

079: Lessons from Creating a Conference from Scratch in Three Months

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A Yeah.

J —where everybody feels like they're having the same experience together.

[Music playing]

A Hello, and welcome to another episode of *The Portfolio Life* with Jeff Goins. I'm your host, Andy Traub, and this is the show that helps you pursue work that matters, make a difference with your art, and discover your true voice. Today Jeff and I have a conversation about the first *Tribe Conference*. Jeff confesses his fears before the conference, and he shares some helpful advice that his therapist gave him to help him get through that. We also talked about the favorite parts of the conference for him and also reveals what will be different for next year's *Tribe Conference*. One hint: It will be bigger. If you've ever wanted to know what goes on in the mind of a conference organizer, here's your chance. Here's my conversation with Jeff Goins.

[Music playing]

A Jeff, thank you for joining me.

J Thank you for joining me, Andy.

A My pleasure. I don't say thank you anymore now that I moved to the South. I just say, "My pleasure." I eat at Chick-Fil-A that much.

J Yes, it is your pleasure.

A [Laughing] You're welcome. We're going to talk about your conference that just wrapped up. And I want to talk about lessons you learned from it. And I know you've written about this a little bit, but we're going to dive a little deep. I'm going to ask you some harder questions—

J Good.

A —we've talked about. A little bit of a recap. We talked about this. So, we won't go too deep. But what were your greatest fears when you said, "I'm going to do a conference?"

J My greatest fears were that it would suck.



A So, the content itself would be like dismal.

J Or like the whole thing would fall apart. Like I would walk up on stage, or somebody would walk up on stage, or we'd miss – it would be the wrong time. They'd say the wrong thing. Or they'd go 45 minutes too late.

A Ah, yeah.

J Or we'd miss a lunch break.

A Yeah.

J I mean we had, I think, 13 different speakers. And I just called a bunch of friends, and I expected three of them to say yes. And they all said yes.

A Yeah.

J So, I was like, "Oh, this is great!" And, then, I was like, "Oh, gosh. I've got to arrange a schedule."

A Now, you're going to talk for seven minutes.

J I needed great help with that.

A "And you're on a panel."

J So, it was stressful trying to make it all fit, and I was worried, "If one thing – one person goes too long, or something goes wrong, it's the first in a domino. It will knock everything else down.

A Yeah.

J And I was really afraid of that.

A And did you have any fear about ticket sales?

J I was afraid of losing money. Not just like losing money, but going broke and having to mortgage our house or something.

A So, when you woke up the day of the event, did you have any fears then? Or were you like, "Whatever"? "I'm off the cliff. I can't steer now. I'm over the cliff."

J I had some fears earlier in the week, and I made an appointment with my therapist to—

A I think I saw you earlier in that week.

J —process this. I was really afraid earlier this week. I thought everything was going to wrong.

A Yeah.

J It was going to be a total failure. And he goes, "So, why are you afraid?" And I said, "Well, I think I'm afraid of two things. One, that the audience will come – 150 people will come, and it won't be any good, and they'll want their money back. Or they'll just be disappointed in me. And, secondly, I'm afraid that all these friends, these higher-profile people that I admire, and look up to, and, frankly,

feel honored that they're going to spend their weekend speaking at my conference are going to lose respect for me and think I'm not legit or something. Those are my two biggest fears."

A And he said?

J He said, "That sounds like shame." And I said, "Yeah, yeah. I'm afraid that I'm going to be feel embarrassed, that I'm going to feel shame. And that I'm not going to be able to recover from this. Because these 150 people will write me off and never want to have anything to do with me again.

A Yeah.

J Same thing with these friends. And I'll just be in a gutter somewhere standing on a soapbox hoping people will listen to me. And he gave me this helpful acronym that I thought was useful. And I even talked about it at the conference. I just said, "Hey, look, here's what I'm afraid of." And he said, "SHAME," and I'm not a big fan of acronyms, because I think they're kind of cheesy. But this worked pretty well. He said, "SHAME stands for Should Have Already Mastered Everything."

A [Laughing]

J And I thought, "Yeah, that's how I feel. I feel like you should be amazing at this. You should be a great speaker. You should be a great event planner. You should be a successful business person. You should write great books. You should be good at all of these things"—

A Right.

J —"that we expect." We expect lots of different people to be good at all at once—

A Right.

J —because you were successful in one area, you should be successful in all those other areas. But that's really how I felt. And I felt, "If I'm not. If I don't appear to have mastered these things, I will feel ashamed."

A So, what went — we're going to completely flip this to the other side. What went better than you ever expected it to go?

J I think it all went better. I mean it was really, really great. What helped earlier in that week was as soon as he said, "SHAME meant Shoulder Have Already Mastered Everything," he goes, "You just need to let that go, and your anticipating that this won't go as well as you expect, and you're bracing yourself for that. Have you braced yourself for the possibility that it might be even better?" And, "No, I hadn't braced myself for that."

A No, Sir, I have not braced myself for that.

J And, so, what I did was, on day one I came out in a Superman costume which I think the Internet is still floating around with some pictures of that.

A Yep, yep.

J And I said, "Here's what I'm afraid of." I just came out and said, "Here's the shame that I have. It's the shame that we have." And we talked about that. I said, "Look like there's no shame here. Just

let go of that.” But I think the permission, the freedom, for this thing to just be what it is, or not to be this neatly polished event like the WDS that I went to earlier this year with 3,000 people—

A Yeah, beautifully orchestrated.

J Yeah which was great.

A Variety, yeah. Magical.

J For this thing just be what it is, and for me to acknowledge, “Look, I am kind of the messy person. Not everything is perfectly produced. And I care about excellence but, also, this event is a part of everything else that I do. So, it’s not going to be perfect.”

A Yeah.

J Because it’s just not – I just don’t do perfect things, unfortunately.

A That’s not really Jeff’s brand.

J Yeah. And, so, to feel comfortable with that, and even to talk about it at the beginning and say, “This will not be perfect.” Like one of the things we asked the audience to do was embrace the mess. Embrace the mess of yourself, and also this event.” In other words, “You can’t ask for a refund, because we told you it might be as good as you thought it should be.”

A Yeah, we actually did say that on stage.

J Yeah. No, it was really good. And I think the things that I did not anticipate was how life-changing it was going to be for some people. I thought, “Well, it will be great. People will come and, hopefully, they won’t ask for refunds. And, hopefully, speakers won’t go over time too much. And it will perform to expectation.”

A Right.

J But all of the little surprises along the way. People raising their hands in the middle of a presentation, even though we didn’t give them permission to do that.

A [Laughing]

J Speaking up and sharing something that added a lot of value. All these little surprises along the way. And people coming up to me at the end saying, “This was great. This was the best conference I’ve ever been to.” Those things really surprised me. And they impacted me so much that I said, “OK, we have to do this next year.”

A All right. So, you’re doing it again?

J We’re doing it again. And instead of having three months to plan it, we’ll have 12. And, so, hopefully, it will be even better.

A Where will people find that information?

J It’s hidden. You have to – you can’t find it.

A It's like an Easter egg.

J You go to <http://TribeConference.com> and find out more about it. We're going to sell the tickets in batches. So, if you go there, and there are no tickets available, just sign up for the waiting list, and you will be the first to know when those tickets go on sale.

A The next batch.

[Music playing]

A So, you pulled it off. When you were done – have you seen your therapist since then?

J Oh, yeah, uh-huh (yes).

A Did he just pull out a big, "I told you so" and do a happy dance? Or did he go, "Oh, let's move on to the next thing I'm right about, Jeff"?

J Pretty much that.

A Yeah. That's good to do.

J "How do you feel?" No, I said, "It was great. Thank you for the content.

A [Laughing]

J Therapy is great, because as a writer it gives you lots – it's not free content, but at least you get your ROI, get your return on investment.

A That's why I'm writing a marriage book.

J That's right.

A Because it's the kind of content that I get. So, yeah, I have a tough editor, you know?

J I should really be writing these things off. I mean, this is research.

A I bet you could.

J I should.

A You really— If there are any tax professionals you could write in. Just leave a comment on this show, "Can Jeff write off his therapy?"

J Good idea, me.

A Well, done Jeff. So, let's talk about what's going to be different. Do you have grandeur? Double the size? Because we're going to talk about the size of conferences is my next question.

J Yeah.

A What are your thoughts?

J I think it will be bigger. We had 150 people there. About a third of those people bought tickets for next year. And, so, I think it will be at least doubled the size of this year. I like the size. I want to grow. We'll be in a different hall in the same building of The Factory in Franklin.

A Oh, cool.

J It will be a cooler ambiance. So, we put the deposit down on that.

A Boom.

J What else will be different? New speakers. I don't want to say better speakers, because we had great speakers. But it will be great. It will be amazing. And I had several people, big names, that we can't talk about yet. But some big names that I reached out to kind of last minute as I did for everybody, because I planned the conference in three months. And a couple of them said, "I can't this year. But put me down for next year." So, they said, "Yes, but not right now." And, so, as soon as the conference was over I reached out back to them and I said, "OK, are you serious?" They go, "Yep. I'm there." So, we've already started booking speakers. You know, one of the things we did in the middle of the event was we brought out Mexican popsicles, paletas, for everybody, fresh fruit popsicles. And that was a fun surprise.

A Is that local place?

J Yeah. In Franklin.

A Are they at the farmer's market?

J Ah, maybe. Maybe

A I think they are. I think I had them there where Rick Dank is.

J Amazing, yeah. Stuff like that. Lots more fun surprises along the way.

A Yeah. You'll have 11½ months to come up with surprises.

J Uh-huh (yes).

A That's going to be awesome.

J That was the most fun part was not just having great speakers, and just kind of doing the kind of things that are expected, but creating those little wow moments. I have way more fun. We, I mean the team. We had lots of great ideas. We had a lot of fun doing that.

A Yeah, and let me ask about the size of the event. World Domination Summit is going from 3,000 to 1,000.

J Yeah.

A And, so, it seems like Chris Guillebeau who we both know and love tremendously is making a shift there.

J Tremendously, just hugely.

A Sorry, sorry. I'll speak for myself. I love—

J Don't exaggerate.

A —him tremendously. You love him hugely. But he's cutting to a third. What are your thoughts on, do you ever see yours being that large, or do you worry about making something too big?

J I don't worry about that. I probably should worry about that. Because I care about those things. I like smaller-scale events. Because I think if you go to a big event what ends up happening is everybody sort of segments into their little groups anyway. So, when I go to WDS, or any large event where you've got more than maybe 500 people, I just kind of find my group of 10, 20, 30 people that I just keep running into and having dinner, or sitting together with, or whatever. And there's something to be said about being at a really big event and sort of being swept up in the experience. But I think there's some of the best things that I've ever been to have been 100, 200, 300 people.

A Yeah.

J —where everybody feels like they're having the same experience together. So, I don't know. We did sort of in the marketing of *The Tribe Conference* say, this isn't going to be some social media extravaganza where you've got like a bunch of keynotes, and a bunch of little sessions with workshops.

A Everyone there is doing live podcasting set up.

J And everybody is lost in the — you're just lost in it. I didn't want that. I wanted everybody to have the same experience. And they've got their own unique experiences, but it's the same thing that everybody is experiencing, and they're having different takeaways. So, maybe it will come to a point where we'll segment into workshops and stuff. But at least for next year, it's going to be all the speakers in the same room. Everybody having access to the same information. And what we're trying to do is build a community. So, however big that community wants to get, we'll sort of cross those bridges when we get to them. But it's important to me that it feels connected, it feels tribal. There was an amazing community that happened just because we had people sit at small tables together. There wasn't a ton of people there. And we will keep trying to create intimate moments of connection that, hopefully, create impact and break through. Because that's what we care about.

A <http://TribeConference.com>.

J Yes.

A Check it out. Sign up. If tickets are not available on the site when you go visit, sign up to be notified when they are. And, Jeff, we look forward to seeing what it looks like.

J And I look forward to that, too. I have no idea.

A Thanks, man.

[Music playing]

A So, in addition to learning a great acronym for the word SHAME, what else did you learn in today's conversation? We really do enjoy and appreciate your thoughts on these episodes. So, leave us a note about this episode at <http://GoinsWriter.com>, or leave us a mention on Twitter using

#PortfolioLife. We'll be sure to reply. I'm Andy Traub, and on behalf of Jeff Goins, thank you sincerely for spending some time with us today. Now, go build your portfolio.

[Music playing]

J He said, "SHAME stands for Should Have Already Mastered Everything."