


THE 
PORTFOLIO
LIFE
WITH
JEFF GOINS

PODCAST

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HOW TO GET PEOPLE TO CARE ABOUT YOUR WORK

KEY

J = Jeff Goins

A = Andy Traub

J A lot of times I hear people say, “Oh, I’ve been giving on my blog, and nobody wants to pay me for anything.” Then you haven’t created value. You have to keep trying. But, ultimately, I think that free becomes paid over time if you’re being free strategically.

A Welcome to The Portfolio Life with Jeff Goins. I’m your host, Andy Traub, and this is the show that helps you pursue works that matters, make a difference with your art, and discover your true voice. After you build up the bravery to create your work and put it into the public view, how much control do you have over people caring about it? How should you measure your audience’s reaction to your work? What can you control and develop consistency in that creates results? And what do you have to let go of because you can’t control it? How do you get people to care? That’s the question Jeff answers in this week’s episode of The Portfolio Life.

Jeff, so many people listening are consistently creating content, and you get asked a lot by those people, “How do I get people to come and see all these great things that I’ve been trying to create?” And you’ve written about this. Maybe a better question is, “How do you get people to show up and care about your work?” So, we’re going to talk about that today. Let’s give some advice for those folks, and some hope that they’re not creating for nothing, practical advice on how do you get people to show up and care.

J Sure. You know, there’s a lot to unpack there. But I think that, you know, this is a really big challenge for those of us living in what we call The Information Age, you know? And that means that there is a ton of information available whereas before the people who were creating information, creating content and sharing with the world, those were the vast minority of people that were

publishing books, and that were in the media. These were the special elite that were set aside to create content. And the rest of us, our job was to consume it.

Now anybody with a blog, or Tumblr, or Twitter account can be a content creator. And, so, with so much content to consume the question that people are asking is, “What’s in it for me? What is going to make my reading your content, what’s going to make it worth my while?” And, so, if you are somebody who has a voice – and I believe everybody has something to say in the world – then you really need to be thinking intentionally about how to capture people’s attention, how to make it worth their while. And if you can make it about them, they’ll make it about you.

A All right. So, I heard you say, “Make it about them.” There’s this balance that, I think, some creators struggle with in regards to, “I’m writing this because it’s on my heart. It’s on my mind. It’s my passion. It’s a worldview that I come from.” How do you connect with the desire to communicate with what you’re passionate about and, then, making sure that your readership, you’re helping them, so it’s not just you sort of screaming about this thing that you’re upset about? How do you make sure you’re helping people in the midst of talking about what you’re passionate about?

J So, I don’t think there is anything wrong with creating content for the sake of creating it. I think there is something really beautiful about making things, because you feel like this is something that you have to do, that you can’t not do if you will pardon the double negative. But don’t be one of those people, one of those artists, who make stuff and, then, waits for the world to recognize it. And you get frustrated or even angry about how people aren’t recognizing your genius. Because I see a lot of people doing that. I don’t think there is anything wrong with creating work, writing books, blogs posts, making apps, widgets, whatever and putting them out in the world and now expecting people to care about it just because you feel like, “Well, I just need to create this.” But if you want to make stuff, and you want that stuff, whatever that might be, to make a difference, then you need to be thinking on sort of two levels.

I think your voice is what happens. When you find your voice, when you find what resonates with you, and what resonates with your audience. And the best way to figure that out is just to be consistently generous with the content that you create. Put a lot of stuff out there that is resonating with your heart, with your passion, and then see what connects with people. And as you see what connects, go deeper with those things.

A So, a few things if I can unpack. One, is first, make sure that it’s about them, that you’re including them in the conversation. And, then, second is to pay attention to what resonates. And we’ve talked about that prior to this episode about what resonates really means. And it’s a connection. It’s literally that what you’re producing creates a reaction in something else. And almost matches it or balances it in such a way that there is a connection there. And, so, let’s get really practical.

What are ways that you measure what resonates with the audience? And am I correct that this does scale whether it’s two people or 20 people? Because some people, obviously, have a small readership. But how can we measure what really does resonate?

J Right. Yeah. So, I think that you measure what matters to you. Don’t measure things that aren’t going to impact your action. Don’t measure something that isn’t going to lead to some sort of outcome. So, what I mean by that is, if you’ve got a blog and you’re measuring – I don’t know – page

views or something, and you're beating yourself up if you have two page views on a blog post. And, then, you're giving yourself a pat on the back if you have 20. But that doesn't actually affect your output. It doesn't change the way you do things. Then that's not a helpful metric.

On the other hand, I tend to measure things like – I measure engagement. Really, for me, that means comments on the blogs, social media shares, and then responses. And the heaviest weight of those is the responses. When people respond via Twitter or email and say, "Hey, when you wrote this or said this on your podcast it really resonated with me. It really connected with me." That's something I pay attention to.

A Now, I heard you just differentiate something I've never heard separated which is social shares and, then, responses. I've heard comments. I've heard social shares. Those are some great tools that most people you go to a Website and you can see how many times someone else has shared something, right? But responses, that's a separate category of social media. And you're right. It's more than just sharing. So, you are seeing those because people are literally responding and saying, "This is how it resonated with me, correct?"

J Yeah, I was just looking at some social media statistics. I use a tool called Buffer which is a free tool that you can use to schedule Tweets and Facebook posts and that sort of thing. And it gives you some decent analytics that you can use to look at the things that are making a difference. And one of the things that I was looking at – it was sort of funny – I was looking at these Tweets, and it tells you how many people re-Tweet, how many star them, and then how many people actually click the link when it's a link.

And I saw one of these Tweets – in fact this was fairly common, where if I wrote something really pithy and cool that people would like give a thumbs up to, people would re-Tweet it. And I had this one Tweet that people had re-Tweeted like 20 times. And, then, I looked at the amount of link clicks that people had actually clicked the link to go read the article based on this pithy thing that I said, and that was five people. So, 20 re-Tweeted and five actually—

A Five of them actually—

J Yeah. Not only five of them, but five of them in all their followers.

A That's essentially saying, "Read this book. Have you read the book?" "No, no, no, no. Let's not get into details here, but read this."

J So, you know, not every Tweet is that way. But it was interesting to me. I realized that people will re-Tweet things because they agree with it, because maybe they want you to be their friend, because they think it's interesting without actually consuming the content. And I appreciate that on a certain level. I'm grateful that you're sharing my words with other people. But I'm even more grateful when you read them and respond, because that's ultimately why I'm creating content. I want to connect with people. I want to make a difference in their lives, whatever that looks like. It usually means like something that I said changed something in them, or something about what they did. And if I'm making those kinds of connections consistently, I feel like what I do matters.

A There is something about the human connection that happens when someone responds. It's really equivalent of if someone walks up to you and says, "How's your day?" Or, "That's a lovely

sweater.” You feel compelled you owe them a response. It’s very, very rude if you don’t, because it takes effort to go to that much of a response versus just talking about that thing, whatever it is, to someone else. And I really appreciate that new area of measurement. Because it is exciting to see re-Tweets and shares and so on and so forth. But to have the individual respond really shows that it resonated with them personally.

And in regards to getting people to care about what you’re sharing, a lot of people listening have this desire to at some point make their art something that’s bringing an income. And there is a tension that a lot of listeners, because we get to hear from them on GoinsWriter.com, and they’re writing the comments. We’re having those responses, those conversations. And they’re saying, “Hey, I want to be generous but at some point I feel like I need to be able to flip this switch and monetize.”

So, what’s different about the strategy? Is it just more free?

J I’m writing about this on the blog right now, because I’ve been getting a lot of questions about my book launch. People were asking me as I was basically giving the book away for free for anybody who pre-ordered it. Once the book hits shelves, there won’t be this great deal. But during this time when we’re trying to encourage pre-orders we’re giving the book away for anybody who wanted to pay shipping and handling. And people kept asking, “Why are you doing this?” Like, what is the point? We talked about this in another episode. But the basic bottom line belief that I have – it’s sort of twofold.

One, I believe that if I have a choice between being generous with my art or being stingy, I’m going to choose generosity every time. But the practical side, the other thing about that is that I do believe that what goes around comes around. And that if you give away 10,000 copies of your book, that’s the best way to sell 100,000 copies. And if you want to get a bunch of people to listen to your music, or come to your concerts, you know maybe one of the best ways you can do that is gets lots of people right now to listen to your music.

Now, I’m not saying that all art should be free. Because I realize in different industries that means different things. But I think the strategy of free, being generous for a certain period of time is a very smart marketing decision and can be done very strategically where if you are consistently generous to your tribe, then give them opportunities to basically pay you back. And there is lots of interesting psychology studies about this, about reciprocity. When you give, give, give, give at a certain point some of you are going to want to give back. And that’s not why you do it, but it’s a beautiful byproduct. And if you’re not just being generous but helping people, and the stuff you are doing is connecting with people.

A lot of times I hear people say, “Oh, I’ve been giving on my blog and nobody wants to pay me for anything.” Then you haven’t created value. You have to keep trying. But, ultimately, I think that free becomes paid over time if you’re being free strategically. You’re giving things away in the right way where it’s adding value. It’s creating a need. It’s meeting people’s needs, and it’s creating a market of a certain percentage of that group of people that you’re helping are going to want to pay you for the things you’re doing or for something else.

And, so, I think the cool thing about it is if you do enough things for free, enough acts of generosity, there will be opportunities down the line to do some things not for free. And to quote Seth Godin, “People will be standing in line waiting to pay you.”

A All right, Jeff. In this section we're going to keep it with the theme which is, how to get people to show up and care. And you may not like this, but we're going to talk about what people have shared with you, how they have communicated that you care about your work. So, in regards to in the in-box, we're going to talk about, what are some feedback that you've received? Because you get so much email. You get literally mail in your inbox across the street at the post office box. What are some things that people have communicated to you that you're most proud of? And when it comes to how you've been able to affect them with your own writing and your message?

J I've been thinking a lot about this, because sometimes I don't know. Like sometimes I think that, "Man, if I had more email subscribers I would feel like what I was doing is awesome." Or if I had 50,000 more Twitter followers I would feel validated. And I set these numbers, and I go after them. And I go, "Aah." And, then, I achieve these numbers whether it's money, or followers, or whatever. And I don't want to sort of undermine the importance of having goals and measuring success. I'm a driven person. I think those things are all great. But I consistently keep disappointing myself by achieving my goals and going, "Huh, that's it?" And I think it's because I'm measuring the quantity of the feedback, not the quality, meaning I've got 100 emails of people saying I'm awesome. Or 500 five-star reviews on Amazon or something. And the things that continue to move me are not the quantity but the quality.

So, for example, consistently the things that connect with me are when somebody reads a book, not just a blog post. I mean I appreciate that. But it takes dedication to read an entire book, to sit down for a few hours in one sitting or over the weekend, or whatever, over a course of a year and read a book which is usually a single idea or story and say thank you for that. And, "When I read this, it made me do blank." And, so, when people read my book, *You Are A Writer*, and they say, "This led to me calling myself a writer." Wow! Like I love that. And I think I shared before, I only need a handful of those a month to keep me going. I don't need hundreds and hundreds. I just need maybe like an email a week for me to feel like what I'm doing actually matters. And I feel sort of weird being that vulnerable. But I think we all need to be affirmed for the things that we are doing at some point to feel like I'm not just creating in a vacuum, that what I'm doing matters to someone else out there.

And I've been surprised to realize that it doesn't need to be hundreds of thousands of "someones" out there. In fact, once you get to certain numbers it's hard to imagine. It's hard to imagine 50,000 people waiting to receive an email from me. I can't write for 50,000 people. I write for Jim, the guy who emailed me two weeks ago thanking me about a blog post I wrote. Or Ryan the guy who sent me a Facebook message after he read my book in one sitting and made him cry. I mean, these are things where I go, "Wow! I want to connect with more people like that."

A I appreciate you being vulnerable in that way. And I think what's beautiful – and I believe this is true for all the other people that you and I know that have large followings. Well, I'll tell you what, I've never heard anyone say, "Oh, I hit 100,000 followers." Those aren't the things that they really get super excited about. What they get really excited about are the ways that other people's lives have changed, because they took action based on words you put on a page. And I don't know if you realize that, but that's a separation is what you said, affirmation great. But it's the life change of someone else that really keeps you going.

I was playing Super Mario, something with my son on the Wii. We got one recently. We're like eight years behind. And we got like the Turbo Boost. And that's what those affirmations are. I'm the

same way. When I get those I'm like, "OK, here's a boost. And that's good for a week." You know? So, Attaboys are great. But if you change your life because of something that Jeff has written, then that's the boost you can give him. He wouldn't ask that, but I will.

So, actually, we are going to talk about some practical writing tips.

All right, Jeff. There is a smaller and smaller amount of attention that people are able to pay to content. *USA Today* was criticized for many years by people in the newspaper industry because they said, "You're a joke. Your stories are 200 words long. That's not a full story. You need to jump to page A17, right? So, you use bullet points. You use paragraph headings, things like that.

Let's talk about some practical tips in regards to writing bullet points and ways you can format what you're creating in order to encourage people to read it and take action.

J So, I think it's helpful to know that before I started the blog that I authored now, you know, I lost track of how many failed blogs I had. But it was something like eight or nine if you count blogs that you created five minutes after you jumped out of the shower, because you had a really good idea.

A No, I think if you install WordPress. Let's get specific here. I think if you install WordPress which was a bigger deal back then.

J Sure.

A Then I mean you've started a blog.

J Yeah. So, I started a lot of blogs that didn't necessarily finish them. And when I was doing all these things every time I thought, "This is it." This is the big idea. And I was always struggling to capture people's attention. And I thought, "Man, I had these great ideas, but people aren't paying attention to what I'm doing." And I didn't really understand a lot of these concepts that we flesh out on the show, especially in this episode.

But one of the things I didn't understand was how to write for a culture that really has this sort of cultural ADD where there's so many interruptions throughout the day. You can go through your entire day never really fully consuming any piece of content. You can start a video on YouTube, read status updates on Facebook, get started through your email inbox, and one distraction can lead to another, to another, to another. And you never actually sit down and focus on one piece of content.

Some of us waste entire days. We're spending our lives doing this. And I'm guilty of this sometimes. And we're all in this world. We're all experiencing that, or at least there's this temptation. And when I started reading about copywriting, when I started reading Brian Clark's blog when he was the only author of *Copyblogger*. And I started understanding that copywriting is really the art of capturing attention with word. That really connected with me. That really moved me. And I started to apply some of those lessons.

These are like, you know, time-tested copywriting principles like using bullet points and short paragraphs. You know, don't use super-complex sentences. And as a writing purist, this was a challenge for me. It sort of offended my sensibilities.

A Now, he's not exaggerating folks.

J Yeah.

A Literally, Jeff is offended at improper grammar usage. I'm sure I offend him every episode with some improper use of some word. But he continues to have me back, and I appreciate him for that. So, do you feel like you were giving into something by having a bullet point? I mean, people should be able to get through long paragraphs. How did you get through that, Jeff?

J Yeah, thank you for that therapeutic question. I think I had to have a very pragmatic dilemma, or was I going to stick to my ideals and people were going to read this whether they liked it or not (laughing), or was I going to fight for a person's attention? And did I believe that writing was something that was a craft, that the reader really needed to bend around, or did I want to bend the writing around the reader's attention?

And I decided to do the latter. I decided that words, messages that we create, are intended to connect with people. I went back to my communications speech class in high school and remembered that communication is about a sender and receiver and a message. And if the receiver doesn't receive the message, you haven't communicated. So, I was sending a bunch of stuff out there on the Internet. And it wasn't connecting with people. And I was doing something wrong which was not honoring the attention of the audience.

And, so, I now have this idea that I think is, writing can take on various forms without it necessarily losing the core content of it. And I write blog posts, and format blog posts differently than I would write in a book, because it is a different medium. And I think the medium in a way affects the message. And you kind of have to fit the message to the medium without corrupting the main content. But if you're creating stuff and it's not connecting with people, then you've got to change the way that you're creating.

A All right. Let's share a resource or two that would help someone get into a better frame of mind when it comes to being generous, communicating with your audience, making sure that they do receive what you're trying to help them with. Because as we say in the beginning, it's really about caring for them to help them in a way that they receive the message, and being generous very consistently.

So, is there a resource or two that you would point people to that would reinforce and remind them: "Be generous. Be helpful"?

J So, this isn't a writing resource, but I recently reread a book by Bob Goff called *Love Does*. And it's a book about living – I think the subtitle is "A secretly incredible life." And it's this idea that there are lots of people who are trying to look amazing, and do amazing things for the attention that it brings them. But truly remarkable people are doing these subversive acts of generosity. And Bob talks about capers, and whimsy, and all these fun ideas about how we can basically love each other better as human beings. And the book is just full of story, after story, after story of not only these really

generous ideas and actions, but they are sort of audaciously generous, and fun, and helpful. And sort of over-the-top things that he and his family and his friends have done to create these wow experiences for the people that they love and to make an impact in the world whether that means when his kids turned a certain age Bob took them to anywhere in the world they wanted to go to have some sort of adventure, or whether it meant having all of these global leaders over to their house for a sleepover, or going into Uganda and helping improve the situation there for kids who have been orphaned and war-torn area in the world.

And all of it was based on this idea that love doesn't just think about things. It doesn't just feel things. Love does. Love takes action in the world, and if you're going to make an impact on the world and live the secretly incredible life – which the cool thing about it is it doesn't remain a secret for too long – you're going to have to do something that's sort of over-the-top audaciously generous and whimsical and fun and out there. The cool things that Bob does in the book is you don't realize this until you get to the end, and he lets you in on one of these capers, another one of his capers that's you are unaware of which is that when you buy the book, or somebody bought it for you, that everyone who benefitted from the profits of that book Bob, ? Miller who wrote the forward, and edited it, and Thomas Nelson, the publisher, they all gave all the money to charity. And, so, even without you realizing it, you were a part of something that love does.

And I think that's the secret to living this incredible life is to do things that just keep topping their generosity. And if you give and give and give I think we end up creating the kind of world that we all want to live in.

A In this part of the show we force Jeff to be profound.

J (Laughing).

A And, so, Jeff, what profound thought do you have for us today?

J It's a pretty forced thing. Yeah, so, we're talking about how to get people to show up and care about what you create. It's really about being generous. So, far we've talked about being consistently generous, trying to not just put stuff out there, but stuff out there that's going to help people be helpful, make it about them, and they'll make it about you. And, ultimately, realizing that free, generosity, has a way of begetting more generosity. Free becomes paid over time. If you give enough, people will start giving back to you. And, so, I think the thought, the profundity, which is not a word you hear very often, incidentally, of this whole idea is that we don't earn attention. We don't do something to earn something from somebody. That's sort of a transactional way of looking at getting attention to us or our work. But really we give our way into attention. We don't earn our way into attention. We give our way into it.

A All right, Jeff. We go from really profound and powerful and meaningful to just completely silly predictions.

J Well, they were supposed to be serious. But you just took it....

A No, no, no. Mine are very rarely serious. I mean, maybe you are. You got a little too heavy there. So, I'm going to lighten it up with, I think that Jeff by the end of 2015 will own an Apple watch.

J I always feel compelled to make these prophecies come true. You know, it's like—

A Your wife is going to be mad at me.

J It's like a Greek tragedy or something. Like, here, the prediction. And, then, like you try to avoid it, but it ends up coming true, because you heard the prediction. My prediction is that they're going to stop serving candy in movie theaters in the next few years, because of the whole organic food thing, and they're going to start serving like Paleo snacks there instead.

A Like kale shakes.

J Like lima beans or something.

A Like the Ju shots.

J Like Kale chips is what they'll do.

A Wow.

J Like instead of getting a Slurpee, you're going to get like a green smoothie and Kale chips instead of popcorn at the movie theater.

A All right. We will see which one will come true.

J We both will.

A How will you view your connections with your audience differently now that you've learned the other ways to measure how people care? Let us know by stopping by this episode on Goinswriter.com. Hey, we're grateful for the 100 plus listeners who have left their review of this show on iTunes. And if you have a few minutes today and haven't left your review, we would appreciate you leaving yours as well. I'm Andy Traub, and on behalf of Jeff Goins, thanks for spending some time with us.

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