



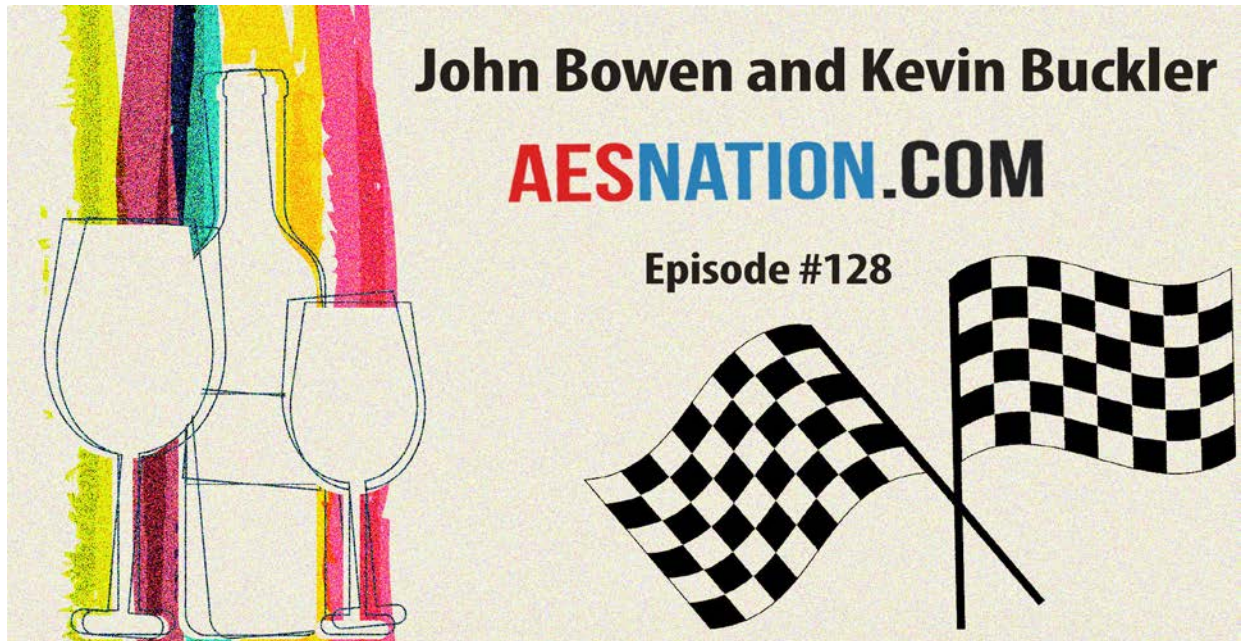
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ACCELERATING ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS PODCAST

EPISODE
128

Kevin Buckler

Show Notes at: <http://www.aesnation.com/128>



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Best of success,



John Bowen
Co-founder, AES Nation

John Bowen: Wow. As entrepreneurs, we want to make a difference. We want to work in areas that we are really passionate about. I have someone today who is a remarkable entrepreneur. Not only is he a phenomenal entrepreneur, but he's a phenomenal entrepreneur in two areas that most of us, most guys and many gals love, racing cars and fine wine. He puts them together in an amazing way, but he didn't start there. I've asked him to share with us today some lessons learned from where he got started to where he is today, because it's amazing. You do not want to miss this remarkable entrepreneurs and the lessons that will be learned.

Kevin, I am so excited to have you here. You are an amazing entrepreneur. I have so many friends that have tried to do what you've done and you have blown it out. Thank you for making time for us today.

Kevin Buckler: Thank you John, it's an honor to be on. Really eager to be able to share some of our challenges and lessons and be part of your world.

John: We've so many entrepreneurs that want to learn. What we really want to do is build great businesses that support a high quality of life. You and I met an event that was a high quality of life that you specialized. I went with one of the magazine, car magazines, Auto Week. I was up in Sonoma and had a chance to act as one of their advisors. There's 20 of us readers, avid readers that were invited up to test drive cars. It was a great experience. One of the highlights was coming over to your company, TRG, The Racing Group to have dinner. I thought, jeez, a racing team in Sonoma. Not only did you have a racing team but you had a winery.

We all had a fantastic event. You had some of the best looking race cars that I've ever seen in my life. Then I got to check to see how well they've done. Kevin, there's so many lessons, I had the opportunity to sit next to you at dinner. Just so many things you were able to share with the group that I had the chance to talk with you about it. That's why I wanted to have you on here. Before we get in there, give us a little of the back story, that journey. Normally I'll start out and say at 5 you didn't wake up and say you wanted to drive race cars, but maybe you did.

Kevin: Yeah, it's funny, but thanks John. Indeed, I think like a lot of people, we started chasing a dream and found about halfway through that maybe wasn't a dream that I wanted. I was working very hard in a real estate development company that I started and it grew very fast and we were successful. I just wasn't happy. About the same time I was really realizing this, I tragically lost a dear friend and my mom at the same time. It was a little bit of a real wake up call. I said, do I want to be in this exact same position in 10 years if I'm not happy? I can change it, I'm the only one that can change it. Crying on the couch is not an option. I use that a lot with my kids.

I decided if I ever worked this hard again, I want to do it with something I love and around people I like, so the two things I really cared about motor sports racing and also wine. I grew up in Southern California as a Southern California car culture kid. I was a jock and played tennis and surfed and did all sorts of fun stuff I guess. The one thing is when those two things struck and I was going to strike out on my own with this business, we sold the company and we are able to move back to California in the early 90s. I chased it, and it took 25 years. My joke about it takes 25 years to be an overnight sensation, it sure has been that way both with the race team and a little bit with the winery.

John: It is. You go to your place, Kevin, and it's pretty spectacular, TRG, The Racing Group. I don't know how many cars you had in that night, but all of us know the car, recognized it right away from James Bond movie, Aston Martin. We can see, if you're watching it on video. Definitely if you are listening to this on the podcast you're going to want to go to AESnation.com to get all of the links and see all of the things we're going to talk about. Motor sports are definitely a visual. Sound is good, but the cars were just amazing. I was surprised. I'm a guy who follows racing a bit. I'm not a die-hard fan, but I love it and I make time to do it each year to go out to some of the big events and so on. I always thought these were all company teams. What are these cars doing here at this place? How did that evolve?

Kevin: Yeah. A lot of times, sports car racing first of all is what we specialize in, which is recognizable cars. They look like a BMW or a McLaren or a Ferrari or a Porsche, in our case now an Aston Martin. We run the Aston Martin racing division for North America and a lot of the other tasks and assignments that are associated with that. We buy and race our own cars here in the US. We do that for clients as well who we supply all the technology in the infrastructure for them to go racing. We also support other teams, teams that buy these cars and the way they live in Chicago and New York and they need a little technical support from us.

What's really happened is we're in a magic moment right now, that's what I like to say, in time with sports car racing. It's always nice if in once in a while you happen to be in the right place at the right time. In this case it wasn't lucky, we just worked really hard, and finally looking through the fence for years at NASCAR or Indie car, sports car racing has become relevant. There's a lot of manufacturer support. You see a lot of money coming into this support from the big manufacturers, and also it's popular. A lot of fans, a lot of people, our brand is popular.

What's been happening with us the last couple years, we've been doing a ton, like with you, a ton of really cool entertainment, relationship marketing, corporate hospitality events. I'm honored, I'm happy, I'm also giggling a little bit because watching us steal away some of the business from say golf or tennis or stick and ball sports and do it around something that people so much love to be involved in, a day of driving at the race track followed by a cool epic wine dinner. Like you said, people come to our facility and they're like, what the heck?

We're going to a race shop for dinner? They walk in and they're like, wait a minute, it's cool. It's quite different.

Most of all of your viewers and listeners and the entrepreneurs out there, everyone can probably choose to go dine anywhere they want. We try to offer a very unique experience if we do it here. If we're not doing it here, we're doing it on the road. We try to do the same type of thing in a setting that will be memorable. The one thing, I know it's a big part with you guys too, we always try to over-deliver.

John: You did that night. That's one of the reasons why I wanted to reach out to you. I thought, okay, I'm in Sonoma. This is Napa, Sonoma. For everybody that's not real familiar, if you ever drank wine, chances are it came from one of these two premier areas. We're going to a race car shop type thing. I haven't gone to too many of those. In Sonoma, I don't think you've got a lot of competition there probably. Then we're having dinner and it was a great event and everybody enjoyed really seeing all the cars and so on.

Then you bring out the wine, and I'm used to going out to a lot of events. I put on a lot of events. You and I, we want to make sure we get to this. For entertaining, the opportunity for connections, the connections I walked out of the dinner there, and I was just a guest, were just unbelievably powerful. Certainly for Auto Week it was a home run. I was talking with the publisher sitting at our table too Kevin, he just told me it was amazing. You poured some great wine. A matter of fact, I had to wrestle some of your best wine away from you. You have 15 wines I think, over 90 on Wine Spectator. These were phenomenal wines. It was just an unbelievable evening.

Kevin: Yeah. The fun part is that it's imperative to us that both businesses are operating at a high level. It would be a shame to have one of them be successful and try to work with the other one and have to prop it up or make apologies. It's also really important to me, we are big guys in the world, and we're little guys in the wine world. I'm really proud of our small brand. When I stand up in front of a group here or at a Ritz Carlton in Florida or at a big event in New York and I'm the one tapping the glass and telling the stories, I'm genuine. I want to make sure I'm telling the story correctly and that I believe in what we're doing, super important to me. The wines have to deliver or people are going to call BS and they're going to say wasn't that great, wasn't that good.

What I like too, it's a little bit of a kick is a lot of times people will take a sip, listen to what you're saying and they'll say, wow, that's really good. What I always laugh about, they're saying I didn't really expect that, I thought you were the racer guy. We work equally hard on both businesses. In the end of the day we're the big guys in the racing world and we're little guys in the wine world. Again, I'm proud of our small boutique brand.

John: Let's go to that Kevin, you really have gotten an awful lot of acknowledgment on the wine side, but there's no shortages of wins and successes on the racing side too. That's one of the reasons why you've been able to build this great company. Why don't you share some of that as well, and then we'll go into the lessons learned?

Kevin: Sure. When we started racing in the early 90s, I was our test dummy. We were a parts company making competition parts. I was basically spec'ing everything and building it and checking it out on my own cars, or any of my poor friends I tried to try it out on. It hit pretty quick. We had a lot of really good ideas on engineering services. Our company grew, we were at this point describing what we do. We were a multifaceted motor sports operation at that time centering mostly around Porsche. We were parts, we were service. Someone might give us their car and say work on my car, we'd build a car.

Then we started a lot of what today has turned into a lot of our entertainment site is we did a lot arrive and drive services. Somebody would say hey, I want to race with you guys in Sebring, Florida, or Watkins Glen, New York, but I'm not going to drive all the way back there, I'm too busy. We put all the cars on the trailer and load them up and take them back there and have a great weekend with these guys. Again, that grew. I was our professional driver for a long time. 7 years of learning in the beginning, building our brand after we finally moved up here to the racetrack area, we were at Sonoma Raceway from 95. We were in Monterey for 3 years. 95 to 2004 we are at the racetrack.

In 2002, I had a big break where we finally had attracted the attention of a corporate sponsor. My good friend over at Monster Cable, he backed us to go down to the 24 hours of Daytona, which is a big race for us. We were still a little team, little independent team. Long and short of it, we put together a program, a good formula that I still follow to this day, and we won. Later that year I was accepted to run finally at the 24 hours of Le Mans. I've been bonked on the nose many times, because we were a small independent team. No real family. Embassy history with the factory, and we got accepted to Le Mans and did the unthinkable. We did went over there and beat the Porsche factory and ended up winning the race.

It was an epic moment for me, and the team had a really great finish to the season and then came back the following year and did it again at Daytona. This time was a Super Bowl ring for us because we ended up winning the race overall, but we won it from the GT class, which has never been done. Formulating some of my different little life lessons that I tried to follow and had a great couple years. Then in 2004 we were very busy with corporate involvement, sponsorship and things. Again, it was that same moment from back in 92. I said, I think I have to change my own personal strategy within the scope of what I'm doing. I can continue driving this car, but I think we're going to do better if I get out. I'm probably more valuable steering the ship than driving the car. There's a bunch of folks that can do that every bit as good as I was doing it. It was a big moment at that point.

John: That's a big deal, it's one of the lessons that all of us learn as entrepreneurs at some point. We've got to bring really a team around us and really decide what is our unique ability. No question, you are a phenomenal driver, but you're also a great CEO, rainmaker and connecting people. There aren't that many good of each, but you found the biggest value you could do. I think as entrepreneurs, we all need to do this. Take a step back at least once a year. Are we where we should be for what we want to accomplish over our lifetime? Boy, what a difference.

Talk about building a team Kevin, because you built a couple teams. The races you've won, you've shared some of them with us over dinner, and I've read your background in preparation for this. A matter of fact I was walking down to the studio, and my wife asked, "Who are you going to interview?" I said, "I've got really one of my favorite interviews I'm ever going to do." You've done it as a driver, and then I think most people who aren't into racing don't know, having a small independent team, that's a hard thing to do, being seriously competitive in the number of events that you have. There's certainly a lot of independent teams that come in and go out very quickly. You're staying power has been amazing. You've surrounded yourself with, how did you build these teams?

Kevin: Yeah. The team approach actually was a decision. One of my things I always say, think strategical. The big part when we started, and I realized, look, we've got a chance at this but we're outgunned. When we started originally we were definitely looked at as a dragon slayer. You can only do that so many times. Unfortunately or fortunately both businesses I'm involved in are dominated at the top with big money, big factories, and wealthy guys. How do you take them down? I think one of the ways we did it was surround myself with really great people that are motivated, know we have a little bit of an underdog story, work really hard at what we do. While they're taking their eye off the ball, we're not. I don't do a lot of other things. I'm really focused on motor sports 24/7, and a lot of guys get into the business thinking it's cool. We see them exit quickly with a big hole in their check book. I like it when they come, but I want them to know it's not easy.

John: Yeah, it definitely is not easy. It takes really both, you said earlier, the best way to be successful in motor sports and wine and make some money, a little money at least, is start with big money. Having been a financial advisor most of my life to an awful lot of ultra-affluent people, I can vouch for that. There's other activities, boats, horses and so on that continue. It's really a rare treat to find an entrepreneur that's making this work. There's some really good lessons I think.

Kevin, what you do so well is you're big on experiences. It's not just winning the race. It's bringing not only the team and having the whole team to support, but it's all the, whether it's sponsors, whether it's individuals, corporations that are involved with you, and using that for connections. One of the things I love, and I want to go to network in a second. What's so

important is to create a great experience. You pride yourself on always over delivering. I've asked some people who have worked with you, I was at the one event. I know you do that. How did you get to that point, and then what does that really mean to you?

Kevin: As part of the same strategy we were just talking about is keeping the, how are we going to win at what we do when sometimes from the outside looking in the odds are definitely not in your favor? One of those things is to over-deliver. In racing and a lot of these glamorous sports, or if you are involved in again horses or boats, there's a lot of people that come in and dabble, maybe the clients aren't getting what they expected or the team's not delivering. When we actually are in a sport that can be sometimes rampant with that and we always deliver on a great experience, the reputation goes quickly. There's a lot of networking within our business, there's a lot of word of mouth. I'm very proud of what we've assembled. I can get my phone call generally answered anywhere in the racing community up one side and down the other. It's been a long haul doing that. Right what you said, over delivering on your promises and your experiences.

Then when the guests when they come, again, our guests are people that could do anything, they could choose to be anywhere. We just took a whole group of people over to Le Mans, France as part of the Aston Martin motor sports Festival. The Aston Martin was the honored mark this year, and they ran before the 24 hour race. We were running in a shorter race, a support race, but all week we were at a 17th century chateau, we had the chefs, we had the little minibuses running back and forth. This was a bucket list experience for these 25 people that came, and eight of them were driving. I left there absolutely worn out, but super happy because everybody left with a smile on their face. That was super important to my wife and I.

John: Sometimes people don't recognize how exhausting it is making that over delivery, but I know you do. That is so powerful. This is one of the things that really, when we go to our third point, is building a network. In today's world, particularly once you become affluent to ultra-affluent, and the way we define it in our research is a million or more financial assets, you start becoming affluent. Ultra-affluent is 25 million and above. There are 5 million homes that are affluent or above in the US. At that point you really have most of the material things, you may not have your own jet or your own race car, but you got pretty much a pretty good life. You're looking to collect not more things, but experiences. Tell us, you've built an unbelievable network by creating the team and over delivering. How does this all come together?

Kevin: Sure. It's funny, when we first started I don't think that the network was as clear on my goal as just getting things going. It came within short order, especially 10 years ago where I was realizing the power of the networks. People wanted to be in our world. When they come, I think the number one thing I wanted to see is they come back or they tell their friends. It's really easy to take a one hit wonder at any other number of events. It's a hassle. I give my

staff a little speech. A lot of these people who come here, you'd be lucky to get 5 minutes in their office, but they just gave you 3 days on the weekend. Make sure it counts, make sure it's perfect, and make sure that they're happy.

The power of the network in so many ways, one of the things I think is super important is you have to deliver. If it's a one way street and you're sucking off people in a way that you're not really delivering an experience for them, then it's not good. Then once you maybe reach out to someone else and say hey can you help me with or do you have an idea or can we share some stuff, and it's an easy conversation, I love that.

I'm very proud of the network, my friends that we've assembled within a variety of industries, and I lean on those guys sometimes for advice and they lean on me. We do share a lot of cool experiences. I love it when my phone rings. Today my phone was ringing on a couple of people that are sending some friends out from a beautiful resort in Florida and they know that we're going to deliver a great experience. It was his word to his friend and his CEO's coming, so they're going to stop by the shop next week and we're going to give them a tour. He's trusting me and I want to deliver on that trust.

John: This is so powerful. I learned this, Kevin, early on in my financial services career. I was in London with a company that I was doing work with. The CEO spent \$500,000 creating, bringing over all their top clients and really creating this special event. I remember asking him, I go, "David, does it make any sense spending this amount of money?" I was pretty young at the time. He goes, "John, to spend 4 days with my top clients, this will be paid back next week." David's a multiple billionaire now. He understood experiences much earlier than I did, and I'm creating those too. It's that, for all of us, certainly you can get on a phone. You and I certainly get most people we want on a phone and have a conversation. To spend the day at a racetrack or some other experience, that connections that come out of that, it's a totally different experience.

Kevin: I think sometimes too, I have to make sure I check myself. This might be one of the many lessons is make sure to keep the network alive. When I travel a lot of times I'll look back into the area I go and I'll see who have I not seen lately or what have I not done. I might owe someone a phone call. It's like reconnecting with an old friend. Although life gets in the way, your emails get in the way, stuff gets in the way, it's worth it to keep that network alive and to continue to deliver friendly exchanges and experience. I have 3 awesome daughters, and one of them the way in college at Washington DC. When we first went back there I was just trying to connect with some of my friends. It's nice to see how they start to understand, wow, having a network at a young age is important, because I wasn't thinking that when I was 17, 18, 19 years old. You weren't thinking about that at all. It's important to build it early on today.

John: You are a big giver, that's the experiences, you're helping other people but also you're providing these really valuable connections. One of the things that I love that you shared with me that you do is how you end every day by asking yourself whether you did an excellent job today. I can see that show in the results. Where did that develop?

Kevin: I don't know where it developed. It was just something that after a long day, a lot of times for me it might be a day at the shop or a day at the racetrack, we're on the road. I'm probably on the road 25 major events per year. Unfortunately I have a very patient understanding, my wife Deborah and our CFO of the company here to understand I have to do that. It'll be all day at the track, it will be back home to the hotel, clean-up, pop a Red Bull and head out to an event for a night event.

I come back and say, did I do an excellent job? I hope the answer is yes. It's not always, but if I did an excellent job and I feel good, I swear first of all I sleep better, and secondly try to learn and try to capitalize on those things. If it's not, what got in the way? Why didn't I? What was the blocker that kept me from achieving to do what I just considered a really good job for today? I think it's been a little bit since I was early on. I was in sports, could I achieve, could I do better, what could I do? I'm always pushing myself. We joke around here in the office. Monday morning we have our powwow, although we might have had an epic weekend, it's usually a couple minutes of rah-rah, and then it's like, all right, what we could have done better? I like pushing the guys like that and they like it too. We have a real motivated team here.

John: I think that's so important. We're all working toward perfection, none of us have ever achieved it or maybe a moment, very moment at the winner's circle or something like that. This is where that debrief, as entrepreneurs, we have to do this. I encourage everyone, you should do this. This is a great life lesson. Let me go one last one that really hit me. You call it your endurance race mentality. What is that and how can our fellow peers, our entrepreneurs, how can that help them?

Kevin: Sure. If I can pass one lesson from all of the ups and downs and the highs and lows of the epic events that we've done and some of the crashes and failures over just strictly the entrepreneurial and business world, that would be my best one. I call it the endurance racing mentality. Everyone's tempted to always reach for the highs. I started this because we would look at what's called data. We look at the data on the racetrack and the drivers would always be seeing where can I go faster, what can I do here better. If you look at statistically how you win these big events, and I'm equating these big events to just life events, success and small businesses or ventures, it's not usually the highest of high, it's what takes you out in the valley or the peak. Avoiding the risks, avoiding the crashes, avoiding the problems.

If I adopt this philosophy that we've got a good product and we're going to keep pushing, but instead of always trying to go 1 mile an hour faster as a metaphor, let's see what's going to take us out here first. There's a stump under the water you didn't see with your speedboat or any other number of things like that. Let's be super careful about those things. If you're really careful about managing the risk, you're going to succeed at some level. It's always a temptation to crawl a little higher, but make sure your ladder is firmly on the ground.

John: It is so important. One of the things I did know, I assumed you did because you're in great shape and so on. As we were getting prepared for this, we shot some emails back and forth and you mentioned you're heading off for a workout. This is certainly when you were driving in motor sports. A lot of times people think it's not that much energy to really drive for a long race. It's just me going around a few times on a track. I recognize it's a lot. I think we sometimes forget the endurance, the energy we need for really just being an entrepreneur. How has that affected your life, staying at the top of your game, Kevin?

Kevin: Maybe because of early on in sports a couple little injuries or whatever, but I will tell one of the best things I would say I can pass along at least from my perspective is some sort of daily physical exercise. I'm totally not an exercise freak, I do it because it helps me in everything that they do. It helps me in my attitude, it helps me in my self-awareness and how you feel about yourself. It helps you in your appearance every day. Also I feel blessed in that I'm 56 and I don't have any ailments of any kind, but I attribute so much of that to daily exercise. It's my religion in terms of being sane and happy.

Along with that I say, again, silly little thing my dad always says. I get up early, I like getting up early, I get a jump on the day. I always feel like I get a head start on everyone else if I'm at my desk first and I'm cranking through emails. Then I set my strategy for the day. I call it yellow pad mentality. It doesn't always work. I set myself up on the day of what I've got to do. Sometimes I look at the yellow pad at 5 or 6 o'clock at night, I haven't even touched it yet because there's so much other stuff that's coming your way. At least you have a strategy you're trying to follow. Again, back to that exercise, I would just really push any of the listeners to try to just do a little bit. I multitask, so if I'm walking or if I'm on my bike or whatever, I'm actually on my phone a lot of times. It isn't always so great, but it works for me.

John: We want everyone that's watching us, listening to us, I want you to have an unfair competitive advantage. I think the last point of that daily physical exercise, I would be one of the first if I could pay a trainer to go do 100 crunches, 100 push-ups and I'd get the end result, I would do it in a second. You can't, you got to do this and we've got to have the energy to live the life that we want.

Kevin: You got to make it easy though too. I couldn't do it if it had to be a big hassle. I have a small gym at the office, or even on the road I'll be on the treadmill. Again, I'll be reading my

trade magazines, reading my mail. I got to do two things at once or I feel like I'm being wasteful. The exercise for me is big.

John: It's really, you don't need to kill yourself type thing. I do also like the getting up early in the morning. That's another unfair advantage. It's quiet, you can get a lot of things done. I want to go to a segment here. Its resources. Kevin, I want to pull up your website. Let's do first TRG. I've got that up, let me flash it on the screen. You've got some beautiful pictures. We're not going to have the time to play the sizzle reel. Kevin's got one on experiences that we're going to link on AESnation.com. Definitely go, it's just amazing.

Kevin, tell us a little bit about what are the resources. I can see a lot of people thinking about this sounds really, this is on many people's bucket lists. It's on mine, I'm going to take you up on a number of things here we've been kicking around doing. It's on our bucket list to go. It's one thing to go to a racetrack, it's another to experience it from the driver's perspective. You do some things to make it really exciting. What's on the website and how could they learn more about what you're doing?

Kevin: Sure, appreciate that. What it's morphed into for us is we are a full service motor sports operation which offers some great experiential marketing opportunities. We offer some great corporate hospitality. I don't think relationship marketing was a word 3 years ago, but we sure use it and overuse it a lot. For instance, we have a big event somewhere around the country, it can be in Florida, it can be out in Raleigh Durham, and it's up in New York. It's a racing event.

Around that, we will have an opportunity for people to come as our guests. It's an equation to maybe sitting in the dugout with the Dodgers or the Yankees. We give them a backstage pass. They come down to the facility, they come down to the racetrack, they get a hot pick credential, and they get to mingle with the cars, the drivers. Our sport offers great access. It's one thing that's really nice about it. There they are with people they've either watched on television or their favorite brand or their favorite opportunity there. We also have a very nice setup in our paddock area where we live for those 4 days. We have a chef or we have a golf cart. We just make the whole thing fun and easy. I think easy is the key.

Again, a lot of people come to these races, they think about it like it's going to a NASCAR race and waiting for 2 hours to get in with traffic or whatever, it's not like that at all. We ran in NASCAR for 4 years and 3 years in Spring Cup, enjoyed every minute of it, learned a lot. Again, we've struck a real magic chord here in the sports car world. Having people come to our events and be part of the weekend and just see it from a backstage pass perspective is wonderful. We're doing these motor sports marketing forums around the country right now which are great.

This brings in people, entrepreneurs, C level executives, particularly guys looking for new opportunities for the companies to see what it is that we do. It's just explaining it in 101 terms. I'll have a group of our partners there that can tell their experiences with it with us, we'll bring industry experts that are involved in the space to explain here's how we activate around our sponsorship and here's why we're doing it. We have a variety of announcers and those types of things. We do that around the country with a series of forums.

The ultimate thing we've been doing lately are these VIP driving days. We'll go in, we are very mobile. I have these big massive transporters, and the Aston Martin race cars I can fit on one or two up, and we can fit 5 cars on there. We'll show up at a racetrack at Road Atlanta or here at Sonoma or Laguna Seca and set up for the day. Typically a company can be for their corporate executives, it can be for their best clients or vendors. We give them an experience like no other. To us, we're being entrusted with someone's relatively large budget for a day event like that and we want to over deliver, we want them back.

That's been what's happening to us lately, these guys have booking and rebooking and rebooking. They're saying, look, we have all the stick and ball sports and skyboxes and we've done the golf and we've done the tennis. I just took them out to this racing event. When you let them get in the right seat of the Aston Martin racing car with the professional driver and then they got to drive the car, they been talking about it for a week and I just closed a big deal. That's why we're putting those opportunities together. We do them all over the country, and sometimes by request. We had one last week where someone requested we book a day in their area, and it was a large bank with their wealth management division, and we're working on that.

John: I've used backstage passes a lot in my businesses to bring connections together. I'll tell you, it is amazing getting that quality time. I didn't know it right in the beginning. One of my mentors taught me this. It's just so valuable. I just want to encourage, whether it's motor sports or other type of events. As entrepreneurs, relationship marketing is just so important. Bringing the right people together.

Kevin: Absolutely. You asked me, and I should've mentioned, on the website we actually now offer individual backstage passes to people. It's been very popular. We're doing an event in Austin, Texas at the big CotA, the F1 facility in September. Randomly people are signing up. It's a \$1000 ticket. You know what I like about it is when they come, not only do they have a great experience, but they might meet somebody. We have an incredible network and I love delivering that side too.

I think that's been a big eye opener for some of these companies when they come. They're involved with us as an annual sponsor. A lot of times they thought it was going to be around some sort of social media or a sticker on the car and stuff for the clients. It's not just that.

While they're there, they're meeting new clients, they're meeting new heads of companies and the B2B play in our world has become just massive. When sea level executives meeting sea level executives in an environment like that, believe me, they're talking and passing business card back and forth. Everybody's happy and I'm happy.

John: Kevin, we just met and I have done events like you're describing in the motor sports world. I can tell you that I've picked up some very large clients through that process and built relationships. That's why I'm so passionate about this. Let's put up your website on Adobe Road Winery too. I'm almost hesitant because you have such a, you're such a boutique winery and I love the wine now that I've discovered it. I'm afraid you're going to sell out real quickly here.

Kevin: It's hard to get a bottle, but I know a guy, John, so don't worry.

John: Really what do you specialize? What's your focus there?

Kevin: It's funny because we had plenty of discussions around the board room in the old days. We have a small group of us involved on the ownership side, I have a dear friend and a partner from Canada that's our primary partner right now. We stayed true to course in that we do craft over 10 different varietals. It changes from year to year. We're still at a big cab house, we do a Napa Valley Cabernet and a Sonoma Cabernet. It used to be Napa was the king and Sonoma was the little brother, but it's the little brother with muscles that you don't take on anymore because Sonoma is just a beautiful place and just tons of other opportunities around the wine world and other varietals.

We're big on our Pinot Noirs, we're big on our Chardonnays, and we craft a lot of little offer idols. We're doing a Viognier, a Semillon, we're doing a Zinfandel, and we're doing a blend now, our Cabernet Franc. What we're finding is having those small 100, 150 case productions really excites people, even just sometimes a placement or a restaurant. We cut out most all of our traditional distribution, which was a big decision for us, because we got real busy on our direct to consumers. The most way we interact and sell wine now is people in our wine club or people that come by the tasting room.

It was a good decision to do that, because we're having to push the distribution model in all the different states, it's time consuming and expensive. If you have a good product you don't need to do that, although we do have a couple of awesome distributors still out there that we work with. I'm really proud of that. We've got over 50% of our business now goes just out of the tasting room and direct to consumer. We stay true to our cause, which was small boutique, handcrafted. We've got a beautiful facility.

It's funny, we have a state of the art wine warehouse. We left away from the old custom crush co-op model back in 2008. We built a small state of the art facility that's next door to the race shop here in Petaluma. When people walk into it with all the barrels and the tanks and everything going on, they're like, "I didn't know this was here." Actually, that model's real popular nowadays. That's what we were saying earlier, how are we going to take down or compete with the big guys in that world while they were building a testimonial to themselves on a big house on the side of the hill, we're just making good grape juice. That's important what goes in the bottle.

John: No, you are too. I certainly will be continuing to buy, I'm part of your wine club, and encourage others. We want a very specialized boutique with a great story. Let me go to the last segment here which is a ways. I took a whole bunch of notes. This is lessons learned. This is a lot of fun talking about motor sports and wine and all that and entertainment. I'm going to go, there's 6 big lessons that I walked away.

Number one, build a team. Everything is a team. Nothing great is accomplished by an individual. Surround yourself with excellent people. Don't try to be all things. Recognize as Kevin did that he couldn't be the driver if he wanted to accomplish that all he wanted to accomplish, even as one of the top drivers in the world. Second, always over-deliver. Whatever you promise, deliver that and more. It's going to pay back dividends. Three, build your network. Never stop. It's all about connections. Relationship market, we can have some of the most sophisticated market sending out millions of emails. Oftentimes it's that one connection that is going to be worth more than any other marketing that you're doing.

Four, I love the question did I do an excellent job. Every evening ask yourself that. What could you have done better? Learn. Kevin, one of the things I'm so proud of you and just knowing you and feel very privileged, to see how you've let the market guide you along the way. These were bucket lists, this is the direction you wanted to go, but the market told you how to make it work and you listened. So many of us don't listen. The endurance bracing mentality, number five. It is an endurance race. I think all of your fellow entrepreneurs are going to agree with that one right away. Live it like that, don't get caught up, there's going to be highs and lows as you've talked about. Manage the risk, it's a great way to live.

Then six, have the energy to live, do that daily physical activity, make it easy to do, make it happen. Kevin, this has been great, I want to thank you. I want to encourage all of your fellow entrepreneurs to go to AESnation.com. We'll have all the show notes, the links, the transcript of this. Definitely if you like motor sports, click on the link, examine those bucket lists. If you're a company, you may want to consider creating an event. I'm going to encourage not too many of you to try the wine. It's really good. It's a limited supply.

Kevin: Let them try it.

John: Above all, let's go execute. Take these 6 lessons, make them yours. Your clients, your future clients, they're all counting on you. Wish you the best of success.

Kevin: Thank you John, pleasure and an honor to be on and to share my thoughts with your fellow entrepreneurs. I invite everyone to visit us at any of these events. Come to one of our bucket list events, come out to the winery, and visit us here in Sonoma. Again, thank you so much.

John: You're very welcome, and I know everyone's excited. You're going to see a good crowd show up. All the best Kevin.

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