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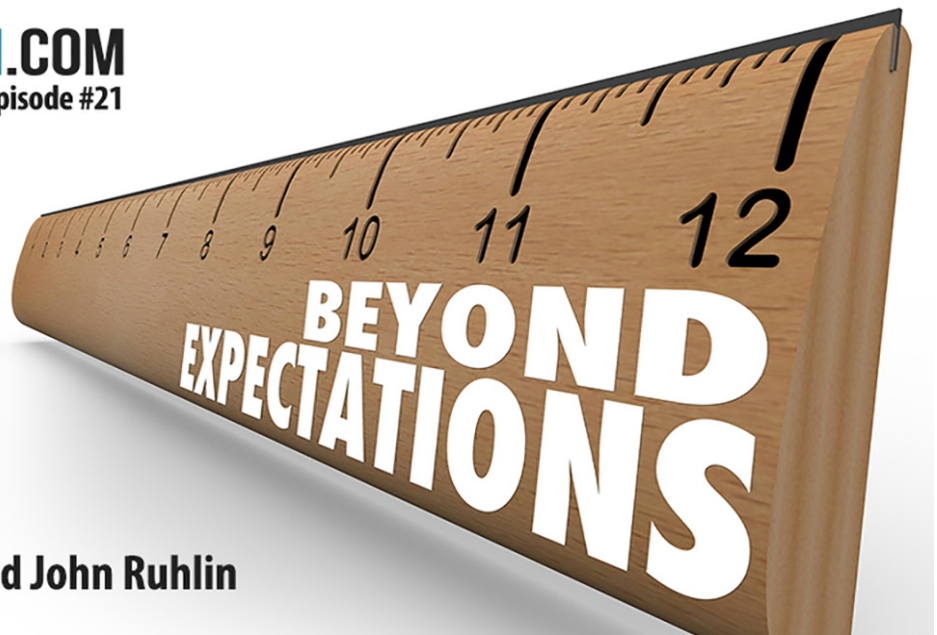
ACCELERATING ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS PODCAST

EPIISODE
21

John Ruhlin

Show Notes at: <http://www.aesnation.com/21>

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Episode #21



John Bowen and John Ruhlin

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Best of success,



John Bowen
Co-founder, AES Nation

John Bowen: As entrepreneurs, we have to provide leadership. We are driven individuals. We're so driven that oftentimes we don't appreciate everyone around us, those key people who are making a difference, our clients, our employees, our teammates. Well, in this podcast, you're going to learn how you can do it and do it in a way that's extremely effective where you can make a big difference. Stay tuned!

John Ruhlin, I am so happy to have you here today. I've had so many of your buddies and good friends and clients tell me how talented you are and you've blown me away with some of the things that you've done and kind of setting the stage for us to get to know each other better. Now I wanted to immediately share you with some of the successful entrepreneurs I hang out with here at Accelerating Entrepreneurial Success.

John Ruhlin: Thank you for having me.

Bowen: Well John, what it is that you do that you help entrepreneurs really build solid relationships with their teammates, their clients, their friends?

Ruhlin: As a business, any successful business has key stakeholders, key relationships, suppliers, vendors, employees, and most leaders... 80% of the world out there is Type A men. That they might be really good at finances or they might be really good at logistics, but if you ask them or their spouse what they're weakest at? Most of the time, it's being a thoughtful giver. We're not wired to be appreciative and most of the world walks around pretty unappreciated. But we do hope feel like we have time to do so and so we essentially teach CEO's, leaders at professional sport scenes, anybody that's dealing with more affluent, B2B type relationships, we teach what we call Appreciative Leadership which is really just a fancy way of saying we teach people how to deepen relationships, leveraging tangible, physical gifting.

Bowen: As entrepreneurs we got to do two things really well. We got to deliver great experience so we build a strong relationship. And the second is you got to have more people to raise their hand to explore working with us. And really what you're teaching does both.

Ruhlin: Absolutely. I think that in business today, everybody's been kind of conditioned to do the same dog and pony show, it's the same travel and entertainment. We do a trade show. We do a dinner at Morton's. We do around the golf. We go hunting. It's all very much the same vanilla. Nothing wrong with any of those experiences except that everybody does them. So if you do really want to stand out and make somebody feel VIP and special, it can be very difficult because we've all been trained to do things the same way.

Bowen: How do you teach entrepreneurs to be able to deliver a world class client experience or customer experience that really shows that appreciation and then what kind of return on investment is it other than a feel good thing?

Ruhlin: Yeah, if you look at some of the best brands in the world, the Ritz-Carlton's or the areas that they focus on are the little details and I think that the reason why you want to spend \$400 a night for a hotel versus a hundred dollars at the Holiday Inn... they both have four walls, they both have a bed... it's all the little things that make you pay 400% more for basically a very similar core structure. And so I think that from an ROI perspective, people spend a lot of money when there's trust involved, when they feel VIP. We're all emotional beings. And yet it can be very easy to treat a business relationship like a transaction and none of us want to have our products purchased like a commodity and yet very much so, we treat that person or that relationship like a transaction. So I think the ROI, I can share many stories of our clients being able to land their whale, their dream client or a meeting that they have tried for a year or two to land, all around the concept of doing this high level, what we call strategic appreciation the right way.

Bowen: One of the segments is a whole concept that life intrudes, that none of us get out of life unscarred. Was there a moment that it was a little scarring along the way that this became clear to you and lessons learned?

Ruhlin: Yeah, any entrepreneur that's been doing things for a while has multiple scars or scar stories. My first was I started a business so I could go at Ford Med School. But unfortunately it was a blue-collar type physician making 40 hours an hour, climbing poles and ladders and I fell off the ladder two times. I got lucky that I didn't kill myself both times. But I ended up interning with a company and I was scrambling to just make the ends meet in college, and I fortunately interned with a company called CUTCO, the knives that your wife so eloquently was impressed by.

Bowen: She was impressed, definitely.

Ruhlin: Yeah, and so fortunately... I was of low point because I was like, "I'm not going to be able to afford school. I have to drop out." I grew up a poor farmer's kid, got straight A's but I had to pay for school on my own. And so that tenacity to find a way led me to go sell knives door to door for this direct sales company and really led me to the idea of inventing a corporate gifting program for them and I sought advice from my girlfriend's dad at that time who was an attorney and a lot of the principles I teach were born out of that struggle. I was able to build a relationship with him and he was the attorney who made all of his money off of non-attorney related things because he was always giving away and everybody always took his phone call and everybody was keen to their idea because Paul was such a giver. And so a lot of what I

teach was modeled 14 years ago for me, you know this poor farmer's kid in college just trying to make ends meet.

Bowen: Out of those survival mode, a lot of times things just appear and sometimes we got to be hit alongside the head a few times before they become crystal clear. But the market is great at telling us. What are you working on now John that you're really passionate about?

Ruhlin: Well, I think one of the things I've realized in working with all these different industries is just how little there is a strategy being put to appreciation. I know working with a number of financial advisors and other entrepreneurs that have fast growth and I think a lot of times people want to check a box once a year and send a David's box or some wine of the month club or something.

And I've realized that we kind of fell into the trap of just helping people with whatever they were willing to spend on gifting and not really saying, redirecting their travel and entertainment budget, their marketing budgets and getting them to think holistically 365 about a real plan and so our pros sports team clients, we're getting them to think more year round about the appreciation and really kind of put into place. a lot of people have heard of the drip campaign; Chet Holmes has a great concept. We basically have taken that Chet Holmes concept except and say that being a trinket, we've made it to become a world class personalized type gifts. So whether you're going after your Dream 100 prospects or whether you're taking care of your Dream 100, your current clients. We really have a more holistic client so it's not a once a year tight thought process but a year round type program.

Bowen: I'm going to tell you the truth here, just you and me and a few thousand other friends, I haven't been very strategic. I think I'm pretty representative, I've worked with a lot of entrepreneurs and that's why it really resonated with me is that what we most often do is, it's Christmas, the holiday season's coming up and what are we going to send this year? And aah, okay who's the most caring of our group? Come up with something, saying "This is a dollar amount, go do it."

Ruhlin: Yeah, the idea you talked about, lifetime value? And I always encourage people to say what's the current value of that relationship and in a perfect world, what could it be? And I think a lot of times we've been successful in spite of ourselves and we may have gotten 10 or 20% of the value of the relationship based upon not pouring more back into it. So I kind of view it that 10x principle of what you reap, you sow.

And I think that in a lot of relationships, we're not selling enough appreciation and good seeds back into our current relationships so maybe they're a hundred-thousand-dollar client but if you look at their network and their circles and just that person as a whole, we all have had game changing clients where we thought they were a million-dollar client and all of a sudden

they became a five-million-dollar client. I think we just get people to understand, if you're profiting \$100,000 on a client, why would you reinvest 2-5% back into that relationship? One, just to solidify that your current business with them but also to inspire them to do more business with you and to refer you, what would that do to your business? We're not trying to get people just to spend money just to be cool. It really is an investment in that relationship.

Bowen: How would you recommend to an entrepreneur who's thinking about doing this. How do they do that? Because this is something that we all talk about. We kind of in the back of our mind know we should do it but we're not doing it.

Ruhlin: Well, I think just like anything else, outsourcing it is one of the easiest ways to handle that but there are some core questions that you should be asking yourself. We think that there are 16 core questions but ask yourself, "Is the gift reaching their inner circle?" So many of the people that we're doing business with, you for instance, you golf the nicest golf courses. You get access to nice food, nicest hotels. To get your attention is very difficult. So I'm not going to target you. I'm going to target your assistant, your wife, and your kids because those are three people that in your world, if I make you look cool to them and take care of them, it's a game changer. Cameron Herold's a business coach and world renowned expert, his wife has become my best salesperson. She's talking about me at least once a day because I send things that are related to her, not to him. Because he's getting bottles of scotch [distorted] I take care of her with things and so I think taking care of the inner circle.

The second thing, most of us, switching the financial advisor world, we have custom monogram shirts that we wear, vanity plates, everything's personalized and then it comes the time to send a gift? And we send the most generic gift on the planet that doesn't have their name on, our logo the size of a softball on the chest or in the front of it, make the gift all about the recipient. I was recently interviewing with somebody and they said, "John you got to go check out Bob's used watches down in Florida and it had a bunch of Rolex's that had been turned in and traded in. You'd think why would somebody trade in a Rolex that they got from a company? Well, the one detail that they got wrong was on this right Air-King, right face of this Air-King, Domino's put their logo on the face of it and give it out to their franchisees. Even if you work for the company, you don't want your brand smacked in the middle of it. And so that one detail was completely wrong.

Make the gift. Is it a promo that you're hanging out at a trade show? Or is this a gift? The gift all about the recipient, it's a game changer.

Bowen: What else jumps out at you John?

Ruhlin: Well I think that so many people default to consumables and so you measure cost per impression in almost area of your marketing and on the planet, whether it's Facebook ads

or whether it's billboard and say, "How many impressions am I going to get?" And then it comes to buy a gift for somebody and you buy something that lasts for a day or five minutes or a week. I'll bet it was only \$50. It was only a hundred bucks for that bottle of wine or whatever else and it's consumed in minutes and so we try to think of things that are used daily, knives, whether people entertain or whether they're a foodie, the reason it's cool and the reason it works is one, you've probably never received knives as gifts. But two is, it sticks around.

Bowen: Well you can't throw them out. You just can't, They'll never be thrown out. It's not going to happen.

Ruhlin: No, and it didn't have my brand anywhere. I made it all about you and your wife and you didn't tell me what your wife's name was, with a little bit of research, I can find out wives' names, kids' names, not to be creepy or stalker, but these are the most valuable relationships, why would you not do the extra steps or research? You can delegate it to somebody over in India if you really wanted to. That information's out there and so whether we're taking care of somebody's thousand best relationships or just ten, that extra personalization, research, finding things that are used daily...

So I actually measure the cost per impression and you'll have it for the next twenty, thirty, forty years. That's a pretty good way to stay top of mind. Because there's so much noise, especially digital noise? Cutting through the clutter and being able to really like stay top of mind. That's really at the end of the day we all want people to remember us on a regular basis and they can refer us business so that they will do business with us so our name gets brought up at cocktail parties at their most intimate conversations. And frankly, the knives' work is most people are eating food, somewhere in their kitchen and knives just so happened to get brought up at pretty much every family gathering on the planet.

Bowen: You're talking about cutting through the noise in the marketplace; the average successful family is getting over 4,000 marketing messages a day.

Ruhlin: Whatever you're going to do, whether if it's a coffee mug or whether it's a set of knives or whatever, make it the best. A lot of people go middle of the road with whatever they do and they think it's good enough so if I get a coffee mug which I don't, because I think it's a little tacky, but if I gave out one, it would be a \$50-mug. It would be the best coffee mug on the planet. I think taking that mindset of... instead of what is the cheapest I can get by with, say, what's the most I could possibly spend on this? Like our business cards, we spend \$3. Our letterhead that I sent you that you commented on, that's 8 bucks. People think that's insane, but relative to a \$20-brochure, an \$8-piece of letterhead is one of the best investments I made.

Bowen: You're a little bit of a road warrior out there helping all these entrepreneurs, what's the app that you would recommend?

Ruhlin: Well, I've dropped 40 pounds in the last 8 months and one of the way is when I'm on the road, finding a healthy place that's in every city that's quick and easy to eat is pretty difficult and so I'm a big fan of Tim Ferris and his 4-hour body and so yeah this low carb diet, which many people are avoiding carbs. That's the cool thing. Avoid gluten and all that kind of stuff so I'm on that bandwagon. So I use Chipotle.

Bowen: So how do you use this app?

Ruhlin: I'm able to skip the line and I'm able to get my six or seven-dollar burrito with no rice and all that other kind of stuff. And literally, 30 seconds versus waiting for 30 minutes. So it's literally saved me an enormous amount of time. Sounds pretty cheesy for that to be one of my favorite apps, but on the road, it's been a lifesaver.

Bowen: The Book of the Day, what would you recommend?

Ruhlin: One of my favorite books, at least as of recently that I just finished is a book called *Give and Take* by Adam Grant. It basically segments and gives research...Adam's I think the youngest 10-year professor at Wharton. And he essentially has broken people down into givers, takers, or matchers. And I'm sure a lot of people that are on your show would consider themselves a giver. And it essentially talks about givers either at the top of their class, whether they're a doctor, a lawyer, or the bottom. And a few minor details of how they interact with the world determine whether you're a winner as a giver or whether you're a loser as a giver. And it gives multiple case studies. It's just a... it took me literally a day to read. It was one of those kinds of books you can't put down.

Bowen: I will put you on the spot on this next segment. This is what we call the Entrepreneurial Insight of the Day. What's the one thing you would share with your peers, your other successful entrepreneurs, that they could really make a big difference with?

Ruhlin: I think that oftentimes in gifting and a lot of what we do, people hear of the \$3-business card or the \$8 card, they think that to spend more money that's a matter of "when I'm successful then I can afford to spend those sorts of things" and I think a common thread that goes through all of our strategies is, whatever everybody else is doing, do the exact opposite. And it's such a simple "aha," "duh" type thing but most of the time when we work with a client, they're not spending more money, they're actually spending less. It's easy. Nobody gets fired for hiring IBM or nobody gets fired for spending a million dollars on a trade show, but imagine if you're able to redirect that million dollars to your most important

relationships? What will that look like? And how would that change your business? Or even half of it.

A lot of times when they say, cut whatever your budget is in half and let's redirect the portion towards those key relationships, those people that you want to have key relationships with. And it's amazing what takes place when you do the opposite or whatever in your industry is doing.

Bowen: John, I want to go over my notes here and I want to share with my fellow entrepreneurs so they can see not only that I was paying attention but more importantly, what you can take back to your group and really share with them so you can execute and have even more success.

Number one, I'm going to use the word, appreciative. We want to be more appreciative and we want to be in a thoughtful but systemic process so that we're looking big picture. That was number one.

Number two is the inner circle. So often, I'm focused on the key decision makers but they're surrounded by teammates, assistants, family members, and so on. And oftentimes, it's a little easier to get to the other people and make a big impression. So the inner circle, the importance of that.

And then make it the best. It's one that so many of us as entrepreneurs say but we don't always do. And we certainly don't do it when we're showing appreciation.

So how did I do on that John? Was I paying attention along the way here?

Ruhlin: Absolutely. Impressively, because a lot of times people completely miss the mark.

Bowen: I just want to encourage everybody. We're working so hard to differentiate ourselves, get out of the noise in the marketplace and these are some really pretty easy things we can do and we can do them systemically and be thoughtful about it and really make a difference. Tell us what resources are available to our fellow like mind entrepreneurs, both of your sites.

Ruhlin: RuhlinGroup.com is basically focused people that really want to execute a gifting program. They've heard it and they're like Yes, I want to do this, but I don't have the bandwidth or I do not know how; whereas [JohnRuhlin](http://JohnRuhlin.com) is more focused on, as more of a teaching resource and so it's more focused on my speaking and consulting and some of the strategies that we put in place. At the very end of the day, the gifts without the strategies, don't really make a huge impact. So one is more education-focused. One is more execution-focused.

Bowen: Make sure to share this with your friends. The transcript's available at [AESNation.com](http://www.aesnation.com) as well as all the links that John talked about. John, thanks again for sharing the insights and being out there and really making a difference.

Ruhlin: Thanks for having me. Tell Jean I look forward to meeting her.

Bowen: And she does you as well. In the meantime, all our fellow entrepreneurs, let's go out and make a difference. Your clients, your customers, and all those future clients and customers, they're counting on you. Don't let them down. Wish you the best of success!

A Second Opinion on Your Finances

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John Bowen
Founder and CEO
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