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ACCELERATING ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS PODCAST

EPIISODE
198

Tom Mulliez

Show Notes at: <http://www.aesnation.com/198>

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Episode #198



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Best of success,



John Bowen
Co-founder, AES Nation

John Bowen: As entrepreneurs, we are busy doing it, doing it, doing it, and you know what? We don't make time for what's important to us. We always talk family, friends are so important, but we're doing it, doing it, doing it, doing it. Well, I have a remarkable entrepreneur who is doing something that's different than almost all of us. It's something that I really appreciate because what we tend to do is focus on work, and we don't realize that we're in business just from our business. We're in business for supporting a great quality of life for all stakeholders, not only our clients, our customers, our teammates, our partners, shareholders if we have them, but our families, as well.

One of the best ways to do that quality of life is really collect great memories, not great things. We can buy the cars, and the boats, and all that stuff, or planes or whatever level you're at, but it's the memories. Well, I've got a remarkable entrepreneur who's going to join us and share with us how we can create some amazing memories outdoors. You don't want to miss this. I'm John Bowen, and I am the co-founder of AESNation. It's all about accelerating your success and making time to build a great quality of life is going to create a great business. Stay tuned. You don't want to miss this.

Tom, I am so excited that you joined me. You're in one of my favorite areas of the world. Silicon Valley, kind of cross corner in Florida, and you are on a mission of making things happen for guys like me, which is just, I really appreciate it. But first of all, thank you for joining us.

Tom Mulliez: Oh, thanks so much for having me, John. I really appreciate it.

John: We're going to talk about outdoor adventures, and you've got a great company making some amazing memories for clients. The one thing I always like to start out with so we get to know each other better, our audience does, is a little bit of the background 'because I just can't imagine most of us waking up in the business we're in, that that was always what we were going to do, but I'm looking at the beautiful pictures on your website. You may have started right from a kid thinking about this, Tom. Give us a little backstory of how you got there.

Tom: Yeah, for sure. One, I'm a father of three lovely children, a husband to a lovely wife who lets me pursue this passion, which is amazing. For that, I thank her, but my first childhood memory, the very, very first one, was waking up in a tent on an island in the middle of a river in the North Georgia Mountains to the sound of the water just going by. I vividly remember that because on the way home, we were playing the Bee Gees, the song on the radio. And so forever, that was the spark, my bug, my outdoor bug, as you call it, that created my passion for the outdoors and has led me down the path that I am today.

John: No, it's, you know, Tom, it's really amazing. We were talking before we turned on the camera that, you know, I mean, as soon as you said that, I could remember being in a fishing camp in Quebec that my dad had taken me up, and I had Rod Stewart singing. It was a great experience. These things, so often, we don't realize the bonding experience in the case of my dad and myself, and just with friends. We were talking about adventure before we turned on the camera, and we'll get into more of those. But, did you ... You're running a significant outdoor adventure company, and we'll get into what more that is, but help me out with how do you make that transition? Because I know you were kind of in a financial ... Well, like me, but you went in a different turn.

Tom: Yeah, so prior to doing this, I was working for Capital One in Richmond, Virginia. I was leading an analytical team that we did the analysis on the customer experience and how to improve that across all the contact centers for the high valued clients. That got me to Tampa 'cause eventually they were like, "Tom, great work, love what you're doing. Nobody can implement it, so can you go, please, take all this awesome stuff and implement it in the call center in Tampa?" And so, that's how I ended up here.

Low and behold, Capital One bought HSBC Capital US Card and they were \$80 million over budget, and they had to let people go, and kind of last in first out, greatest thing that ever happened to me. It was them saying, "Hey, Tom, we're real sorry. Here's your severance. Because we're super sorry, here's a fake job we're going to give you for six months as an extra we're sorry." I love those guys. I'm still in touch with them, but because of that, they gave me my seed money that I would then have to start working on this. I was still getting paid by Capital One working two hours a week, and then was able to work on my business plan, and flush out the model and launch it December 14th.

John: It's always interesting when we have things like this. One door closes and another door opens, and particularly when they hold the door open for you, it's even better.

Tom: Absolutely.

John: But one of the big challenges, I'm a guy, I do love adventures and I love many of the things you're doing. I was in the Navy, fell in love with the whole area, other than the mosquitoes, but everything else is really good. When you're by the water and the wind is going, it's not bad at all. But these amazing outdoor experiences that you do, I want to go big picture first, and then we're going to dive in because as business owners, we tend to have limited time. We go into business to have freedom and the business kind of chains us. We only work half time, 12 hours a day instead of 24.

Tom: Right.

John: But behaviors say that we should really make a minimum about six weeks of the year that we're doing things away from our business, and that's going to allow us to recharge, be high performing in what we're doing. The question always is how do you choose the right adventure, and particularly, the outdoor side, Tom, there's guys like me who, I used to love camping, boy scout, and all of the stuff with it, and all kinds of stories. Then I went on a 14-day trip down the Grand Canyon in kayaks, and rafts, and I just found that 14 days of camping with 16 of my buddies, I was ready to leave, and actually, one other guy was, too. We checked. It was 10 grand to rent the helicopter to fly out. Every night, we would go, "Okay, is today the day?" 'Cause we had agreed to split it, and we did make it the whole way, but it was a close call.

Now, how do you find the right adventure to create these memories? I mean, you're talking with a lot of business people, fellow entrepreneurs, like yourself, and they love what you're doing, but how do they find the right one? I mean, you get tempted to put it in great outdoor adventure in Google and see what comes up.

Tom: Yeah, it's not easy. This is an industry that's incredibly fragmented, and so really, it's kind of mom-and-pop, word of mouth. You got some players on the internet, but really, you end up Googling outdoor adventures to do, or things to do in Florida, or that kind of stuff. It is difficult to find something. What I would recommend, though, is if there's something you did as a kid, or something you were passionate about, kind of focusing your search on basically trying to relive some of the memories that you had created in the past that you have for too long for sake. That's, I think, how you're going to be able to re-jumpstart your well-being, and those feelings of peace and calmness that accompany an amazing outdoor experience.

John: Yeah. It's so funny. I just think sometimes people think we watch reality TV shows. That's enough outdoor adventure. When you find ... One of my favorite experiences, my wife really loves fishing even more than I. We were ... I'm forgetting. It's Tarpon Springs. We were Tarpon fishing. I guess it's by Naples. My wife and I were going, "Should we go fishing? Or go on a real-estate tour?" We had a half a day open, and going the inner coastal way was a pretty good way to see an awful lot of real estate and a fishing trip, and tarpon are an extremely exciting fish would be kind of not saying it strong enough.

If I were to ask my wife one of the best memories of fishing, and we've gone all over the world, just something like that and it was the spur of the moment working with a concierge but we're kind of brainstorming. I'm just wondering, you've got on your website all kinds of adventures. How do you help guide fellow entrepreneurs as they're thinking through, or a family member, that thinking through I go, okay, I remember I had a good time fishing with my dad? Okay, so how do I ... Or, camping, or hiking, that type of thing.

Tom: Yeah. The approach that we take is, basically, we ask you questions. Are you comfortable being in the woods? Are you comfortable being on a boat? Are you comfortable? Have you ever done kayak or before? Are you more interested in the educational aspect of things, or are you more interested in action? Then from that information, we'll say, okay, well, based on your skill level and the things that you're talking to us about, this is what we kind of propose. Our goal is just to make it the best possible experience for you that we can, and that can only happen if it's something that really you get to immerse yourself into and really experience.

We don't want to put you on a Tarpon fishing trip, for example ... I love to Tarpon fish, but I wouldn't take my eight-year-old daughter and my five-year-old daughter Tarpon fishing 'cause that doesn't make sense, right? It's really understanding who the customer is, what they're looking for, and help guide them into the right choice. But at the end of the day, most of the adventures that we do today are entry-level adventures to get people to reignite that passion with the outdoors. And so, it makes it a little bit easier for us to figure that out for our customers.

John: Well, one of the things, let's start with the basic, Tom, 'cause one of the decisions is if I have a memory, should I do the outside activity? There's all kinds of them, but one of the things, I think many of us have gotten a little soft. I know I'm a little softer than I was when I was younger. Not coming over quite as many times a week, but the ... And we're used to some luxuries and so on, but, I mean, this is something I think you and I are alignment on. Just, once you get out there, just the amazing, I mean, just disconnecting from the world that you work in, the business and so on, the recharge just an afternoon or a day, but how do you help clients who are just a little uncomfortable?

Let's go from the two extremes. One that is really uncomfortable that they know they should try it, but they haven't had much outdoor experience to. Then we've got, I'm sure you've got friends, I've got friends that are pro triathletes who haven't yet met an adventure, you know, jumping out of a plane, or on a helicopter on a snowboard on a cliff just seems like an average day to them, but there's a whole bunch of us in between type thing.

Tom: Yeah, yeah, there are. There's actually 150 million Americans who view themselves as outdoorsy, but don't actually get outside.

John: Yeah, walking to the car doesn't count.

Tom: No, no, but I mean, they view themselves as outdoorsy 'cause they want to get outside. They want to get more engaged with the outdoors, but there's certain things that are kind of blockers, right? One is we always blame time. You brought that up in the beginning of the show, but really, to me, it all boils back down to an uncomfortableness of fear. It's something

that we haven't done in a while, or never done. It's something we want to experience, but is it worth the money? Are we going to get the value we think out of it, and all that? So, our job is to remove all of those fears. We do that through 100% money back guarantee. We do it through having some of the best guides we can possibly find. The work is done for you. You know you're going to get a great guide, a great experience, or your money back.

It's just you kind of talked about the conveniences we're used to. We embrace convenience. We don't want to put you out there in the middle of a lightning storm for you to have a horrible experience. No, we embrace the comfort. You show up, you get on, you go have a great time, then you get off. We take care of the setup, the clean-up, the works. That's how we're bringing the outdoors back into today's society. The boy scouts call this the lost generation of individuals, people who are wanting to get outside aren't getting outside. Why aren't they? Well, because we have too many conveniences at home. Back in the day, 6:00 AM came and you were up, and you were out the door, and you came home when the dinner bell rang. That was it. We lived outside, but as a society, we've become so sedentary.

Over the past 150 years, if you think about it, 150 years ago, we were still using the restroom outside. There was no inside/outside. There was life. Now, we've moved into this very sedentary always on our phones, always the electronics. The goal is just to reconnect people to the outdoors for them to reexperience things that, innately, we all need as humans, which is this connection to something that's bigger than us, connection to those around us. That is not very easy to do when we're always holding this.

John: Yeah, it's great. Tom, I'm putting up your bottom third here and we're opening outdoor adventures to the rest of us. To me, that's such a big deal because what we have is we're so busy in the business side, and that set up, I wouldn't have gone down the Grand Canyon other than we had 16 guys who went together. Well, we had 16, what do you call it? The guides with us, and I mean, it was a really nice trip, and they made it as effortless as possible, and we got to enjoy the outdoors, and we gained the skillset going down to be able to perform at a reasonable level. This is the thing that I think so often so many of us forget. If you get the right people that are going to make this outdoors easy, it is really easy in today's world.

Tom: It really is, and it's really fun, and it allows you to not focus so much on all the hardships and just to enjoy. We want to enjoy things and we want them to be easy. Well, there's nothing better than enjoying the outdoors in an easy and safe fashion.

John: Well, one of the things I want to touch on, I don't have any kids, but I have a whole bunch of friends that are offering the lease to own program selling their kids, but no.

Yeah, but this is a ... To me, this is an unbelievable bonding experience, whether it's son and daughter, mother, father, maybe talk to that a bit because this is breaking away. I don't have

my smartphone with me, or I would just hold it up here, but the ... I have ... I'm looking at ... I've got six screens here. We're surrounded by electronics, and you and I are doing this over Skype, and it's just as if we're next to each other, but we're not. That experience of being together in the outdoor just taking that in, what are you seeing happen when the entrepreneurs and business owners make time with their families to do this type of thing?

Tom: There's a lot that happens. When you make time to spend that very valuable time with your family, we're working 12-hour days, et cetera. When you make that time, it takes the entire family's dynamic to a whole different level. I'll give you a quick little story. I took my 20-month-old on the boat three months ago for the first time. We've been training him to wear his booties and his swimmies for three months walking around, and he's jumping into the pool, and all that.

And so, he finally got the pool down, so then we said you know what? We're going to take him on the boat. We're going to go to a sandbar, and we're going to let him experience the beach, experience the water, and the funniest thing happened. He's sitting there on the beach. He goes into the water. He's looking weird out into the distance and he starts swimming, and he just doesn't stop swimming. He just doesn't understand, where is the edge? Where is the end that I'm going to grab on to?

My wife and I are looking at each other, and we're sharing a moment as we're sharing him discover the outdoors in his own way. In his little brain, we can only imagine what's going on in there, and so we're jibber jabbing and then the girls see him going. They jump in. Let's go rescue Theo. It just creates this and this environment. So, from a remembering standpoint, my daughters will always remember swimming out into the great ocean and go rescue Theo. My wife and I will always remember the look on his face as he's exploring and he doesn't understand there's no end. It was just magnificent for us, as parents.

Now, from the kids' perspective, the creativity that it brings, three days later, they're still talking about the hermit crabs that they found, and the fish that they caught, and all this stuff. It just continues to engrain in them this feeling of accomplishment, I made it outdoors and I did something awesome, happiness, but as well as a deeper connection to us because we all got to share that moment together. That's really what the outdoors is about when it comes to family time.

Now, that can happen with friends, co-workers, you name it. It's one of the greatest bonding experiences possible. It drives creativity to a whole new level, and just the health and wellness of allowing each and every person to create their own unique bond with their environment. At the end of the day, they'll care more about it. Since our mission is to create advocates for the outdoors to eventually save Mother Nature, it kind of all flows and goes together. It's just the one little piece of a puzzle.

John Bowen: It really is. I'm thinking that Theo's going to hear that story at 18 from your daughters of how he owes his whole life to them for rescuing him.

Tom: Yes, absolutely.

John: But I mean, it's memories like that. I think it's a really important point. I went to family, but I do a number of events with both corporate clients, as well as my different company key people. As much as we're working really hard on the business and so on, when we bring people together like that, we have an annual ski event that we do each year in Colorado that's just phenomenal. The relationships out of that are lifelong, much stronger than the company bonds, themselves.

Tom: Absolutely.

John: Yeah. If somebody's thinking of a corporate type of event, how do you help them? I mean, I can see the family interviewing. Do you do much on the corporate side, Tom?

Tom: Yeah, yeah, we do. It's actually almost 30% of our business, and we spend \$0 to acquire the customer, which is great.

John: Yeah, no. Well, and I think one of the things that's going on is we're all trying to ... I mean, we're working harder and more effectively. The tools, I'm going to argue, I know sometimes the statistics don't say it, but we're getting much more productive with the tools that we have. That means we're more fully engaged in that break time. The outdoor time is just so valuable. How do you make that a special event for a corporate type client?

Tom: Yeah, so, I'll just give you an example. Right now, we're working on a 400-person event in Jacksonville. The founder is a very outdoorsy guy, and he wanted to go paddling. We're like, "You know it's February. That may cause some problems to some of your team members." He goes, "Oh, that's fine." We kind of had to talk him out of it, but instead, we're going to basically ... We curated an experience for them that meets the goals that he was trying to set. He wanted to create a team bonding environment. He wanted to make sure that it happened outdoors, and he wanted to include more than one element.

So, we're taking people from the main land and we're taking them over to an island in Georgia, and they're going to be hiking along ... I think it's like five, six miles of trails. There's going to be a picnic out there. They're going to do some corporate games and then we're going to bring them back. That whole thing is going to be done in a way that's simple and easy where they just show up and then they go, and they have a great time and they get off. They created those memories and that bonding experience. That's what it's about on the corporate side. There is a culture piece that's important. There is the associate engagement, the wellness

that's important, and really, it's going to sound ... The company becomes memorable in the eyes of the employees. The employees make memories, but they get more fully grounded into the company that they work for and they feel even better about working for the group that they work for through these types of events. It's not just going bowling. It's not just going to something simple.

John: Go out to lunch together, yes.

Tom: Yeah, no, this is, like, we are investing in you having a great time with your peers. As a by-product of that, you're going to want to work for us longer.

John: Yep.

Tom: In the day and age of everyone job hopping every two, three years.

John: It really is powerful. I don't do it as much. I'm writing down that I need to do it even more, but when we had more of the traditional company, I've had a lot of employees, we would do it all the time. We'd schedule ... I had a partner and his wife, she was just phenomenal at it, would find individuals like yourself, Tom, to help us put together these adventures because they're just ... I mean, I'm going through my mind almost like a Rolodex, different experiences along the way as we're talking that have been meaningful between friends, between business teammates, between client business development. This is one of the most effective ways of doing it. Let me go to resources. I want to pull up your website, and you've got a great website and all kinds of adventures. Tell us a little bit about what people are going to find on your website.

Tom: Well, when you get to our website, you'll land on our homepage, unless you're in Florida. Then you'll be geo targeted to a specific page. It's simple. You just go to the search bar and you look for the area that you're going. It would be, Miami, or the Keys and what not. Then you'll see the adventures that we have in that location. If you are just poking around and you want to ask some questions, that little chat button at the bottom on the right-hand corner, click it and off you go. You can talk to our live team members who will answer your questions that you have. You can pick up the phone and give us a call. You can chat us on Facebook. I mean, you can literally reach out to us in any way, shape, or form.

We are here for you to assist you and your friends, families, co-workers to get outdoors. That's our mission. It's really that simple. Poke around. If you're already outdoorsy and you already know what you're doing, awesome. Go check out our blog. Go check out our resource section. We have cool tips, and tricks, and unique content there that even a pro is going to want to kind of look at, 15 duct tape hacks, what to do with duct tape while camping. Someone will learn something, regardless.

John: No, that's great. How many guides do you have on your team?

Tom: We've got 125 guides across the state of Florida today offering camping, hiking, paddle, which is paddleboard and kayak tours and fishing, as well as fishing, every type of fishing you can imagine from tarpon to shark to bow fishing, deep sea. You name it, we've got it. It really depends on what you're looking to do. If you don't know what you want to do, then hit us up and we'll help you figure out what's the best option for you to get outdoors.

John: No, this has been great, Tom. I appreciate it. Let me do the key takeaways that I'm walking away with. What I find, this is something, hopefully you're having the same ... Well I hope you're not having the same reaction I am. I'm going, you know what? I got to do more of this. I'm hoping you're going, you know, John, I've got this covered. It's done. I think Tom and I would both be happy for you. But, most of us, I'm 61, my age group is what Tom explained. I don't remember ever showing up to the house other than when the dinner bell was there type thing, coming in and we were outside doing all kinds. I grew up in Upstate New York, and I went trout fishing, which is kind of ... You just walked across the street to do it type, and so many of the other things and the hunting and all that.

Then suddenly, life happens and you're in different areas, and you don't do it, and I've got some good friends that often make the time. I've got really a great COO who helps put together these activities, but who's doing it for you, or should you be doing it? And doing it in a way that you're taking your great experiences with your family, great experiences with your teammates, and great experience with the clients. I mean, we all like business development. I've always found that to be one of the most fun ones 'because you get to do fun things with great people that you want to work with for an awful long time, your teammates, the same, and the family. There's so many memories, it's not the things in life. It's the experiences that are going to make a difference. Tom, thank you, again. I want to just remind everybody that the show notes, the links to Tom's company website ... If you're in Florida and you cover all the state. Is that correct, Tom?

Tom: Yes, we do, absolutely.

John: Yeah, yes. If you're in Florida and you've got some time for an adventure, you know where to go now, as well as if you've got a little bit more time, a little bit bigger organization, or a family special thing, make sure to reach out. Everything is at AESNation.com. The show notes, and again, Tom, wish you the best of success. Everyone out there, let's go make a difference in life. One of the best ways we can do it by getting recharged to have the energy, and there's nothing like the outdoors. Wish you the best of success.

Tom: Thanks so much, John. I really appreciate it.

A Second Opinion on Your Finances

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Founder and CEO
Financial Advisor Select