

## Agency for Change Podcast: Rob Joseph, Co-Founder, Anti Ordinary

- Connect with Rob on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/robjosephanti>
- Learn more about Anti Ordinary: <https://www.antiordinary.co/>

### **Rob Joseph:**

Look after your brain and look after your friends' brains.

### **Announcer:**

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

### **Lyn Wineman:**

Who out there loves to snow ski or snowboard? If you do, you've probably been faced with the question of whether or not to wear a helmet. You know you should. It's an important part of protecting your head during accidents and collisions that could occur while zipping down the mountain, yet helmets just don't look cool. They're rarely comfortable to have on your head for a day-long outing. This, though, is where a new company comes into the picture. Anti Ordinary is a startup that is introducing the next generation in brain protection because they decided your brain needs more: more comfort, more style and most importantly, more safety.

Hey, everyone. This is Lyn Wineman, president and chief strategist at KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change Podcast. Today's guest is Rob Joseph, founder of Anti Ordinary, who has developed a new and exciting product to protect the brains of skiers and snowboarders. Rob, welcome to the podcast.

### **Rob Joseph:**

Good day, Lyn. Thanks so much for having me.

### **Lyn Wineman:**

I'm so excited to talk to you. Let's just start by having you tell us about this exciting new product you've developed.

### **Rob Joseph:**

Yeah, sure. I'm from a company called Anti Ordinary. We make skiing and snowboarding helmets that are more like beanies. They fit better. They feel better. They look much better, in my opinion, at least, and they're really safe as well.

### **Lyn Wineman:**

Just to clarify, though, is it a beanie that acts like a helmet or a helmet that looks like a beanie?

### **Rob Joseph:**

It's somewhere in between the two. It's like both but not the exact same as either. We're creating a new category of brain protection. It shouldn't really sit within, either. It's certified as a helmet. It's got the safest drop test results of any helmet we've ever seen, but the fit and feel is more akin to a beanie and becoming more and more like that every single day.

**Lyn Wineman:**

As someone who has kids who have had trouble with concussions, I really, really appreciate the work that you're doing because protecting your brain is a pretty important thing, particularly in a sport like snowboarding or skiing.

**Rob Joseph:**

Absolutely. I'm a lot the same. I grew up riding motorbikes and mountain bikes. I've had plenty of brain injuries. It's something, as action/sports people, we don't talk about anywhere near enough. That's why helmets haven't gotten a whole lot better in a long time. The market's moved really slowly in terms of technology. It's not great. That's why we wanted to change it because you get two arms, two legs but only one brain. Once the damage is done there, it's pretty tough. We're trying to make it all a bit more accessible, a bit safer, and happier for everyone on the mountain.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I love that mantra. You get two arms. You get two legs but only one brain. That's a good one. I am really curious. As a marketer, I have to ask about the name of your company. Tell me about how you came about with this name, the Anti Ordinary.

**Rob Joseph:**

Yeah. It was one of those serendipitous ones. We didn't really spend a lot of time thinking about it, I suppose. It was just one of those ones that just popped up, and it was right. It was early on too. It's Anti Ordinary. It comes from the idea that ordinary is just the everyday. It's okay. Extraordinary is the everyday stuff done really well. But we didn't really want to be "every day" at all. We wanted to be the opposite of that, so we became Anti Ordinary. It's not the same as everyone else. It's different. Sometimes it's not for everybody. The leaps that we're making in technology and the product and the way that we conduct ourselves is different; and different good. But sometimes, it takes people a little while to adjust. You point back to the name and go, "It's okay. Not everyone's anti ordinary. Everyone is ordinary. But not everyone's anti ordinary, and that's okay."

**Lyn Wineman:**

It feels like pure genius to me, Rob. Congratulations on that name. I love hearing people's founders' stories. You started as an action-adventure person. But what led you down this path? How did you come up with the idea?

**Rob Joseph:**

Yeah. It's a bit of a convergence of a few different things. I grew up in southeast Queensland in Australia, where it's nice and warm. I grew up riding motorbikes, mountain bikes, wakeboarding, all that kind of thing. I ended up studying medical engineering at university. My dad's an engineer, a very good one, and I was lucky enough to learn from him. I decided to get into medical engineering as I got into university.

I'd never really snowboarded before until I turned 16. It was my first ever time, and then again when I was at university at 17. I was riding one day. I was used to wearing helmets. I was a medical engineer. I'm a reasonably intelligent guy, particularly around the body and safety and that kind of thing, and being an action/sports person. I've always worn a helmet, never had a problem with it, riding bikes and wakeboards and that kind of thing. Then I got to the snow. I wore the same helmet that I was given to riding competitions with wakeboarding, took the same helmet with me. The thing just annoyed me. I just hated wearing it. It was uncomfortable. It bounced around because your head moves. It changes a lot at different temperatures and the way that you use it. For me and the gloves and the goggles, I'd just never been more annoyed by it.

It got to the point where I guess the bravado of being a 17-year-old man or boy and thinking I was a bit better than I was... And I was in New Zealand; took the helmet off; thought I was pretty cool. I was really comfortable then and then had a pretty hard crash. Not long after that, I realized how dumb it was to not wear a helmet but also realized how much I didn't want to wear one and had a bit of a look around and realized that everyone who wasn't wearing a helmet wore a beanie. Even a lot of people who were wearing helmets wore beanies anyway. We then had a bit of a look at the way that helmet technology had been going. Quite sadly, for a long time, it hadn't really changed as much.

We thought, "Well, instead of trying to make a helmet more comfortable, why don't we make a beanie more safe and come at it from that angle?" I was 20 at the time when we first started.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Wow.

**Rob Joseph:**

It was something that took a long time. We thought it was going to be much easier. I remember it was January. We kicked it all off. I said, "Oh, we'll have samples by May." We had samples by May four years later. But we had to invent a lot of stuff to make it happen. It doesn't work anywhere near what a traditional helmet does underneath. It's groundbreaking in a lot of ways, and I'm really proud of it. But it did take a long time to get there. Now, we're here. We're happy with the way it fits and feels and looks. The safety itself speaks for itself. It's better than any other drop test results we've ever seen from any other helmet.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's amazing. Rob, I started skiing. I'm quite a bit older than you. I started skiing before we wore helmets. We didn't wear helmets skiing. Then, when I introduced my kids to skiing, they had to wear a helmet. Then, one day, my husband said, "Hey, you're making the kids wear helmets. Why aren't you wearing one?" It's like, "Whoa! Because it's ugly, and it'll mess up my hair." But I finally succumbed to wearing a helmet too. But I hated every minute of it. I'm excited to try out the Anti-ordinary process. A bit ago, you gave us just a glimpse into the process. You started when you were 20. It took a little bit longer than you thought. But can you give us a bit more? What has it taken to get the product to this point?

**Rob Joseph:**

Yeah. It's been quite an incredible journey: one, manufacturing just generally but, two, manufacturing something that's so new and so different. The original concept was a non-Newtonian material, which starts off soft and turns hard when you impact it. We wanted to build a whole helmet out of that. There's a way that you could home-make some non-Newtonian material. It's cornstarch and water. I

remember making some of that up and running around and getting my sister to hit me. It worked, and it was good enough. My sister and everyone seems to love that part of the process where they just smack me over the head. We started to realize it would work. We went through this big design process of just using just non-Newtonian materials.

Then, we realized it was going to be too heavy. The safety element was going to be a little bit interesting and very different in a lot of regards. Just building a unit that could be impenetrable as well by sharp objects was really tough with just non-Newtonian materials. On top of that, a really interesting part of the process is finding a manufacturer. We tried really hard to build in Australia. We just couldn't get anyone to take the job. We had money in our pocket, ready to go, at the time. We went to the manufacturers in China. Most helmets come out of the same four factories or three factories in China over there. All the big brands that you know and love come from the same factories that pretty much other ones come out of. We went to them and said, "Hey, can you build this?" They go, "No, absolutely not."

**Lyn Wineman:**

Wow.

**Rob Joseph:**

We go, "Oh, no! It's a bit of an issue." We did a Kickstarter well after this. We decided all that. We went and spoke to the factories and said, "Okay. What can you build?" We had to make a decision as to whether we went with a manufacturer who could build the things we were looking to build with or we went with a helmet manufacturer who couldn't. We decided to go with the helmet manufacturer because they had all the expertise, all the drop-testing rigs, all the engineers who had been building every helmet in the world for the last 30 years. We thought, "Well, it's better to stay with the expertise." What we had to do was then adapt the design into something they could build. It became complex. From an engineering perspective, it was quite the feat to get it to where it ended up being. But we got there.

Now, from the non-Newtonian prototypes we had, the unit we have now, which is a little bit more plastic-y, slightly more rigid... But in terms of the fit and feel on the head, it's better. In terms of safety, it's much better as well and looks very much the same. That's part of the process. It took the best part of three or four years to get that right because it's easy to build something that moves and is flexible. It's easy to build something that's safe. But combining the two is really tough in such a way that it's safe enough to go on people's heads. The thing we always started off with was that it could never be unsafe. Safety had to be paramount. But we had to find a way to make that work with the flexibility and the way we wanted them to look and that kind of thing. It was really complex. Then, of course, COVID hit.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Changed everything for all of us. Yeah.

**Rob Joseph:**

Everything. We were in China, actually. We were in the airport the same day as the first Australian COVID case.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Whoa!

**Rob Joseph:**

We somehow missed it. It was in March. We had no idea what was going on. We both came home and just continued living our lives. It could have been really scary and was really scary. But the thing was is 'cause we were manufacturing in China and doing all this prototyping. Normally, we'd just go there and look at it. They'd make a design change. We'd go through. We'd test it. We'd check it out. It would break. We'd fix it, and that would be fine. But because we couldn't get to China, and we're all locked down, they'd build it, test it, and then send us photos and videos. Then, they'd send us the unit over. We'd inspect it, have to look at it, then send it back. It turned what was a two or three-day process into four or five weeks. We had to make countless changes throughout that process.

It was brutal, honestly. From that time, from a business perspective as well, investment was impossible to get, particularly for a snow sports company from the hot part of Australia. It was a real bunk-down type situation. But we made it through. We kept persisting. Then, it got to the stage where the final prototypes came out, and they were great. Now, we've done our first couple of runs. The first Australian run sold out very fast. The American run's done the same. We're delivering Kickstarter units as well at the same time, which is good too. It's just at the point now where we're really happy. It's been six years, and it's felt like six years as well.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Wow. Wow. Rob, I hope you're documenting this because I've recently read the book *Shoe Dog*, which is the... I don't know if you've read it. It's the Phil Knight and Nike story. But there seem to be some parallels, the rubber and the waffle iron and your sister hitting you over the head. I think there's some parallels. Someday I want to read your book. I hope you'll ping me when it's available. Rob, what was the most surprising part of that journey that you went through? Was it the time? Was it COVID? Was it the manufacturing? I'm sure there are so many things.

**Rob Joseph:**

So many things. So many things. There's been so many things that have been just wild. I never thought manufacturing something would be so difficult and change so much, the little fiddly things. But I guess one of the biggest, surprising things is just our ability to do it, I guess. I mean, for me, I'm a boy from Brisbane. I got kicked out of university while I started this company because I didn't do enough classes in time. I'm most of an engineer, officially. But now, I'm here in America. I'm meeting just the most incredible people. I'm worlds away from where I was. We've built the best ski helmet in the world.

I suppose that's the most surprising thing for us: is just the ability that with a lot of persistence and a lot of hard work, we were able to do it, and something that people said was impossible... I got an email this morning saying, "Hey, you guys are scammers. This can't be true." You go, "I'll send you one," because it's real. I guess that's the surprising thing. We meet a lot of people on the journey, a lot of startups and founders. They mimic a similar thing. It's similar to the *Shoe Dog* thing. Not to compare myself to Phil Knight, of course. Would be good one day. But just the impossibility of everything that people perceive is not necessarily correct. If you want, persevere, and everything's possible, I suppose.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I do think perseverance at all costs is the story of the entrepreneur, I believe. I hear that in your story as well. You started in Australia. You do some work in the States. You're manufacturing in China. How has that distance and that travel impacted the process also?

**Rob Joseph:**

In a lot of ways, Brisbane, Australia, or Queensland, Australia, is a great place to start a business. The people are friendly. We know it well. The networks are quite easy to tap into. It's a great community there. It's quite similar. Access to capital is tough in Australia, particularly for a company like ours. Early-stage hardware company, first-time founders in an industry that people are aware of but don't realize is 17 billion wide and then 42 billion wide for cycle helmets. That convincing is really hard. In America, people just get it. You put their helmet on people's heads, and they go, "Oh, I get it," whereas, in Australia, they go, "Oh, this is an interesting product. But don't really..." There's a lot of benefits to being in both places and in China as well.

Time zones are tough. Having calls at 3:00 in the morning back home in Australia, and then staying up until midnight to catch up with Australia when you're over here, and then China being two hours different to the Australian time zone too.

Also, one of the biggest, I guess, steps in all of it for me was the volume of money and people out here. Australia is as big in terms of surface area as America is from Mexico to Canada. They're pretty comparable in terms of size. But Australia has the equivalent of something like three and a half New York cities. Just the volume of people and money and accessibility and sport and that kind of thing... There's probably more people in a bar or resort than there are that ski in Australia on any given day. That's one of the biggest adaptations. Sometimes Australians tend to go be a bit more modest. We like modest people in Australia. We like our athletes modest, that kind of thing. You come to America to go, "No, this could be a billion-dollar company." You go, "Yeah, it could." You go, "Great." We all believe this. "Yeah, I don't have to see it."

**Lyn Wineman:**

People nod their heads and say yes. Yeah. The big dream.

**Rob Joseph:**

"Show me the numbers." You show them the numbers. They say, "Yeah, great. That works."

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's awesome.

**Rob Joseph:**

Exactly. Dream a bit bigger. That scale and the size of money here is a big adaptation. But it's a fun one.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Absolutely. Absolutely. I saw on your website and, I think, on the box also for the helmet that sustainability has been a consideration in your journey. Can you talk a bit more about that?

**Rob Joseph:**

Yeah. Absolutely. I think it's really important. For companies in this day and age, I'm sure... You know, with all your experience, for companies, it's really hard to backtrack in sustainability and equality and those kind of things. For a big company, if you're going to give up 10% of your revenue for equality or environmental purposes, what 10% of your staff are cutting, or what 10% of your costs are you cutting? It's really hard. But as a startup in this day and age, we're really lucky that we get to build a business and revenue and income streams around doing the right thing. We can present that to investors and go,

"Hey, this is great." For us, doing the right thing has always been paramount. Anti Ordinary... We want to be a good company that people are proud to work for and to ride in and wear the shirt.

For us, when we're looking at helmets, helmets, unfortunately... They're built with materials that aren't... They don't break down. A lot of long-chain polymers. It's tough. But they're all totally recyclable. We knew that we couldn't build the thing we wanted to build if we wanted to build products that break down naturally. It's just currently not possible from a technology perspective. But we can recycle them and go, "Great. We won't focus on the materials so much. We'll focus on what we do with them directly afterwards." Our goal is to recycle as many helmets as we sell. We can tie that into a great campaign because, luckily, our market is very socially eco-conscious.

We're a direct-to-consumer company. Our helmets fit everyone. They show up, and they just fit. We can sell online, which allows us to keep a bit of margin in that, that we can go, "Hey, we can give you a bit of money if you send us a helmet. We'll recycle it for you. Then, you'll get a bit of cost off of one of ours." That attracts new customers. It brings the old customers back. It's a business model that can't really be replicated by other big incumbent companies because that's part of the revenue they just couldn't make back up.

But for us... We can do that. We've built that into our model of... "Hey, this is a good thing." But also, it can help us attract new customers, can keep old ones, as well as doing the right thing for all of us. It allows our company to offset the thing that we do to a point where we can make a material that's a little bit more environmentally friendly. But until then, we can use the labor. One day, the dream is to have it come full circle where we have enough material for recycling helmets that we can then build something else, be it sunglasses or goggles or something. We keep it all in-house. We create another product stream out of entirely recycled products. That's the dream.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I like the way you dream, Rob. That is a really exciting dream and sounds like a very smart marketing strategy as well. For our snowboarders and skiers out there, or just anybody who's listening and goes, "Wow, this is really interesting," how do they find the product?

**Rob Joseph:**

Www.antiordinary.co is our website. That's the easiest way. There's a place to sign up, there's a place you can buy them. We're just about all sold out for this season anyway. We always love interacting and people with cool ideas and people who want to represent or take photos or something. We always are going to collaborate and chat to cool people. I'd love for people to reach out.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Fantastic. We will get that in the show notes on the KidGlov website, too, in case anybody didn't get it. But it is .co and not .com. We make sure we get you there as well. All right. Rob, I'm going to ask you a totally different question now. It's actually my favorite question because people who listen to the podcast know that I am inspired by motivational quotes. You are a motivational and inspiring guy with an inspiring story. Can you give us an original Anti-ordinary quote for our listeners?

**Rob Joseph:**

I'm not sure if it's original. But I've been saying this for a while. I don't know if it's popped into my head, or I've heard it somewhere and coined it as my own. But I think one of it is "luck is made, and serendipity is found."

**Lyn Wineman:**

Ooh.

**Rob Joseph:**

You get a lot of people... And you get to a certain point of doing this stuff. They go, "Oh, you're so lucky." Yeah, but I've worked for all this. I wasn't lucky on my couch when I was there six years ago. You go out and get it. I think luck is very much a productive risk and effort. You've got to be willing to go out there and risk it all and put all the effort in. Same as serendipity. You don't get serendipity sitting on the couch. You've got to get up and find it. The more you get up there, the more you try, the more effort you put in, the more you risk, the more you find these lucky things. That's been a common theme throughout my entire journey so far and something I'm really grateful for.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That is so good. "Luck is made. Serendipity is found." Right?

**Rob Joseph:**

That's it.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Luck is made. Serendipity is found. I like that because I bet anybody who says you're lucky doesn't know how many late nights, early mornings, long flights, financial risks, personal risks... all the things, all the things that go into it. I appreciate you for that. Rob, I have loved meeting you. I've loved getting to talk with you and to see your product. As we wrap up our time together today, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

**Rob Joseph:**

Look after your brain and look after your friends' brains. We know a lot more now about the way that these brain injuries and even the small impacts affect us later on. For a long time, we've always thought, "Hey, this CTE thing..." Or an athlete gets a little bit older, and you start getting a little bit sad, a little bit quieter. But keep an eye on your friends. It could be the effects of a degenerative brain disease that we get from impacting our heads in these sports. It's inevitable. Doesn't matter if you're playing football, soccer, rugby, snowboarding, running motorbikes. It's inevitable. But the more we talk about it, the more we can fix it, the more we can be aware of it, and the safer all of us and our friends' brains are going to be.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That is profound. Look after your friends' brains. That should be a new mantra for everyone. Rob, I fully believe the world needs more people like you, more companies like Anti Ordinary. Thank you for taking time to share with us today.

**Rob Joseph:**

My pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

**Announcer:**



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