Jay Shetty Went From Monk to New Media Mogul With His Message of Mindfulness

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12 hours ago
Jay Shetty is not your typical celebrity. Sure, he looks like a laid-back model with his crystalline green eyes and perfectly coiffed hair. He shifts effortlessly in his seat as he locks in with the camera lens.

“Somehow I knew you’d be easy to shoot,” our cover photographer says. To prepare for the shoot, she’s watched Shetty’s snackable, wisdom-laden content, as have millions captivated by his presence and purposeful message.

Mackenzie Stroh for Adweek

Shetty’s a storyteller, life coach and friendly face all wrapped up in one—a younger, hipper, more mainstream Deepak Chopra. He signs off on his emails “with gratitude.” He relates to people like an average Joe—if Joe were a 32-year-old highly purpose-driven British Indian who is the dictionary definition of influence—“an emanation of spiritual or moral force”—and of influencer. But Shetty doesn’t inspire people to buy some material thing; he inspires them to buy into a happier, more fulfilling, less stressful life through small, actionable steps. He wants to be a catalyst for people to influence themselves. In his own words: “We all have things we need to work on.”

After failing out of business school in London, the self-described introvert went to India to be with monks, shaving

his head and meditating for several hours a day, every day. After three years, the monks encouraged Shetty to leave and spread mindfulness. And spread it he did—via YouTube. He started making videos on the platform and getting immediate feedback, like "fascinating and yet so simple. It's what I needed to hear at exactly the right time." A few years in, and still not making money off his YouTube videos, a well-connected friend introduced Shetty to Arianna Huffington, who gave him a daily show on HuffPost Live in 2016. And earlier this year, Ellen DeGeneres offered him a platform on Ellentube to help amplify his message after having him as a guest on her show. "I want to do more with you—all the time," DeGeneres said. On the new platform, Shetty helps people "press pause" on negative thoughts and emotions and reframe them.

Shetty's influence continues to grow—nowadays, he also gives talks for corporations like Accenture, Coca-Cola and Google—and there's no shortage of strategy behind his relevance. His team reads the comments on all of his various platforms in real time to extract universal themes—stress, relationships, purpose, failure—that are important to his global audience and can become fodder for the next conversation. His social media posts, sometimes simple reminders to love like a child, for example, easily rack up hundreds of thousands of likes. And all of the responses are written personally by Shetty.

Video: Dianna McDougall

Shetty scripts and records his video content a month or two in advance in a process he calls "block creating." Perhaps it is this intentional and thoughtful creation process that helps the Shorty Awards winner develop and distribute real, everyday conversations everywhere: on Ellentube, his YouTube channel, a highly rated podcast called On Purpose with guests that have included Kobe Bryant and Eva Longoria, and a forthcoming book.

We sat down with Shetty to discuss how he found success and how he stays grounded through it all.

Adweek: Why wisdom?
Jay Shetty: I really believe that if you come across something in life that could improve the life of someone else, you should pass it on. … I just happen to have fallen in love with wisdom, and I want to tell all my friends about it. So it's this beautiful feeling of seeing something transform your life, seeing it transform the life of others. Why would you not want to give it to everyone? And, at the same time, the more I give it, the more I get a chance to grow and realize how much work I need to do.

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