

John Corcoran: Get Comfortable Connecting with New People and Creating Opportunities

Episode Companion

Introduction to John

- We attended one of John's Rise25 events at Traffic & Conversion, the first year they did it there. It started as a dinner party, and now it's a hotel ballroom filled with hundreds of people.
- Everyone goes to conferences, and one of the best things you can do is bring people together, even three people over a coffee or a beer. It's a way to take that conference-attending experience further.
- The one who brings people together is seen as a connector or an authority. Opportunities are abundant. You can organize a party that you wouldn't even merit an invitation to if you work hard enough at it.
- The night before a conference is a great time to throw an event because everyone is in town and looking for something to do. You can even get the speakers to attend that way and connect with other speakers and guests.
- Circling back to John. He has done so many incredible things in his life that we had to ask him about it.
- The short version is he has ADD and has to jump around before getting bored. He began his career in the entertainment industry and in politics.
- He grew up in LA; he was working on Dreamworks early in the company's history working on a TV show for Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg, and David Geffen. He made a career of parlaying one thing into the other.
- The great lesson of that is oftentimes people try to keep their head low, but when you stand out and do something different and leverage a memorable quality, that will create great opportunities.
- When John applied to be a writer in the Clinton White House, he was 23 years old with a BA in English from a party school. He wouldn't have stood out, except that he came from Dreamworks in LA. He had this cache that opened the door to that opportunity.
 - "Embrace what is memorable about you. People are more likely to think of you when it comes time for opportunities."
- One way to figure out what's memorable about you is to ask your friends and clients what they think. Googling yourself is another way. Test it as you meet people.
 - For example, John was a writer in presidential letters and messages, so he'll joke and say that he was a second-tier speechwriter or a second-string speechwriter. If one speechwriter pulled a hamstring, then he'd step in.
 - Once he was at a party and described himself the other way. A little while later, someone else was introducing John to someone else he'd already met, so the guy was like, "Oh yeah, he's the second-string speechwriter."
- It was self-deprecating, which is a good thing. If you want to be remembered for an accomplishment, it should not be intimidating to people.

- o People who attend Harvard are so shy about attending Harvard, for example. Even stating something as a fact can make you sound conceited.
- o Tim Ferriss' whole thing was he used to say he sold drugs on the Internet instead of supplements because that was a good conversation starter.
- o When someone asks Matt, "What do you do?" he says, "That's a tough question" and rambles on for 15 minutes. The conversation ends with a glazed-over look in their eyes.
- o John says, "I'm a recovering lawyer." "What does that mean?" But it's memorable. You just need to find a hook.
- o John met a woman at a conference a couple years ago who said, "I'm a dream-catcher/dream-hunter." She was like a life coach or business coach, but she helped her clients achieve big dreams. John loved the way she positioned that.
- Back to being 23 at the White House when he had no jokes. John had been an intern in the speechwriting office when he was in college; there are thousands of interns at the White House at any given time. Plenty want to get a job from that, but many don't. John did though.
- The way John did it was delivering value as much as possible to the key people he built relationships with. It starts by doing a good job.
 - o Beyond that, when he went back to college, he looked for opportunities to remain top of mind. He would send speeches or relevant articles to the speechwriting staff or a poem that they could integrate into an upcoming speech.
 - o Because of that, when an opportunity came along for a writing position, one of the speechwriters contacted John about it.
- Being top of mind is so important. Joe sends texts on friends' birthdays instead of writing on Facebook. John recommends doing what is most accessible to you and something you will actually do.
- Another important lesson from his getting the White House job is that John had heard about this position and was told that the hiring manager might give John a call any day now. The person called three or four days later.
 - o When she called, she asked for a resume, background, writing samples, the usual. John said he would send all that stuff but also said, "If you want a writing sample, you can open up today's *New York Times* and look at a letter to the editor I wrote that was published today."
 - o It was coincidental timing, but John had sent that letter a couple of days earlier knowing he might be getting this call and nail it on the timing.
- "If you have a big opportunity coming along to you, don't lay down and let it happen to you. Take control. Take action. What can you do to position yourself for ultimate success in what it is you want to happen for you?"

An Abundance of Opportunities

- People contact us almost daily with opportunities they want us to get involved in, and we have to work out which ones to take up and which ones to turn down. Does John have any tips for how to filter them?

- John frequently has this conversation, and it is super relevant. Someone may think this is the world's smallest violin, but the truth is, this happens at every level, where you have distractions.
- John was graduating from law school, and he had no real business to speak of or a job at the time. He would volunteer at nonprofits that he wanted to get involved with, and they would invite him to join the board as a law school graduate. It was tempting, but it was distracting from what he wanted to do.
- That happens for all of us. What's helpful is to have a good polite written template that allows you to release your guilt from turning people down because you're doing it so nicely.
 - If you want John's templates, email him [here](#).
- The other thing John does, which takes more effort, is how can you then pay that forward? You may know someone else who wants to take advantage of that opportunity.
 - John constantly gets invited to participate in virtual summits, so he turns them down due to other commitments. But he knows plenty of people who would like to leverage those virtual summits in an intelligent way. Rather than saying no, you can give them an alternate person to invite, and they will really appreciate that.
- John's current business partner Jeremy Weiss contacted him in 2015 because they were attending the same conference. He asked him to co-organize a small group mastermind. Usually, John would have turned that down. But for whatever reason, he said yes. Good instincts.
- On the other hand, John is a big believer in setting clear goals for yourself and judging any opportunity that comes along through that filter. Or will it take time and energy away from achieving those goals?
 - We always talk about the North Star goal. An example is like a Gary Vaynerchuk whose goal is to own the New York Jets, or Bill Gates, whose goal is to eradicate disease, or Elon Musk, who wants to populate Mars. They have giant massive goals they are shooting for that allows them to filter opportunities.
 - Gary Vee's looks a little heady. Does that inspire people around you? That's worth thinking about.
 - Tony Robbins wants to provide 100 million meals. That rallies people around you. Elon Musk is not a great boss and he's not that charming in person, but he gets people to buy into his vision.
- This guy who attended a Rise25 event had immigrated to this country at age 15 on his own, living with a relative. He hadn't gone to high school, and he worked as a janitor for a while until he could go to night school. What a great story.
 - He turned himself around and was committed to helping foster kids and young, impoverished kids and teenagers on the right path. That mission wasn't integral to his business, so John encouraged him to integrate the two because clients may be more interested in your business if they know about that mission.
- Yesterday, SpaceX launched their Falcon rocket, the most powerful rocket in over 40 years. John couldn't concentrate yesterday because he was so excited. As he was biking to work this morning, he felt so terribly because of what Elon Musk is doing. We can't all have that impact, but we can have a smaller, more local impact.
 - John lives in wine country in northern California. His wife's community college she works at had 600 students and 60 colleagues lose their homes. She focused on helping three other families rebuild. Others in their community donated materials for those three families. That is one small thing you can do.

Debunking Networking

- Rise25 originated out of Jeremy and John's doing a small group event before a conference. They liked it, and they found ways to improve it through feedback. These events have gotten bigger over time.
 - The VIP reception at T&C had 300 people last year, and they expect about the same or more this year.
- They have two markets right now (don't do this). The primary market is professional services people who want to leverage their time better and do something one-to-many. They are also working with e-commerce founders.
 - They are holding an event in Vegas in conjunction with a conference to do VIP days for their highest-level attendees.
- The reason for the event is not about attracting clients for John's business; it's about bringing other people together, allowing people to make connections amongst themselves. That's when the benefits will flow.
- For years, John had a blog and podcast called [Smart Business Revolution](#). Now Rise25 allows him to bring people together in the same way but with more benefit for others.
- We put on networking events in breweries, where we brew on their system, making a unique beer with them for our event, market the event, and give the brewery more exposure and revenue.
 - Matt is super introverted, so it usually takes him two beers to start talking. This is ironic because he's the one who can't shut up on the podcast.
- You should adapt your business to play to your strengths. If you love chatting with people, then a podcast is good for you.
 - The podcast started out as a challenge to Matt because he didn't make an effort to network. This was an exercise to get out of his comfort zone. He can still be in his own safety bubble while talking to people. But now he is more comfortable.
 - As far as events, he is definitely not in his comfort zone.
- A lot of people don't like attending events because they are not aligned with what they want to do. You need to step back and get clear on why you are attending the event. Often, the reason why we aren't excited about events is because we're not in the right room. Once you get in that room, that can make it less painful.
- Plenty of people out there at events are introverted. John will take an introverted person who's great at systems and following up over an extroverted person any day of the week.
 - An extroverted person is often great in the room but terrible at follow-up. An introvert will be totally cool with following up with someone they met at an event and finding some way they can further that relationship, such as a podcast interview or a profile.
 - The podcast does allow us to talk further with people we really wanted to talk to at events. It's a good strategy.
- When John attends a networking event, his strategy depends. If there is a published list of attendees, he will look at who is coming so he can strategize who he really wants to talk to.

- o He is a big fan of helping out at events, such as checking in people at the door, which is a great way to meet literally everyone in the room. You can just go back up to the people you checked in and have a conversation with them.
- o But sometimes you don't know where a relationship is going to lead. There could be long-term potential you don't recognize at first. If you can find some way to follow up with them and look for that collaboration opportunity, do so. But there won't be that opportunity with everyone.
- What you should be doing in each conversation is looking for a way to follow up. Ask them questions about resources so you can ask for their contact information in a natural way.
 - o Joe used to do this more naturally when he was networking on behalf of both of them for their one-on-one clients. He was always looking to follow up with those whom he talked to at these events.
 - o It helps to get to know more about each person you're talking to. Maybe their spouse needs help with something. You don't know!
 - o John is more interested in talking about the personal before the professional. Sometimes you want to slow down and figure out how else you can deliver value before your professional services.
 - John loves to ask where they are traveling this year. Maybe he knows someone in that place they can meet or restaurant recommendations.
 - This allows them to connect on a more personal level.
- Matt's least favorite question is, "What do you do?" He doesn't like talking about that at networking events, especially as an entrepreneur.
- The worst thing is trying to get someone into a sales conversation too quickly, shoving your business card in their face. Also the third rail of religion and politics.
- Not being open to a conversation. Other people are introverted as well so they have trouble opening up to people, so that can be perceived as a person not being interested. John tries to give people the benefit of the doubt when it comes to these circumstances.
- But be cognizant of the image you put off to other people. You might be presenting a negative image to people; do you have an angry resting face?
- Matt is terrible with names. John isn't great with names either. He meets so many people that he needs to hear their name a couple times before he remembers it.
- Everyone has something they're insecure about in this vein that does not need to hold you back.
 - o John constantly gets emails about individuals' things that hold them back, like their gender, age, disability status, and so many more. That does not need to be the case.
 - o Motivational speakers have suffered from horrible burns or are in a wheelchair, and they have a way of tapping in and realizing that it is the psychology that holds us back, not the wheelchair.
 - o When John was 23 and interviewing for a job to write the president's words, if he'd let that hold him back, he wouldn't have belonged. But he had confidence in his abilities and that he could do this job. He did the job.
- Rather than focusing on your inabilities, focus on your abilities. Laugh off forgetting the name, or find another way to learn their name again.

Event Logistics

- Getting people to buy tickets to an event is always the hardest thing. But with most events, there is a tipping point that allows you to make it easier.
 - Organizing a conference, that marquee speaker will typically draw people. Not always, but usually.
 - Getting those first people to commit to a dinner, like friends or those who know, like, and trust you, will help get the ball rolling.
- Think about how you will make this event profitable. Anything you do, if it's not profitable, you won't do it for long. If you can't do it, you can't have that bigger impact.
 - John was talking to a stand-up comedian today who had organized some small comedy shows, but he lost \$10,000 on them. John told him, "Make them profitable. You bring humor to the world. More people need to laugh. If you lose money on these events, you can't continue doing them. How can we figure this out?"
 - Start with a smaller event and work your way up. This might mean you may need to charge enough at least to break even, or make it profitable, even if that means you will get a bunch of people saying no.
 - Be careful though. If you charge too cheap for it, people don't value it as much, and they may not show up. It's not a big sacrifice for them.
- John will use that as a selling point for people. This is not a cheap ticket, which means you will get other people committed to it and that you will take it seriously.
 - John dropped \$7,000 for a two-day event recently, and he took it seriously. He showed up early, met people, followed up with people, and got an ROI out of it. A \$100 event wouldn't have gotten the same treatment.
 - That advice goes for professional services, too. Matt once paid \$6,000 for a coach, but as soon as he paid that money, he followed everything that coach told him to the letter because he needed that ROI.
 - We've noticed higher-quality work in our business, too, for taking that same approach to our services.
- Time is the #1 objection you hear from people. I don't have enough time to get everything done. You can talk about tools and hacks all day, but it boils down to priorities. Everything needs to flow down from the North Star goal to those smaller goals. Peel everything else away.
 - That could easily unravel into a longer discussion.

Wrap-Up Questions & Quick Tips

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- Some quick tips on time management:
 - If you can't afford an assistant yet, use a CRM software.
 - There are so many platforms. Using one of them as your organized CRM doesn't work.
 - The good CRMs cost \$30-50 a month.

- They help you organize all of your relationships. Focus on the ones that are most important.
- John uses [Contactually](#) personally.
 - This allows him to, say, for an upcoming event in San Diego, only contact those in the Southern California area so he doesn't appear spammy to everyone else who obviously can't attend that event.
- John's book recommendation: [Give and Take](#) by Adam Grant
 - o He is one of the youngest professors at Wharton.
 - o John used to believe that if you go out and do good in the world, the world will reward you.
 - o What Adam did was he went out there and told all these stories, backing them up with social science research. He concluded that if you are a giver rather than a taker, you are much more likely to rise to the top of the success ladder.

Contact John

- John on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#)
 - o Email john@smartbusinessrevolution.com for polite decline templates.
- [Rise25](#)
- [Smart Business Revolution](#) Blog
 - o There are additional email templates here.

Additional Resources

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- [Give and Take](#) by Adam Grant