's primetime game show favorite, "The \$100,000 Pyramid."

He's co-founder of SMAC Entertainment, a multi-dimensional talent management, music, branding, and production company which has created a major presence in sports and entertainment. For four years, he co-hosted the hit talk show, "LIVE with Kelly and Michael," and prior to joining the ranks of the top sports broadcasters in the country, he had a spectacular NFL career that resulted in him being named to the 2014 Pro Football Hall of Fame.

In 2015, he launched the lifestyle brand, Michael Strahan-TM, a men's and boys' apparel line. He also has released a best-selling book, *Wake up Happy: The Dream Big, Win Big Guide to Transforming Your Life*", which includes personal stories and motivational advice.

I'm going to switch now to our format for our conversation. We're honored to have Club Chair Emeritus and retired Executive Chair and CEO of Macy's, Terry Lundgren, as our moderator. As a reminder, this conversation is on the record, and we do have media in the room and online. Please turn off your telephones at this time and any other electronic devices. We're going to end promptly at 1 p.m. And with time permitting, at the end they will take questions from the audience. So without further ado, please join

me in welcoming Michael and Terry to the stage. (Applause)

Conversation with Michael Strahan

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Hello everybody. I'm glad you let me know this is on the record. Be careful.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Yes, because I've got some good questions for you. Thanks, Barbara. And welcome everybody. This will be a fun conversation with one of the most successful people with an incredibly diverse set of skills and talents that will be revealed if you don't already know about them. But we'll get into that in the conversation.

But first, I just want to get into your background, when you grew up. You grew up in Houston. You were one of six kids. Your mom decides raising six kids, managed to be a basketball coach as well. Your dad was an Army major which caused the family to have to relocate once in a while and you lived in Germany. And you were in Germany, in fact, when you started playing some football. But they didn't play a lot of American football over in Germany, at least they didn't call it, they didn't play the kind of football that we know here. And so you did a little club work and learned some skills over there.

And between your sophomore or your junior and senior year, your parents decided, they

said, Michael, I think you need to leave Germany. We're going to be staying here. You need to leave Germany and go back to the United States and live with Uncle Art, your dad's brother. And so you did that. You only had one year, therefore, of high school football, and you managed to get drafted by Texas Southern. So tell us about that story.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Well, I mean it's been incredible. I literally was having breakfast with the head of ABC News this morning, and I was saying to him, I look back now and I'm thinking why me? Lucky me. And it's really weird because I was a kid, my dad was in the Army, I was born in Houston. But I really grew up in the states for the most part, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Dad was in the military. He was an Airborne Paratrooper, 82nd Airborne Division.

When I was nine, I moved to Germany. So I really grew up in Germany. I felt more European than I felt American. And I didn't play soccer really because they run too much. I didn't know, like I just found out a few years ago, when you're playing soccer and you sub off the field, that you can't go back on the field. There's no way. I need a break. So I was like, no, no soccer for me.

And I was just a kid growing up, when I was 13 years old, I considered myself to be big-boned. Other people may have said I was a hefty kid. And I was hanging out with my brothers and their friends. I'm the youngest of six. And they gave me a nickname, Bob.

And I'm like, oh, that's cool. You know, I'm the youngest kid, I get to hang out with the older kids. I have a nickname, Bob. That means I'm in the club. And one of my brother's friends told me eventually that Bob stood for Booty on Back. You know, big old butt.

And so, I was devastated. But it motivated me to work out. So I bought the Jane Fonda workout VHS tapes. I'm not lying to you. Jane Fonda was doing the leg lifts; she's working her butt off so I figured it out. So I bought the Jane Fonda tape. And Herschel Walker was coming out of the University of Georgia.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Two names you don't always put in the same sentence – Jane Fonda and Herschel Walker.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: But he was doing pushups and sit-ups. And I didn't really have any equipment. I was at home. And I would watch TV, so it was like *Dynasty* and *Falcon Crest* back then. And I'd watch those programs and every commercial break, I'd get down and do pushups and sit-ups or I'd do the Jane Fonda leg lifts. And my dad saw this and he's like, you know, if you're willing to put in that much work, I'll work out with you. So my dad bought the *Muscle and Fitness* magazines. He was always big into technology, so he always had the latest computers, you know, back when they were ancient. And he made up programs. We'd go to the gym. He'd mark off the weight, the exercise. I did that with my dad from 13 until 16 years old.

And when I was 16, I didn't play football. I just didn't want to be called Bob. My dad said, you know, you want to play football? I said, yeah, yeah, I'll play. I thought he was just going to send me to the Army base to play because he had retired, because I went to a private school not on the base, no football team. I graduated in a class of two. And I was second in my class if you...(Laughter)...if you were curious, but Julie Johnson was really smart.

I went to Houston. My dad said you're going to go to Houston. You're going to live with your uncle. You're going to get a football scholarship. Okay. So I go to Houston, stay with my uncle for five months. Won a scholarship to Texas Southern University. I didn't know where it was. My dad's like it's free, that's where you're going. And I went to TSU, HBCU, right in the middle of Houston, right next to the University of Houston, literally right next door.

And it was an experience that I say took me from being a boy to a man, because when you're 16, 17, you leave home by yourself and have to become more self-sufficient, it completely changed the way I looked at the world, myself, and how I had to learn to kind of depend on myself and push myself without my dad being there in the gym with me.

TERRY LUNDGREN: And did you ever think about that and reflect back, what would your life be like if you had not gone back to live with Uncle Art and played high school...

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Oh, I tried to quit. I tried to quit. We would have found out real quick. Because after my first semester, I hated it. I hated being in college, like away from my family. I missed everybody. So Christmas break came around. I took everything out of my dorm room, light bulbs, everything. I was not going back.

And I remember the week after school started, my dad said, when do you have to go back to school? Didn't it start? I'm like, yeah, it started a week ago. And I thought I was a man at that point, and I let my voice get a little deeper. Like, yeah, it was a week ago. He said, what are you going to do? I said, I'm not going back. I'm just going to stay here and get a job. And he looked at me and he said, what are you going to do? And I realized that my dad was meaner than me, bigger than me, stronger than me, my dad was a boxer in the Army. So I'm like, yeah, I don't think it's a good idea to fight him on this.

So I went back to college. And I just made up my mind, I have to be here. And that was a pivotal point in my life where there are certain things that have happened in my life, like being called Bob, and realizing what it meant. And that changed my mind set to go. I said I don't like this, and I changed it. To changing my mindset about being away from my family and in college on the other side of the world, or six, seven hours, the time difference, away. That completely changed my mindset. And I realized I have to go back to school because I can't stay here. If you're going to do something, be the best at it.

Everybody, so many people are doing the same thing, but the ones who stand out are the ones who do it and they go into thinking that they're doing it to the best of their abilities every single day with consistency, not I'm getting through it, which is what I was doing my first semester in college.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Well, you must have had some qualities and characteristics besides will that made you stand out obviously because a few years later you got drafted by the New York Giants. So what were those qualities and characteristics?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: I work hard. I always did as a player; I think when my mindset changed. And I was hungry to learn more. Like I never thought I knew everything. I never professed to know anything. Even after 15 years in the NFL and everything that happened there, I always wanted to learn. I always felt like it was fresh. I was never bored with it. And the second I get bored with something, I kind of feel like, eh, maybe it's time to move on. I've exhausted it, and I just don't want to spin my wheels.

So with football, I was always interested. I wasn't the biggest guy, the strongest guy, the fastest guy. But I think I had enough of a combination of each on top of willpower, on top of the ability to have the right mindset on a game day. Because the guy you're talking to now is not the same guy you'd be talking to on a Sunday. I can tell you that right now. The guy on a Sunday wanted to rip your heart out and would feel no remorse

at all.

I was just with Ben Roethlisberger last weekend, and we were talking about that. And I told him, I said there was nothing better as an athlete, and you do miss it, like I miss the physicality of it. I miss throwing a big 300-something pound guy down on the ground. And like making a tackle or a sack and then looking at him going...get your big butt up again, I'm going to whip you again. Like to be able to talk to a guy so much bigger than you and knowing you can whip him. I would never do in the street. But on the football field, I would do it. And then to hit a quarterback...like I know you had Brady, your last guy, you did it with Brady, with Tom, and I loved hitting Tom.

TERRY LUNDGREN: He didn't love getting hit by you.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: He didn't love it. He talks about that all the time. He didn't love it. But I mean, first of all, it's Tom Brady. He's so handsome. But there's nothing like it, and it sounds violent, but football to me was a controlled violence. And like, you hit a guy, a quarterback, and you just feel the...like could life leave his body.

TERRY LUNDGREN: That feels good to you...

MICHAEL STRAHAN: It feels good because I had to fight a 350-pound guy to do it. So

talk to him, don't look at me. It's his fault. But that's the kind of thing that I miss, I gotta say in football, that competitiveness of it. And I just didn't want to be just average. If I'm going to do something, I want to be great at it. And not for anything more than just to prove to myself that I can. And I think that's why post-football, I work hard now because I just want to prove to myself that I can do things. It's not for anybody else, outside of my kids to show them what hard work is.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Here's some proof that you did alright. Seven Pro-Bowls. First Team All-Pro multiple times. Two-time NFL leader in quarterback sacks. 142 career sacks- fifth in all-time NFL record. 22 ½ sacks in 2001, which was the most in a single season. 24 forced fumbles. In 2001, you were named Defensive Player of the Year, among all teams. Super Bowl Champion in 2007/January 2008. Enshrined in the Pro-Bowl Hall of Fame. And number 92 was retired by the Giants in 2021. I think that deserves a round of applause. (Applause)

MICHAEL STRAHAN: I feel like Urkel, "Did I do that?"

TERRY LUNDGREN: So occasionally for these interviews, I use the phone-a-friend technique. And so I spoke to your friend, Dr. Ian Smith, and he said I should ask you to talk about the early days when you slept on his couch because you didn't have a place to stay, and when you were struggling financially, and you did personal appearances at

local bars for \$250.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: First of all, I was never struggling financially. But I did stay on his couch, but it wasn't because I needed to stay on his couch, it was because I was getting divorced. And I wanted to stay in a hotel. He said, no, you have to come stay with me. This is how good of a friend he is. You have to come stay with me. I'm like, why would I sleep on your couch when I can have a nice hotel? He goes, because you never know, they tell when you're coming and when you're going and where you're going and who you're with. And click, click, click. Like stuff I never thought about. I never worried about that. So he took care of me in that regard.

TERRY LUNDGREN: But he said you were also doing gigs and personal appearances for \$250.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: No, when I first came to the league, back then we weren't making the money they're making now. A pedestrian player, like a guy who is okay – I was the highest paid defensive player in the NFL for like seven years – a guy who is okay makes more than what I made back then, a guy who's okay. So it was a different financial, I'm not complaining because I made plenty of money for what it was at the time. But when I first came into the league, I mean I got a signing bonus, it was a few hundred grand. I was making like \$160,000 a year. And so extra income, it helps.

So I would go do, be at a bar, you come, I give you a beer, and I'd get \$250 for watching Monday Night Football with people. And the craziest thing I ever did, and I look at these things, but they all really helped me now. The craziest thing I ever did, there used to be an appliance store called Top's in New Jersey. I did a thing for them where I, they paid me \$10,000 in retail, not even wholesale, at the store.

TERRY LUNDGREN: There's a difference?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Yeah, a little bit. Oh, you know, Mr. Macy's. (Laughter) There's definitely a difference. So \$10,000, retail, but I had to go to a stranger's house every Monday night to watch Monday Night Football, some raffle that they ran every week. And I would show up with a foot-long, a sandwich big enough to feed like 12 people. And they could invite whoever they want. I am driving to some location that I shouldn't have been in the middle of the woods, late at night, by myself, where you read a map. They didn't have Waze back then. And I'm pulling up to these homes, and I'm like, oh, my God, hopefully I make it out.

But it was great, because now doing what I do, I've learned to just talk to people. And I see people as people. And I can have a conversation with anybody because I think that no matter what economic status or where you're from or where you live, we all have something that joins us together and in conversation. And I think for me doing that for

that \$10,000 of retail really at this point has paid off because I see all the little things, like the bar, talking to people at the bar, and I don't even go to bars really.

TERRY LUNDGREN: You got that skill; you dialed up that skill. And you can obviously tell that you've learned that well. So you were Team Captain of Super Bowl 42. You probably remember that one, 2007, you beat that undefeated, almost perfect record of the New England Patriots that year. You must have had a mix of young players, veterans, and as I recall, a complicated personality in Coach Tom Coughlin. I didn't just make that up. That was well publicized. So how did you help, as Team Captain, get everybody on the same page to come together for that really critical big win?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Well, I will say that we definitely have characters. Anytime you have a football team with 50-something guys, like 60 with the practice squad, you have characters. We're all from different backgrounds, raised differently, schools, whatever it may be. And some guys are normal, some guys aren't. They just aren't. For me it was important as a leader of the team to understand each person. So I had a personal relationship with every player. So it wasn't like we have 60 guys and this guy doesn't talk to me because he plays offense and I don't care about him. He's young, he's a rookie, I don't care.

I realized as a rookie, like I played with Lawrence Taylor and Phil Simms when I was a

rookie and they were awesome. But then I had guys who, it always seemed to be a guy who was kind of on the team but wasn't a great player, who always gave the rookies the hardest time. And I said I hated going to work as a rookie. I did. Because I just felt like you were being hazed all day, every day. I have enough to worry about trying to figure out a playbook and what I'm doing on this level, and I gotta worry about another grown man messing with me.

So for me it was very important to have the rookies feel important, to let them know that you're a part of this team. I need them to win. And the Super Bowl, Kevin Boss, Johnson, all these young guys helped us win. If we didn't have them, we're not winning that game. So it was important to make people feel like they're a part of something, and like you're wanted.

TERRY LUNDGREN: And you learned that, about what not to do.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: I learned what not to do from what was done to me. And, you know, I also think, Coach Coughlin, when he first came there, tough. I mean he'd fine you for everything. If you're, oh, sir, you have a blue shirt on, you don't have a white shirt today, \$500. He used to sit at practice with a little board. He's looking around just writing stuff. Like what is he doing? Then you'd get a letter at your locker, oh, \$300 because your socks were too low. What? Life stuff, we didn't even know that was a rule.

But he was doing that and it was taking the focus away, I think, from playing football and more on sticking to his rules.

And at the end of the day, he and I had one knockdown, drag-out blowup, and our relationship changed after that. For some strange reason, we had a blowup, but I think it made us both realize that we really did respect each other, and we just had a different way of showing things. But at the end of the day we wanted to win very badly. And once we figured that out, we were able to get on the same page. And I used to say I'll never play for this guy again – the first time I met him, I said I'll never play, I got one year and I'm never playing for this guy – to, if I ever had to go back and play football, I'd only play for that guy. Amazing human being, love him.

TERRY LUNDGREN: That's quite a story. So, you know I interviewed Tom Brady in February because you participated. The phone-a-friend came to you for that one. Do you remember the question that I asked you to ask Tom Brady?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: How many rings would he give up for that one loss against us when they had a perfect season going?

TERRY LUNDGREN: That was the question. Yes. And his answer was two. He said I'd give up two rings. And I'll tell you, a quick story, I'm not sure I told you this. But when

Tom talked about that, he goes, let me tell you about Michael Strahan. He said there was a play and I'm rolling to my left and I've set up the screen pass. I think it's perfect. I think we've got everybody going, doing what we want him to do. And I turn around and I'm ready to throw the screen pass.

And all of a sudden, right here, I look, and who is in my face? But here comes Strahan full steam ahead. And he looks, and he tucks the ball, and he said, oh, my God, he's thinking, it's over. My life is over. And Michael grabs him, and instead of pouncing on him, rolls him down and sets him down, hard, but on his side. And he looks at him, because his face mask, there's this big gap, and says, hey, Tom, you knew I could have ended your career, don't you? (Laughter) And Tom was like, yes, yes, I do, yes.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: I mean the thing is, as competitive as we are, it's your friend, and I'm not going to, at the end of the game, I want to say I beat you, but I don't want to hurt you per se. But there are some guys, if I hurt them, okay, you know, I probably want to – to be honest with you, because you don't get along with everybody. But a guy like Tom, I respect him so much. He's such a good friend and such a good competitor. And I mean, what he did in his career, he's the GOAT by far, as far as the best quarterback to ever play the game of football. And I don't, if I do that, man, I'm going to have all these young women camping out at my house, mad at me. So let me, just hold the ball, let me get you on the ground, we'll go home after this.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Interesting what your motivation is.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Self-preservation, you know, that's all that was.

TERRY LUNDGREN: I know you guys are great friends. So you announced your retirement from football in 2007 after that Super Bowl win. But the Giants came back and offered you a big package. I mean you were at the top of your game, and you retired, but they said, no, no, here's a bigger package than you've ever had before. We need you to stick around for another couple of years. You turned it down. Any regrets about that decision?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: At one point, yes. Because I had a contract with Fox already to do TV. And I had made up my mind, I'm done. And I actually got the call that the Giants wanted me to come back, and I was in Greece. And I had never really taken a vacation like that. I was always so focused on work. The season would be over and the next one was there before you knew it that I felt like I needed to always be ready for that. So I never let my mind really get free. Because it was easy to be a starter, let's say, 11 guys on the field, I can be one of the 11. But it was always hard to be that one of the 11 on the field, the one that every week, I have to be at a certain level.

TERRY LUNDGREN: They're counting on you.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: They're counting on me. And then the guys in the huddle are counting on me because I can't be, one game I'm great, another game I'm not, the next game I'm great, not. And I have to be the one to give a stomp-you-out speech to get everybody going. And that takes a lot, it took a lot of energy out of him to be that guy and to be on the field. So I never really took a break.

So I'm in Greece, finally relaxing. I made up my mind that I'd retired, and I get the call. And I really, really thought about doing it. And I was like, Greece or New Jersey?

TERRY LUNDGREN: That's a tough one.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: No, I love New Jersey, don't get me wrong. I love New Jersey. I live in New Jersey. But I chose Greece. And I don't regret it now because everything happens, and if I had gone back, the timing of what has happened post-career would never be there. Like Regis, that thing would have never happened because I wouldn't have been available.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Timing.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Yes, it was like timing of everything. And so I am just so happy I retired when I did. And I do believe that I felt it in my heart that it was time, and I'm glad

I stuck to it because the last thing I wanted was to come back and be in the locker room and have one of the young guys, “I remember when you used to be good” or something like that. Because they will say that, and they don’t know. You know, I remember when I used to play with you, you were on the Tecmo Bowl, huh? Like a video game from the 80s. Like no, man, I’m not that old. But they have a way of making you feel old. So I just never wanted to be a guy who did not give everything to the game. And I realized if I came back, I would have been there for finances, for the finances, not because I loved football at that point. And I never wanted to cheat the game so I didn’t come back.

TERRY LUNDGREN: And that worked out. We’ll get to that. So on to Chapter Two here of the Strahan story, which began now 16 years ago. You’ve been busy. You did commercials early on for Snickers and for Subway and others. You did movies and TV shows, everything from Charlie’s Angels to Blackish and a few in between.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: I thought you were going to say Magic Mike XXL.

TERRY LUNDGREN: How about that?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Which I did do, by the way. I did. I played a stripper. (Laughter)

TERRY LUNDGREN: Family Feud. You were the host for some period of time of the

\$100,000 Pyramid.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Still doing it. Getting ready to shoot Season 8.

TERRY LUNDGREN: I love it. How about that? You kind of relaunched that whole program. And you've written two books, *Beyond the Blitz*, and *Wake Up Happy*, which, you know, I learned a bit about you. I think I've known you for a long time, but I learned a little bit more about you, which you'll get some more questions on that, from that book. But you couldn't have written *Wake Up Happy* before you started waking up at like 4:00 in the morning for Good Morning America.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Yes, I mean I was not a morning person at all. I've had to develop into a morning person. But the great thing about it now is I love being home. And people think because of what I do on TV or whatever, that I love to be out and about in the mix. I don't. I love to be home. I love the quiet. I don't like attention.

And I played football, before we moved to Germany I played when I was seven and eight years old. And I was a good player but I cried the entire game. Cried, literally like not just like...like ugly cry, the entire game, at seven and eight years old. And they used to pull me off the field. The coach would say, what's wrong, what's wrong? Nothing. Nothing. He put me back out. I would make a play and the parents would clap or people

yelled my name, I couldn't stand it.

And it's weird now because of doing what I do, and that's part of it, but when I'm not doing it in front of a camera or I've got to be somewhere like this, if I'm walking down the street and you go, Mike, I'll probably go like that. It's like inner shyness, like an extroverted introvert at times, I guess is the best way to describe it.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Well, you've managed to cover that well in the public life for sure. But keep going, though, because you've been forever a constant co-star on Fox NFL, working every weekend during, which is now like six-month NFL season. And then you co-hosted with Kelly Ripa on the Kelly and Michael show. And that didn't come immediately, right? You had a few trials for that.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: No. You know, nothing came easily, even the football show. The first three weeks, you asked me if I had any regrets about not going back to play football, the first three weeks into my Fox gig, I was on set, and I have all these ideas and the camera hits me and I'm like...blah, blah, blah, blah. And then I turned to Jimmy Johnson, I'm like, did anything I say make sense? And he goes, I don't know, I wasn't listening to you. (Laughter) So everything was so fast and so new. And they don't teach you. They don't say, okay, this is how it works, this is how a run-down works. This is how you do the comments. There was none of that. It's literally, here you go, put a mike

on, put him in front of a camera. Good luck.

So it was such a learning curve. It was so severe. And I joined a show that I loved watching, and I admire and love these guys. And so I'm joining the show and I'm thinking, just don't screw it up. But it's so much pressure to be the new guy on a show that they didn't let new guys in on. And, yeah, three weeks into that and feeling lost, I was like, I should have gone back to the Giants. That seemed like a better option. But then all of a sudden it just clicked.

And this is the conversation I had with Tom two weeks ago, right after his first game when everybody was like, Tom Brady sucks. I'm like, no. Tom Brady was more nervous than any player on that football field and across the league.

TERRY LUNDGREN: And everybody had high expectations.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Everybody had high expectations, which if you don't understand Tom, he has higher expectations for himself than any of us will ever have for him. And then last week, what happens, he comes out, he crushes it. He was great last week. And I think that's the thing. For me, it just clicked one day. And I told him the same. It'll just click. And that clicked. And then I got comfortable doing that.

And Regis, I went on that show right before I retired. And I wasn't really a guest. You know, a guest comes out and they go to commercial break after the intro and the guest gets a seat. And you come and you kind of sit at the seat with the desk, and they come out of commercial break. I was kind of a walk-on where they're talking in the middle, at the top of the dialogue, and I kind of come out at the top of the show. And they pull up a little chair next to the desk and I sit there. I was a little different. And I think Eli Manning wasn't available, so they saw I was, so they invited me.

And I remember doing the show and at the end of it Regis said, well, now you won the Super Bowl. If you retire, what are you going to do? I said, you know, maybe if you want to retire...Kelly and Michael, Michael and Kelly...just joking. And afterwards I told Michael Gelman, the producer, if Regis ever takes a break, goes on vacation, and he wants somebody to come and fill in, I would love to do it. A year later, I get a call from him. Can you come in? And I went in and I loved it immediately. And I co-hosted 20 times before I got that job.

TERRY LUNDGREN: So you kept going back way before that, okay, you're the one.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: No, I kind of, I did it because it was fun. And also just from doing that, I actually had gotten a call from, I used to do Ellen's show. I used to go on Ellen as a guest. So Ellen and, who is it, the big production company that did her show, they

both reached out and said, hey, we want to develop a show for you. A daytime show, you pick your co-host, you do your whole thing. We want to do that for you if you'd like. And so I had that on the table. And then when the LIVE thing was going on, I never thought I was going to get that job. I thought they would give it to a guy who is known for being on daytime television. But, I was like, well, if they keep asking me to co-host, they must like something, so hopefully I can get this with a built-in audience instead of trying to build a show. And it worked out that they gave me the job.

TERRY LUNDGREN: And then perhaps, maybe the biggest contributor to making you a household name across the nation here and internationally as well came when you joined Robin Roberts and George Stephanopoulos on the award-winning GMA show.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Oh, I was going to say Magic Mike XXL.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Magic Mike first, and then GMA.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: There you go.

TERRY LUNDGREN: And that's just been a killer. And if that all wasn't enough, you flew on Blue Origin to outer space.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Yes, that was...

TERRY LUNDGREN: Was that smart? (Laughter) Would you have done it if those guys who are up in space...

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Was that smart?

TERRY LUNDGREN: Those guys stuck up in space right now...

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Well, I didn't plan on being stuck. I will say, when you're up there, I was like, what if this thing just keeps drifting? What do we do? How much oxygen is in this tank? Tell everybody to take small breaths.

TERRY LUNDGREN: So what made you want to do that?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: I didn't want to do that, at first. GMA is fantastic. Like, I love Robin. I love George. And what I love about it is it changes every day. You can't get bored. And if there's something that I'm interested in or a topic I want to talk about or a story I want to tell, then I pitch it, and if they approve it, then I'm off and running. And it gives me a chance to travel the world, see interesting things, do interesting things, have incredible conversations with interesting people that I would never get an opportunity to

do otherwise.

TERRY LUNDGREN: How did you prepare yourself? You're coming from a football career and all of a sudden, how do you prepare for this?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Terry, they throw you in there and you figure it out. And when they first asked me to leave LIVE to do it, I said no, no, I'm comfortable, I love the job that I have here, 9:00 to 10:00 a.m. I can sleep in. I can still have a social life. I can have dinners out and all this stuff. I don't want a job that I'm going to have to wake up so early. And then I got a call from a very powerful man who let me know they weren't exactly asking me if I would do it. I said, okay, I'll be there on Monday.

So I did part-time for two years. I did two days a week at GMA and the other days, five days a week at LIVE. And it was just such a learning curve, the hardest thing I've ever done. Harder than doing the football show, harder than doing LIVE, which is probably the most personality-driven, the easiest thing to do. But it's been so exciting, and I absolutely love it.

So I go to cover the first launch. Jeff and his brother, Mark Bezos, go up. And I went for ABC, GMA, they said, would you like to go? And I was like, okay, they want me to go, I'll go. I didn't care about going to space. But I knew Bezos, and I'm like, oh, I know Jeff a

little bit, okay, I'll go. I go to Van Horn, Texas, middle of nowhere. We have this meeting at 3:30 a.m. to talk about, don't go out because there are animals out there. And I'm like, I'm Black, we don't go out in the dark in places that we don't know. I'm sorry, we just don't. I see all the Black people like, yeah, brother, we got you.

So I go out to Van Horn. Gio Benitez, who is our aviation guy. He's like, Mike, I'm telling you, it's going to be the most incredible thing you've ever seen. He's all amped up. I'm like, Gio, calm down. I just want to get through this and go home. That's it. It was the most amazing thing I've ever seen. This rocket takes off and you know that there are six people in it. And you're thinking, oh, I'm going to see it go up and come down, and then it's gone. It's like gone. And then eventually you see this booster rocket that's falling from the sky. It gets to a certain height and it fires up again. And it comes down and directs itself and lands on a pad. And I was like, this is like Tony Stark. This is like Iron Man.

And then eventually the pod comes down. They get out of the pod. I interviewed them afterwards and I'd never seen, like that much unfiltered, like joy. They were so happy. Like their minds were on a different level because they had just seen a thing that cleared their minds and their spirits and their souls. And it was very, man, I caught the bug. And I go to dinner here in the city. I get a call, I'm going to have dinner. I said, okay, I'll come over. And I had dinner with Jeff and his brother Mark and Tony Gonzalez

and we're having dinner. And I say to them, you know what, I said I'd never go to space. But I'll tell you, after being there and you guys, and watching you do that, just the happiness, I would do it in a heartbeat.

Two days later, I'm playing golf and I get a call, hold on for Jeff Bezos. I'm like, okay. Hey, what's up, Jeff? I think you know what this is about. And he invited me to do it. And I said absolutely, absolutely. And I felt great about that decision – you asked if it was crazy – until a week before.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Then you said, I'm really doing this?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Exactly. A week before, I'm like, can I say I have Covid? Like how do I get out of this? This is insane. Why did I do this? And you have to, you know, obviously you get your affairs in order. And then I'm realizing, this could like, things could kick in pretty quick. So I had a little apprehension. But they do such an incredible thing at this program where they explain everything to you. Every lunch you sit with engineers and the developers of the spacecraft. They take you to where they make it. They take you to see the facilities and everything. They brief your family on what to expect and make sure that they're taken care of.

So they make you feel so comfortable that when it came time to do it, you're in this

capsule, and they got the screen here. It tells you your altitude and your speed, but it also has a countdown. And once it hits two minutes and 30 seconds, you're locked in because the computers take over. Before that, there are two code words, two things you can say. One, time out. And they'll open up the chamber and they'll say, come on, Terry, you can do it, you got this.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Yeah, motivation speech.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Or you can say I don't want to fly today, and they'll just come in and say, come on, Terry, get off. So those are the two things. And you're sitting there watching this countdown and you're thinking, is someone going to do it? And if they did, would I go with them? Or maybe I'll do it. But no one did. And I tell you, I'm so glad I did it because it, just your mind is free. The worries that we have, you come to grips with death, I guess, in some way, that something could go wrong. But it was so comforting at the same time. And then to look at earth from that perspective, being weightless and floating around, and pushing yourself. I haven't done a cartwheel in forever. I was spinning, man, spinning.

TERRY LUNDGREN: You hold the record for being the largest person in space, so you have that.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: That's not hard.

TERRY LUNDGREN: I'm going to try to speed this up...

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Go ahead, I'm sorry, I'll be short. I'll be short.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Let's talk about, you mentioned being Black, let's talk about diversity and inclusion, in case you didn't notice.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Transition....

TERRY LUNDGREN: Transition. I assume this was not an issue in football necessarily, but when you entered the business world, you entered the media world, did you ever feel like you were being held back or maybe underestimated?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: I definitely think underestimated. As far as held back, I'm a believer, I always tell a lot of these young athletes especially, your name, your reputation, the fact that you play for the New York Giants, if you want to meet somebody, the world is kind of your oyster. You can pretty much anybody you want. That gets you in the room. But whatever you want to get into the room for, you better have some substance or some knowledge of whatever business or whatever you want

to get into with the people you're speaking to in order to stay in the room. Because if not, you're nothing more than a photo. And somebody tells their kid, let's take a picture with you. Or they're going to say, oh, you didn't bring your ring. Nobody walks around with a Super Bowl ring. And if they do, stay far away from that guy.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Because that's all they got.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Yeah, that's all they got. But it's like you can get into the room, but how do you stay in the room? And that's always been my thing. I like showing that someone who comes from the football world, someone of my complexion, like we're smart. Football, to me, was a beginning, not an end. And it has allowed me to have the life that I've had now. But I also think growing up, not playing football growing up, in some ways, first of all, preserved my body. So when I finished after 15 years with the Giants, I feel great.

TERRY LUNDGREN: And you look great, by the way.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Thank you. It preserved my mind because I wasn't worn out. I didn't think that I was only a football player. Football came so late in my life that it was just something I did at that moment, and then when it was over, it was time to switch to a new moment and capture the next thing. And that's kind of how I think about different

phases of life and my career.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Well, I'm going to, on that note, I asked another friend, Tom Brady, and his question, he started out by saying this. You want to ask a question of Mike? He said, let me start out by saying this. Michael has made transitions from football and media and business as well as anyone I've ever known or seen. He has so much talent and such confidence, but I'm sure there were moments when he questioned himself, and you should ask Michael to talk about that.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Every day. I don't think you ever stop questioning yourself. I think you question yourself and you doubt yourself more than anybody ever does, except for you do it in here. I mean I literally, every show, when I show up at GMA in the morning, I'll go, do I really know how to read? Can I read this without screwing up? Okay, you got through that word. Can you do it again? Always, always the little things you question yourself about. And I think once you stop doing that, I don't know what would happen.

TERRY LUNDGREN: You stop growing maybe.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Yeah, you stop growing. But I think that's what drives me is having to continuously prove to myself. And as a football player, I questioned myself all the time. And I think that's one reason I worked so hard because I never wanted to be

on the football field and say the guy throws me down and I go, oh, boy, had I lifted that extra weight that I cut short on the reps, he wouldn't have been able to do that. So, no, I finished everything to the max. So if the guy did that, I would go, okay, you want to play, big boy, I got you next time, and I'd tell him that. And I'd get it done because I knew I had it in me. I never cheated myself. And yeah, I think you always doubt yourself. I don't think that ever goes away. I think that's more for me, I use it as motivation and fuel. And that's in everything, not just football, but in everything.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Another friend, Jim Gray, Hall of Fame sportscaster, he asked what aspects have you taken from the football field to your current roles?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: I think leadership, like teamwork, being part of a team, and making everyone feel valued. It's like one of the most important things to me. Because growing up in Germany, I was washing dishes. I was mowing lawns. I was moving furniture. And people don't see you. You're just, you're there. And people treat you, when they do see you, as if you're there, some subservient thing, like this is just what you do and you take whatever treatment I'm giving you. And I always have been sympathetic to that because I felt like I was not seen.

So for me, as a teammate and as a human being, it's very important to make people feel seen. And even at SMAC, at my company, you don't work for me. We work

together. Everybody's together. And so teamwork is the one thing that I take everywhere. And just from general, saying good morning every morning, being consistent. The problem is people aren't consistent. And I can't stand that. I see you one day and you're this way. I see you the next day and you're another way. Be consistent. And I like teamwork and consistency.

TERRY LUNDGREN: I'm going to ask one more and then I'm going to open it to questions from the audience. If you were coaching or advising, and we talked about SMAC, you've got an apparel line, you've got a skin care line, so you've got a bunch of businesses as well as all your media exposure and work you do, but if you were advising business leaders and media leaders, complete this sentence...always do what and never do what.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Always acknowledge those who help you win and never think it's because you did it by yourself.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Really good. Really good. Alright, questions.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Alright, good, let's go home. Don't be shy. You can ask me anything and I'll answer it.

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD

QUESTION: Thank you. It was great. I had an opportunity meeting with Tom, obviously here. My question is what is it that you don't like to do?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: What do I not like to do? Shoot 100 when I play golf. That makes me mad.

TERRY LUNDGREN: He never does. He never does. I've played with him.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: You know, what don't I like? You know, it's amazing, I don't like hosting events. I don't like being an emcee.

TERRY LUNDGREN: That's interesting.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: I like acting, but I don't like the going and doing the rehearsal. Like not the rehearsals, but the auditions. Like if you called me and said, we've got a role for you, I'd be like, okay. But if you called me and said, oh, we need you to come in and read for this. Eh...

TERRY LUNDGREN: Not happening. Who else...

QUESTION: Hello. My name is Nicole Arandell. Thank you for your comments. It's really great to hear you talk about leadership. I want to know, you've interviewed some of the biggest names in entertainment, in sports, and the business world, who has surprised you the most and why?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Wow! I would say someone I enjoy interviewing. Some are, you should meet your heroes. I'll say that about George Clooney, for instance. Amazing human being. Julia Roberts, after we finished our interview – I interviewed Julia Roberts in the suite at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel in LA where they shot *Pretty Woman* – and when we finished the interview, she's like, would you like a glass of rosè. We sat there and drank a bottle of rosè. So I'm like, you talk about a pinch-me moment. I'm like, oh, okay.

You know, they have, you have really amazing, but I like the real-life stuff. Celebrity interviews are great, they're fun. I've done them a lot over the last 12 years or whatever. But I like talking to normal people, people who are making a difference. I think that those are always, I find, to be a little bit more interesting, and something I feel like I learn more from than someone promoting a movie or whatever it may be.

And I get a chance to talk to politicians, to the medical field, to the technology field, and I just think that all those things are what make me interested in the job. But particularly,

everyone's pretty good. I haven't really run into anyone, maybe outside of here or there, where you're looking at them going you've got to give me more than that. I'm here to help you. Like some people will come in to the interview with the wrong attitude, and that's just not the most fun thing to be in the middle of.

QUESTION: Yes, Michael, Dustin Jones. It's been great to listen to you. You're likable. You articulate yourself very well. And I say that as a diehard Eagles fan. It's hard to give a compliment.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: That was very hard for you, I'm sure.

QUESTION: I'm curious. What do you think about the role of private equity in football now? How does that change the game?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: It think it's great. If you own a team, it's great. I think that the NFL has always been last to the party when it comes to different things, if it's gambling, if it's, you know, a team in Vegas and all these things. They kind of let the NBA figure it out and then the NFL comes in and swoops up, comes in and takes over everything. I think private equity in football is a good thing for, I think, ownership groups, because how many people in this country can afford to write a check for 60, 70% of \$6-\$7 billion in order to join a majority part of the team which is required.

So the liquidity that it affords these owners is a godsend to them, and I think it will help raise the valuations. Because at some point they had to hit a limit because you only had so many individuals who could afford it. But now with private equity, I think the teams' valuations will continue to go up. Player salaries will continue to go up. Ownership profits will continue to go up. And hopefully we just continue to get good games that make us all interested in the sport.

TERRY LUNDGREN: I think we have time for one more.

QUESTION: Michael, thank you for being here. I have a two-part question, and one of them is an invite. The first question is if life is a series of acts, Act 1, Act 2, Act 3, what's your Act 3 when you see the sunset out in the horizon?

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Okay, well, I'm thinking about that one now. And I'm doing a lot of different things, because my whole goal when I started with my partner, Constance Schwartz at SMAC was what can we do so that everything isn't dependent on me being in front of a camera. That's always been the thing. I don't want to be old in front of the camera. Now old, you know, it's relative age. But I don't want it to take more time for me in the makeup chair than it takes for me to actually do the program, in all seriousness.

TERRY LUNDGREN: That's a good one.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Like someone's coloring the grays, oh, man, this is taking a lot. So it's always been the focus on that. So that's why we started SMAC, which we do, we do consumer products, clothing. We manage everybody from Deion Sanders and his kids and Erin Andrews at Fox to Wiz Khalifa, the rapper Common, the list goes on and on.

And so on top of that, a production company. I own several production companies, one I started with Tom, called Religion of Sports, and so production companies. And I have a sports fund now too. I do it with Marc Lasry at Avenue. And it's like all these things that I'm doing now. So when I'm done with football, I mean I'm done with TV, just like when I was done with football, I have something interesting, something to look forward to, and something that challenges me. Because I believe in retirement, but I don't believe in just doing nothing. And these things keep me stimulated mentally.

QUESTION: And here's the sunset question for you. I hear from a friend of a friend, you're an international fisherman, and you really know how to cut bait, Lake George. So you're officially invited with me on my boat to catch a giant blue fin tuna right outside the Statue of Liberty in the next four to six weeks.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: They have tuna out there?

QUESTIONER: Absolutely.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Did any of you, I didn't know they had tuna. Who knew they had tuna out there? Raise your hands if you knew they had big blue fin tuna right by the Statue of Liberty.

QUESTIONER: I am your guide, and I will take you there with me on my boat.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Thank you. I don't care if you hook it and throw in the water and make me feel like I caught it. I'm in.

TERRY LUNDGREN: Thank you, Michael Strahan, for joining The Economic Club of New York.

MICHAEL STRAHAN: Thank you.

PRESIDENT BARBARA VAN ALLEN: Incredible. What a great conversation. I'm going to speed things up so we can get right to our lunch. We do have a robust lineup ahead of us, and if you look at the other side of your program you can see that there. Be sure to check the website for updates in the coming weeks. We're trying very hard to bring, as you all know we had former President Trump just recently, and we're trying to bring Vice President Kamala Harris as well. So we're working really hard on that right now. In

any event, please keep watching the website as we add events to our lineup.

As always, I want to take a moment to recognize those members of our Centennial Society in attendance today as their financial contributions help to ensure that our programming continues actually into perpetuity. So again, thank you for attending today. And for those that are joining us virtually, we have a very large audience, thank you for being here. We're going to say goodbye. For those in the room, please enjoy your lunch. Thank you.