

## In Context Season One: Changing Career

Episode One Guest: Ke Xu (许可)

*Music credits (all sourced from freemusicarchive.org):*

*Lee Rosevere's Quizitive*

*Lee Rosevere's Tech Toys*

*Lee Rosevere's Whats Behind the Door*

*Lee Rosevere's Theme from Penguins on Parade*

*Lee Rosevere's And So Then*

*Glad Rags's Wonder Under*

*Blue: Anita's narration*

「我特别害怕自己成为一个穷酸书生。我非常想找一个就是可以一生为之投入而不感到厌倦的生涯事业，然后我发现企业家是这么一个生涯事业。」

你刚刚听到的声音来自许可。他是我的大学同学。当我想做关于年轻人的“转行”故事时，他是我第一个想到的人。在许可的领英页面上，他的一位朋友留言说，许可一定会成为中国最优秀的记者之一。

但是2012年从复旦大学新闻系毕业后，他没有做过一天正式意义上的记者。

2014年，许可开始他的创业项目，“清单”，这是一家帮助大众做购物决策的新媒体公司。他们在互联网上生产的内容文章包括《2999元的松下吹风机，你是吹头发还是吹牛皮？》《不以电视为中心的客厅，可以是什么样子》《戴森卷发棒到底值不值得买》以及《谁是低端消费者》。

清单今天有大约30名员工，它在微信和抖音上分别拥有150和300万粉丝。

我想知道，当年费了大劲转专业进入复旦新闻系后，许可为什么没有从事和媒体采编相关的工作，以及，他最终如何以一种更热烈的姿态投入到了创业之中。

Q：许可，你曾经是一个理科生，而且还是成绩非常好的那种理科生，好到你因

"(When I was young) I was extremely afraid that I would become a poor intellectual. I've been very eager to find a career that can be invested without getting bored. Later I found that being an entrepreneur is one such career."

That is Ke Xu (许可), my classmate from college. When I was looking for people to profile their "career transition" stories, he was the first person I thought of.

"Ke is bound to be one of China's greatest reporters," commented one friend on Ke's LinkedIn. But when Ke graduated from the School of Journalism at Fudan University in 2012, he did not choose that career path. In fact, he never did.

In 2014, Ke started a new media company called "eqingdan" (or e-list in English). The firm researches consumer goods and publishes consumer-friendly analysis with a hope to empower consumers to make wiser decisions. Here're just some of the titles they've published, "2,999-yuan Panasonic hair, is it worth buying, or is it overpriced?", "What will a living room look like if it's not planned around watching TV?", "Is Dyson AirWrap worth your money?" and "What is a low-end consumer?"

Currently employing around 30 people, his firm has 1.5 million followers on WeChat,

为竞赛被保送到复旦大学。当时你进入的是药学专业，但是一年之后你选择转到了新闻系，当时是什么原因呢？

A：我觉得也难以说是一个完全意义上的成绩非常好的理科生。在理科所有的这些学科里面，我也不是每一门都喜欢，以及都拿手。我其实一直是个比较喜欢文字和社会工作的同学。可能大家上中学的时候都会有那种比较典型的学的是理科，但是平常老是爱舞文弄墨的那种理科生，我就是那种。

Q：提到文字和社会工作的时候，其实你是对这两个部分的什么东西感到有兴趣呢？

A：我没有考虑过这个问题，我感受一下。比方说我对文字工作感兴趣，当我听到“朝辞白帝彩云间”我会觉得很美好。我会觉得非常愿意跟这样的东西亲近。我听到“云青青兮欲雨水淡淡兮生烟什么，相与枕藉湖州中不知东方之既白”，我觉得这个文字传达出来的东西让我觉得无限的美好。

社会工作我觉得可能是一种关怀或者参与感。从小我有一个特别大的恐惧，这个恐惧其实推着我走过很远，就是我特别害怕自己成为一个穷酸书生。这里面有言下之意，就是我觉得自己是个书生，这个没有问题，但是我非常担心自己穷酸，我非常担心自己无足轻重。

Q：你是从什么时候有这种意识会有这种恐惧？

A：意识是很晚了，但恐惧是很早的。恐惧是非常非常早的，我觉得小学初中可能就有。但是它很模糊，他模糊在于我觉得你比方说听到一些说法的时候，比方说手无缚鸡之力，我觉得这是形容书生的一种stereotype，我不愿意自己成为那样。比方说百无一用是书生，我听到这个会有点受刺激，我觉得我不能成为那样。我不知道这跟性别有没有关系，我作为一个男生，我想象自己去拥有社会价值、有这种社会参与感。我得参与到社会运行当中去，我有这个愿望。

and 3 million on Douyin (a short video social network).

It intrigues me, why, after studying so hard and managing to change his major from Medicine Studies to Journalism (back in 2009), Ke did not pursue a career in journalism at the end? And, what made him so obsessed with starting his own business ultimately?

Q: Ke, you were a top STEM student at high school. In fact, you were so good at STEM classes that you were exceptionally accepted to Fudan because of your high scores. You were placed at the Medicine Studies department originally, but when the first year finishes, you transferred to the School of Journalism. Why?

A: It's hard to say that I was *that* good with STEM classes. I did not score high in all STEM or science classes, and I was not interested in all of them either. I think I've always been someone who enjoyed literature and social science. I think that, everyone may have encountered such a classmate in high school—although placed in a science-focused class, he/she really enjoyed playing with words and writing. I'm that kind of student.

Q: What interests you about literature and social science?

A: Let me think, I've never considered that before. For literature, I think it was about... for example, when I hear "Leaving at dawn from the Town of the White, I see the sky full of rosy clouds (朝辞白帝彩云间)," I find it extremely charming, and I want to be associated with such nice expression; when I hear "The lake stream is so gentle as the clouds turn cyan before raining; we fall asleep in the boat over the lake, not knowing the sun is rising up (云青青兮欲雨水淡淡兮生烟什么，相与枕藉湖州中不知东方之既白)", I think that conveys infinite beauty.

对主体性和参与感的渴望不止一次把许可推往众人关注的焦点。大二那一年，刚刚从药学系转专业到新闻系的许可走上竞选班长的讲台。他需要和另外几名已经和同学们打成一片或者已经有了稳固朋友圈的人，一起争取坐在他面前150多个陌生人的投票。

A：我刚进来，我不认识大家，我想融入这个社会。我需要积极地融入这个环境，我不能等著环境来融入我，对吗？以及我从初中高中我也一直是班长、团支书之类的，我很主动地在追求这个东西，我从小学当班干部就是自己竞选的。我觉得我爸爸妈妈给了我这个东西。

我爸是军人，然后他在一个团里面当政委的时候，我看过他阅兵。阅兵是一种什么感觉？那个已经不是一般意义上的在聚光灯下了，就是这样的场景：同志们好！然后一个方阵小伙子们喊首长好，我从小在我爸爸身上看到的很多都是这样的场景。我妈从小也是优等生，全县成绩第一。她大学毕业之后要找工作，她农村出来的谁也不认识，她当时在石家庄上大学河北师范大学毕业。但是她觉得好像找工作要找关系，她就买了两袋奶粉去直接找了省委办公厅的主任，这个事好像这个好像是最后没帮到她，但是她就有这个冲劲，她就敢去干这种事。

不过，费尽心思加入新闻系后，对社会参与感的渴望并没有把许可推往更顺理成章的调查新闻记者的方向。他很快发现，那些和生活方式、财经、商业有关的报道更能激起他的热情。这种兴趣的形成，和他在大学时认识的一个女生有关。

A：我当时上大学的时候，我女朋友然后她家是做生意的。然后我会比方说跟她相处的过程中，我也会逐渐不断地去感受她的一些认知逻辑、生活和思维的方式，然后她爸妈的生活和思维方式，包括他们的生活水平、工作状态等等。

In terms of social science, it is about social care and social engagement. When I was young I was extremely afraid that I would become a poor intellectual when I grew up. This fear has pushed me far away down the road. Obviously as you could tell that there was an implication about this fear when I spoke about it: one, is that I consider myself as an intellectual, which is of no doubt to myself; the other, I feared of being poor or useless.

Q: Since when did you become conscious of this or have such fear?

A: Consciousness came very late, but the fear was with me very early, perhaps as early as I was in elementary school. It was very vague though—I remembered it bothered me when I heard phrases such as “lacking the strength to truss up a chicken” (手无缚鸡之力) and “scholar is good for nothing” (百无一用是书生). I thought them as stereotypes associated with scholars or intellectuals. I don’t want to be like that. I felt really irritated whenever I heard those expressions. I am not sure whether this reaction had anything to do with gender. As a male, I imagined myself having social value and active in social engagement. I had a hope for that.

Strong self-awareness and a desire for social engagement had constantly brought Ke under the public spotlight. When he was a sophomore, just accepted into the journalism school from the Medicine Studies department, he was not afraid to step onto the stage to compete for student leadership (班長) in front of 150+ strangers. His competitors? They had already formed relationship with fellow students.

A: I just joined the J-School, I didn't know anyone. I wanted to mingle with fellow students and become a part of the group. It was on me to actively engage with the community, because the community won't

我记得她爸爸当时跟我说，我们聊到海宁皮革城，海宁浙江那边我觉得是很典型的一种业态——他说我们浙江这边市场经济的意识比较前沿，然后海宁这帮人就知道在这儿搞一个市场，大家做皮革生意都来这里交易，大家的税和GDP就贡献在这里。然后我到海宁皮革城去，我觉得那里确实搞得很好，然后浙江有很多这样的地方——让我觉得这是一种更加让我觉得欣欣向荣的朝气蓬勃的，社会国家在往前走的时候，这才是非常前沿的样本。这也是我想要的参与社会或者说看到社会向前变革的样子。

2012年，许可从大学毕业，当时摆在他面前的职业机会包括：中国银行的理财经理、淘宝的运营岗位和中央电视台记者。在正式毕业之前，他已经在中国银行实习了6个月，他希望参与一线的商业运作，锻炼他口中“硬碰硬”的商业能力。

不过这份实习没有让他对这份工作产生更大的兴趣。正式毕业后，他选择签约财新传媒。不是做记者，而是加入整合营销部，并在此后调换到广告部，从事和采编并无关联的营运工作。

许可说，如果换到现在他可能会选择淘宝这个回过头看更有想象力的公司。不过这一切都可以理解。

那一年在复旦大学本科毕业生中最吃香的企业仍旧是宝洁、联合利华这样的快消公司，四大，以及以麦肯锡为代表的外企咨询，他们开出的月薪在8000到12000元不等。

在智联招聘发布的2012届应届毕业生求职调查中，IT和互联网行业的受欢迎程度虽然已经排名第二，仅次于金融行业，但大部分毕业生对马上要兴旺起来的互联网公司毫无预期和准备。当时没有美团外卖，没有滴滴，微信刚刚推出一年，距离国家层面提出“万众创新/大众创业”也还有2年的时间。

A：我在财经总共工作了一年半，第一年是在整合营销部，第二年是在广告部。

approach me on its own, right? Also I had been a student leader since a young age (so to me there's nothing to be afraid of). I began running for student leadership roles since elementary school, and I was so crave about being a leader. I think I inherited this from my parents.

My father used to be a soldier. When he was a commander in the army, I had witnessed him inspecting the military parade. Can you imagine what that was like? He was under such a spotlight! Young soldiers would line up in groups and wait for his inspection. I remembered my father saying "Greetings, comrades!" and then young soldiers would respond with "Greetings, leader!" That was my impression of my father when I was little. It was a similar story with my mother, who had always been a top student in her county. When she graduated from Hebei Normal University, she had no connection that could introduce her to a good job, since she was originally from the countryside; but she intuitively understood that she needed *guanxi* to land on a promising career. What did she do? She bought two packages of baby milk powder and went directly to see the director at the provincial government. This didn't help her ultimately, but the point was, she had the courage to do such a thing.

Despite a desire for social engagement and strong self-awareness, which brought Ke into J-School in the first place, he did not follow a path in investigative reporting (where a high level of social engagement is often required). Instead, Ke found himself fascinated with lifestyle, finance, and business stories. The formation of this interest had something to do with a girl he met during that time.

A: My girlfriend at the time is from a family that runs its own business. The more I knew her the more I tried to understand her way

在整合营销部的时候，我其实兼著好几块工作，一个是整合营销业务，一个是市场业务，一个是新媒体。在这一年里我我非常累，我天天加班，然后也通宵过，反正就很辛苦。在广告部的那半年比较煎熬。实际上做广告销售这个工作对我来说，性格上的挑战可能会大了一点，业绩上还可以，但是整个很痛苦。我有点抗拒那个工作。

Q：它和你性格的冲突体现在哪个部分？

A：比方说我要打cold call，我要一天打好几十个cold call，这件事情对我来说很难。我说话有点口吃，尤其我一紧张我说话有点口吃。然后我在打cold call的时候就是我又很怕麻烦别人，我本身当时也是一个比较怕麻烦的人，所以这件事情对我来说挑战很大，对出很多冷汗。我觉得任何一个比较内向的人可能都会有这种深有同感，这就是今天开始要求你每天打40个cold call，然后是要向人家推销.....39个cold call里面人家都会直接挂断你电话的东西，这是一种什么感觉？这对我来说挑战非常大。

不过，这并不是造成许可辞职原因。事实上，他在财新做出过不少令人羡慕的成绩，包括在负责财新集团旗下的《新世纪周刊》的微博时，制造了当时这本杂志最高的微博转发量。他还参与了财新新媒体项目「雅趣」的创办，敲定了雅趣的第一批稿源。

大学时候埋下的对商业和成为一名企业家的渴望在这个时候回归，是因为受到褚时健的鼓舞。当时，这位中国曾经的烟草大王、红塔集团的传世人刑满释放两年，他因为卖遍大江南北的褚橙重新回到公众视线。而在创办褚橙时，褚时健已经75岁。

A：我觉得我非常想找一个就是可以一生为之投入而不感到厌倦的生涯事业，然后我发现企业家是这么一个生涯。我所听过的出色的企业家很多都是干到生命的最后一刻而孜孜不倦的，褚时健就是这样，我觉得很有力量，很有意义。

of thinking, to feel her cognitive logic, as well as her parents' way of thinking and living.

I remember having a discussion with her father about the Haining Leather City, which is a typical kind of business phenomenon in Zhejiang. He said to me that Zhejiang was at the frontier of the market economy, and that the Haining people saw the value of establish a leather goods business here. Everyone was doing their own leather business, contributing to the regional taxes and GDP. And there were lots and lots of places like Haining in Zhejiang. I later visited the Haining Leather City in person and it was indeed very well run. It presented me a prosperous future, and I consider this as a very cutting-edge example of China's economy. I felt urged to be a part of it, to participate in this wave that would lead the country to a brighter future.

In 2012, Ke graduated from college. The career opportunities in front of him at the time included: sales manager at the Bank of China, operations at Taobao, and reporter with China Central Television. Before graduation, he had been interning with Bank of China for six months, in a hope to participate in the front-line commercial environment and exercise his business acumen.

However, this internship did not sustain his interest in the job. Upon graduation, he joined [Caixin Media](#) (one of China's most influential media group). Instead of being a journalist, he joined the integrated marketing department and later transferred to the advertising department to work on projects unrelated to editorial.

Ke admitted that if he had the opportunity to re-decide his first job, he would choose Taobao, a more promising company from

不过，对于创什么业、怎么创业，许可说他当时并没有想太多。

A: 我当时的初心叫做把更多好东西介绍到大家生活中去，其实我没有太关心说大家是不是真的对这个东西有多感兴趣或者有多需要，我更多的是我想介绍这些东西给你们，然后对我觉得是这么一个表达的冲动。

Q: 你当时对他的想象是什么，可能它可以成为一个什么东西？

A: 其实没有想那么多，我在做这件事情的时候是一个是一个非常稚嫩的创业者，是一个非常稚嫩的商人，或者你干脆我身上没有什么商人的特质和能力。就是我只是想做这个事情，然后恰巧有这个机会，然后就做了，就这么简单没有考虑那么多。就是你要说我冲着一个把公司做多挣多少钱，或者要上市或者要怎么样，我真的没有想。

Q: 你有怀疑过你现在的事业，或者说你现在的公司你所做的事情，它们创造的价值？

A: 我会不满过，就是不满足于我觉得创造的价值不够大，或者不够硬，或者不够不够强。比方说阿里巴巴说让天下没有难做的生意，我觉得在切实地改变着很多人的命运，我觉得这个都很了不起，滴滴也是这样。然后我会觉得我的公司和产品提供给用户的价值好像没有那么硬，但是我没有觉得它没有价值过，它一直都很有价值。

它给用户带去了他更加的会生活，看我们内容的人看一篇文章，都比看这篇文章之前更会生活。它还给客户提供了接触消费者，然后消除买卖双方信息不对称的价值，然后让这个社会让这个市场变得更加的有效。我们也切实在挣这个钱。我虽然是拿投资人的钱做开始做的公司，但是我们现在公司花的每一分钱都是我们自己挣的，我们不依靠任何的权威，我们也不依靠任何的外来资源，我们踏踏实实的是我们每一分钱都是自己挣的。

today's view. But his choice at that time was quite understandable.

Keep in mind that was 2012. That year, the most popular employers among Fudan graduates were FMCG firms like P&G and Unilever, the Big Four accounting firms, and global management consultancies such as McKinsey. They offered a monthly salary between RMB 8,000 and 12,000.

In the 2012 Job Market Survey by Zhilian Zhaoping (a job search and recruiting platform), while IT and Internet Industry ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular among fresh graduates, second to Finance, most young students had their eyes somewhere else—very few people had seen or prepared for the upcoming surge of Chinese internet companies. There was no Meituan-Waimai, no Didi at the time, WeChat was just a one-year-old baby. And there were still two years to go before the state government announced support for “Mass entrepreneurship and innovation.”

A: I had been with Caixin for 1.5 years. The first year was with the Integrated Marketing Department (IMD), and the second year with its Advertising Department. I wore several hats while with the IMD and I was very, very tired. I worked overtime every day, and there were days I would stay up all night. It was a hard time. Then the half year at Advertising, I was actually suffering. For me, it was a big personality challenge. Although my sales performance was okay but the process was very painful. I felt my inner resistance to that job.

Q: What was it that was against your personality?

A: I had to accomplish dozens and dozens of cold calls each day. That was very difficult for me. I stuttered especially when I was nervous. I was also afraid of bothering other people. So that was very challenging

Q：在14年公司成立的时候，公司只有你或者只有几个同事的时候，到现在这样一个团队的规模，你个人工作当中成就感的来源有发生改变吗？

A：我觉得是有的，如果之前所说我一开始做这个事情的动机更多的是来自于一种表达的动机，或者说要给世界呈现自己的这么一个动机。但是就是逐渐的会这件事情会变的就我也在成长，然后这件事情会变得丰富很多。

然后比方说我现在也会有很多的成就感来自于比方说像我自己能力的增长以及我带领同事的增长。然后还有像我刚才给你说的，我觉得我在创造价值。无论是我在给我的用户和客户创造价值。我去年给国家创造了一百多万的税收，这还不算我们所有人认的个税。然后我还创造了就业岗位，我还作为这个行业的一员在跟这个行业一起在向前进，我觉得在这些创造价值的过程中你会感到很强的成就感，然后你发现的同事们在跟你一起成长。一开始会更纯粹和自己有关系，后来就会跟更多的东西有关系了。

你正在收听的是《语境 | 转行》，一档关于年轻人转行的播客节目。我们好像是在聊职业选择，但我们希望走得更远一些。我是徐婧艾，本期节目由我编辑和制作。我们下期见。

to me and I endured cold sweat a lot. I think all introverts could relate to what I'm describing right now—just imagine that you are asked to make 40 cold calls per day, and in 39 of those you are going to be rejected. How does that feel? It was a big challenge for me.

But this was not the reason he quit. Despite the difficulties described, Ke had a whole lot of achievement to celebrate at Caixin. He was the person behind two of the most reposted Weibo posts while he was in charge of the magazine's Weibo account, setting unprecedented record; he was a founding member of Yaqu, a new lifestyle-focused brand under Caixin, and he was the one in charge of Yaqu's first installment of content.

That early belief in the impact of business to reshape China's future found its way back to Ke, when he learnt about the legendary story of Shijian Chu, founder of Hongta Group who was known as "China's Tobacco King." By that time (2014), Chu has just been released from jail for two years, returning to the public eye because of a very successful orange business he didn't start until he was 75. Ke was utterly inspired.

A: I've been very eager to find a career that can be invested without getting bored. Then I found that being an entrepreneur is one such career. Many of the outstanding entrepreneurs I have heard work hard to the last moment of their lives and they never cease. Chu was one such entrepreneur to me. I felt his story so powerful and meaningful.

Despite the urge to start something on his own, Ke wasn't sure what business he was about to create, or how.

A: My initial aspiration (for eqingdan) was to introducing good things into everyone's

life. In fact, I didn't care too much about what users or readers thought about our content, whether they were interested in reading or not. It was more about my own self-expression. That was what I felt most impulsive about.

Q: What was your imagination of your business at the beginning?

A: Frankly, I didn't think that much. When I was just starting, I was a very young entrepreneur. I was a very young businessman, I didn't even have the qualities and abilities to become a businessman. It was more like, there was something I wanted to do, and I had the opportunity to realize it. So, I went ahead. I didn't think about turning it into how big a company, making how much profit, or going public or anything. I honestly didn't think about that.

Q: Have you ever doubted the value your business is creating? What value do you think it is creating for your audience?

A: I might not be satisfied with the value we are creating, but I've never doubted its value. I might feel that the value we create is not that big, hard-core or strong. For example, Alibaba believes in "to make doing business easier for everyone," which I felt is very remarkable. It has indeed changed the fate of many people (by unbalancing them to gain control of their life). And this rings true to Didi as well. But then at eqingdan what we are not creating hard-core value per se.

However, that doesn't mean we are not creating value. On the contrary, we empower consumers to make smarter decisions through informative content. Our readers become more knowledgeable about a particular product or consumer goods everytime they read our article. We also provide our clients (advertisers) access to consumers, to eliminate the information asymmetry between brands and

consumers. And hence we facilitate a more effective commercial environment. We are also earning money. We started with investor dollar but now we are on our own, we do not rely on any authority, we do not rely on any external resources. The truth is that every dollar we earn, we earn it by ourselves. And we are working very hard.

Q: Where does your sense of accomplishment come from nowadays, and is that different from when you started in 2014 just with a few people?

A: Oh yes, it is different. As I said before, when I first started, I was driven by self-expression and a need to present the world who I was, but it has gradually become something else if you ask my sense of accomplishment today. It's becoming richer.

For example, it comes from knowing that my team's capability is expanding and that everyone is growing to be a better version of themselves. Also like I mentioned, we as a company are creating value, for our readers and clients. Just last year, we contributed RMB 1 million in taxes; this does not include our staff's individual income tax. I also created jobs, and I work hand in hand with this entire industry to a better future. Along the way in these processes of value creation, I felt a strong sense of accomplishment. So in summary, my sense of accomplishment started small and very personal but it's growing to relate to more things.

You are listening to *In Context Season One "Changing Career"*, a podcast about young people making career transitions. You may think we are talking about career choices, but we hope to go further. I'm Anita Xu, this episode is produced and edited by me. Tune in next time.