

EPISODE 116

JG: This is how I think intentional networks get made. You find people that are part of a community and then you start finding people that you really want to connect with and then this is when it becomes a network: you start connecting those people, not just to you but to each other.”

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:26.9] AT: Welcome to The Portfolio Life Podcast with Jeff Goins. I’m your host, Andy Traub and Jeff believes that every creative should have a portfolio life. A life full of pursuing work that matters, making the difference with your art and discovering your true voice and so Jeff is committed to helping you find, develop and live out your unique world view so that you so that you too can live a portfolio life.

If you’re looking for a community, should you search one out or build it? How can you find a community that will accept you that you can help and it can help you? Should you pursue the biggest names in your industry or look elsewhere? Well today Jeff and I discuss the importance of community and a simple strategy for finding one.

Here is my conversation with Jeff Goins.

[EPISODE]

[00:01:16.6] AT: Jeff, you live in an amazing physical community. You have a wonderful home and you live in a nice city but today, I want us to talk about your friendships, your writing community and the role that plays in your own creative development. So first of all, how intentional have you been about creating community of creatives or business people around you?

[00:01:38.6] JG: Well, I don’t know if I’ve created a community. I think more often or not, you find a community and I think about this, we’ve talked about this before, about the community of ex-pats living in Paris in 1920’s, the Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso, they’re all a

part of this and that was a scene and I like thinking of it like this. I think a scene is a community of people, that's a group of people usually that are particular to a certain place that you join.

You become a part of an existing scene and I think every city has their own scene, they have their own strengths and weaknesses but they have groups of people that come together to do interesting things. When I moved to Nashville, moved here to chase a girl that I married...

[00:02:26.4] AT: Good job by the way.

[00:02:27.0] JG: Thank you.

[00:02:27.5] AT: You caught her.

[00:02:28.2] JG: I got her, I went to see about a girl in the words of Goodwill Hunting. Yeah so I came here and for years, I thought about being a writer and I was sitting at my laptop, looking at my laptop going, "How am I going to do this?" Not realizing that one of the ways that I was going to do it was by closing a laptop, leaving my apartment and stepping out and going out into the community and becoming a part of whatever scene was there, you know, what was happening in the city.

And at the time, I was working as a marketing director for non-profit and Nashville was starting to do these local events called "pod camps and bar camps" and they're these local free conferences. They call them an "un-conference" but it was gatherings of people who were using social media even before it was called that new media technology to grow their business and so I started going to these places and becoming a part of that scene connecting with other entrepreneurs and creatives and marketers who were trying to figure out how to use this technology. I was trying to figure out how do I use blogging to maybe become a writer so all that to say, the first thing I did was I became a part of the thing, the community, the scene that already existed.

[00:03:43.9] AT: Do you think every city has that at some form or fashion?

[00:03:48.2] JG: I do. What I don't think is helpful and we've heard this from readers and listeners of the show is to go, "Oh look at Nashville or San Francisco or New York and I group the cities together."

[00:04:00.0] AT: Well Never look at San Francisco, just never do.

[00:04:03.4] JG: Well what's funny is I think some people look at the community though. We're a part of the Nashville as something desirable in it, it certainly is but then I could look at New York or San Francisco or Chicago. I could look at much bigger markets, much bigger cities with way more stuff going on. We're in a relatively small town compared to those places. I don't think it's helpful to do that though. I don't think it's helpful to go, "Oh you've got these great opportunities I wish I have that."

I do think that wherever you are, there is some kind of opportunity. There's some scene that you can be a part of in some way and so the first thing I did was I joined an existing scene. Then as I started to make relationships, I realized that that's not the end all be all. So if you don't have something like that or doesn't look like there's a lot of opportunity in your town, the next thing you could do is you can build a network and that was me being intentional.

But the first thing I did was become a part of what was already there, build relationships and then I realized and I think this is true for conferences, Facebook groups, blogging communities, communities both online and offline. Any community that you're a part of there is a sub set of that community. So I would go to marketing conferences in Nashville where people are talking about how to use this next new piece of technology and I realized that there were creatives there.

There were designers and writers and people that weren't just like hardcore technology enthusiast. There are people like me who are on the margins of the community.

[00:05:37.0] AT: So you're saying look at the larger and don't go, "Oh, it's just the Chamber of Commerce maybe there's people inside of that" or more likely there are people inside of that that maybe fit a little bit better. So don't throw out a bigger, maybe older group in your community to say, "Oh, I don't fit there." What you're saying is you went into those places and

you found smaller, I think you used the word “sub sets” of people and you said, “Hey maybe there’s four people but those are four more people I can connect with”.

[00:06:00.2] JG: Yeah, find your people. So go to the big gathering, the conference, the event, the thing that’s happening in your home town or not like I am not saying that everything is happening right outside your door. I do think there are opportunities in every local and those are unique to those places but that doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t move around, that you shouldn’t go somewhere new. I leave Nashville a lot, several times a year to go to bigger cities or just different places.

Where people are gathering that I don’t usually get to see because I know that opportunity happens when people come together and gather around shared interest. So go to those places, join that scene, become a part of that community but then, look for your people. Look for the people that represent your interest. In my case, it was finding other writers and creatives and then after you do that, I think you specifically target those people and grab coffee with them.

Grab lunch with them, hang out with them, Skype with them afterwards, build a personal connection and this is how I think intentional networks get made. You find people that are part of a community and then you start finding people that you really want to connect with and then this is when it becomes a network. You start connecting those people not just to you but to each other.

[00:07:15.7] AT: Yeah and that’s more I guess the word I think of is *impresario* where it becomes less about you being part of the tribe and more like, “Let me connect these other people”. I’m going to be the person that brings people together right? There is so much value in that. When you think about it, was it the ring master for the circus, is that whether it all?

[00:07:32.9] JG: Ring leader?

[00:07:33.2] AT: I think it’s ring master? Anyway, the person in charge of all the rings.

[00:07:37.2] JG: I was thinking of the Lord of the Rings when you’re talking about ring master.

[00:07:39.8] AT: Oh maybe that is, you're maybe right. Anyway, the guy's in charge. It's not that he is going to fight the tigers or he's going to jump off of the high or whatever you call it, trapee or...

[00:07:50.1] JG: Trapeze.

[00:07:50.5] AT: Trapeze, yeah.

[00:07:51.5] JG: Not trampoline.

[00:07:52.7] AT: Trapeze.

[00:07:52.9] JG: That's another thing.

[00:07:53.9] AT: Well, let's walk away from that one.

[00:07:55.1] JG: Okay, hang on. Ring master is the person in charge of the circus.

[00:07:59.7] AT: All right, so I was right.

[00:08:00.4] JG: Ring leader is a person who initiates or leads an illicit or illegal activity which is the word that it actually does.

[00:08:06.1] AT: So let me be clearer, we're going to talk about ring masters or ring leaders for the adult version, the explicit, yeah but that person, their gift is, "Hey, look over there, here's what's coming next" and what I have found is and I am usually not the most skilled person in the room but I'll connect people and there's real value in that as well, right? So just in case we have lulled people to sleep here, we're going to reverse. Throw it in reverse even though we're driving forward, how could you do this wrong.

You've built a community, you have people around you that know and like and trust you and you have a healthy community, what are ways that people just do this really wrong and you're like, "Oh man you're just doing it wrong" right? I mean because you get people that don't want to be

a part of your community, part of this community, whatever it might be, maybe you meet in a conference, maybe you meet them locally, are they just moving to town and expecting it that it will just happen? Are they being forceful, how have you seen people just get community wrong?

[00:09:05.5] JG: Yeah, so I was at a conference hanging out with my friend, Chase Reeves from Fizzle and somebody asked him this question and he had a really good answer for it better than any answer I could think off and he said, “What you want to do is you want to go to a conference, you want to go to a place, join a scene and then find the people who are more or less at the level that you are at. What a lot of people do though is they go to a conference.”

“They go, “I want to talk to this speaker. I want to buy so and so a drink. I want to hang out with this influencer,” and Chase said, “More often than not success, real success is going to come as a result of you finding people who are just as ambitious as you are, just as hungry and talented as you are and just become friends with them and help them get to where they want to go and if you do that, then as both of you come up in your industry, then you have this really great circle of influence that everybody goes, “Oh isn’t that great” and I think about that.

I thought about that and I thought, “That’s really interesting because I’ve gone to two groups of people that I know,” relationships I guess in terms of on the business side not just family and friends and one group is all these influential people who are way more successful than me and I’ve had lunch and coffee with these people and they’ve helped me. I’ve learned things from them, they’ve really helped me but these are busy people and then I’ve...

[00:10:34.2] AT: Yeah, like if you said, let’s get together again you were like, “great, every quarter maybe” right? Sincerely, they’re not being a jerk. They’re just saying, “Yeah maybe in a few months we can get together again”. It’s not like, “Yeah, let’s go tomorrow, same place” right?

[00:10:46.2] JG: Yeah and I think that those relationships are valuable in growing your portfolio but I don’t think they’re enough. I don’t think they’re sufficient. They’re necessary but they’re not sufficient and so then when I look at all of my peer relationships, so the other night I had a group of guys over in my backyard. Those are all guys that are basically around the same level. There were no “rock stars” in that group.

[00:11:13.2] AT: Yeah and then I came too.

[00:11:15.3] JG: You know what I'm saying? There was no stars in that group to us like these, "Oh that so and so," you know?

[00:11:23.5] AT: Yeah and with my pen, I really hope I get to talk to that person. It was like we could talk to anybody and it was fun.

[00:11:27.7] JG: Yeah everybody understood that we're all peers here and that's a much larger group of people that I know that if I text that person, call them, e-mail them, they're going to get back to me today and we could hang out this week if I need to.

[00:11:40.0] AT: Or just help each other or give each other advice right?

[00:11:42.5] JG: Totally and these are busy people too but we understand that there's mutual benefit from being together.

[00:11:49.2] AT: Right, I love this. Yeah.

[00:11:50.6] JG: I think that I have gotten way more out of those relationships because I just have more of them and so what I mean by that is, the guest post or the endorsement from big influencer bill is great but that's one big blip in the radar and then the 20 little things that this friend does and this peer does and that person does that are all at my level it just adds up to more. Does that make sense?

[00:12:17.6] AT: Oh totally. I have a friend that is going to speak at a TEDx conference at the fall and one of the things that — she's in a mastermind and a part of, the one thing that we advised to her is, "Hey, this is great but this isn't, no offence but you're probably not going to be Brené Brown". It's not going to be the talk that it breaks you out, it's going to be those daily visitors to your blog. It's going to be the people that you talk to at your local whatever next week that she's speaking up.

It is that larger and frankly more accessible community, which is what I love about your advice Jeff and I hope people are hearing it is stop shooting for the stars necessarily and look around and realize there's people that are capable and hungry and available just like you and embrace them instead of being all starry eyed, right?

[00:13:02.8] JG: Yes, so here's a practical way to break it down. So say you go to the next big conference or whatever and you're standing in line waiting.

[00:13:09.2] AT: Like the Tribe Conference which is...

[00:13:10.9] JG: September 16th through the 18th.

[00:13:12.6] AT: Tribeconference.com, go ahead.

[00:13:14.5] JG: Yeah, so say you come to the Tribe Conference and you're standing in line to get Chris Drucker's signature or something. You are standing in line to meet influencer so and so, that's great. Say get a selfie with them and that's totally fine. They like that, it's fun for you, it's great then turn around and grab two people behind you in line who also want to get Chris's autograph and go hang out with those people for two hours.

Go get drinks, buy coffee, have lunch, those are your people. Those are the people that if you all get together and start helping each other, that's where magic happens and I think you need both. I mean to be clear, I think it's good to have both. It's good to get the attention of an influencer hard but it's nice. When those things happen, it's really nice. Those opportunities are rare whereas the opportunity to connect with other people who are at the same place that you're at more or less.

A little bit ahead, a little bit behind, those opportunities are abundant. You go to a conference and 500 people are there, you've got 499 other people to connect with. Whereas...

[00:14:18.5] AT: Yeah or the seven speakers, right?

[00:14:20.6] JG: Yeah, exactly.

[00:14:21.1] AT: Yeah, I think that's a really healthy perspective. One of the thing I've seen people do poorly and you talked about this a little earlier but they really use where they live as an excuse and they don't just get out and I'm going to be really clear about this. I moved here from Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I live there for 10 years and I'll tell you a thriving place for creatives is Sioux Falls, South Dakota. There is a group of people there that are doing it.

I had a friend that was an infographic company called Lemon.Ly. He's probably in his early 30's now maybe late 20's and he's got 15 employees and they make infographic for major league baseball. They do it for massive brands and they're in this town of a 150,000 people that's the closest town is three hours away. What's their excuse? They don't have any and I just think what's really powerful if there isn't a community in your town, I almost think that's more of an opportunity because you can be the one that's, "Hey, let's start something".

There's so much power there and I hear a lot of people say, "Wow, you guys have a lot of cool stuff going on," and we do. It's a great environment but I want to end with this, what do you do when you get into a community and you start to feel like you're not big enough? There's a lot of big names, so how do you get into a community and still feel like what you do matters when essentially, there's a lot of people doing bigger and better stuff. What do you do with those feelings of, "Man, I don't even know if I belong here or I wanted to try that because what I do is so small"?

[00:15:55.2] JG: Yeah, I think that that doesn't really matter because whether you're big or small or medium or extra-large, there is somebody else in that big crowd of people that's a lot like you.

[00:16:07.1] AT: Yeah, I love that.

[00:16:08.1] JG: And so, who cares where you're at right now? That's not the point. The point is connect with somebody like you who's at your level and it's not level of importance or significance. It's often level of skill or experience or just reputation and I went to lots of conferences. Well I mean a few per year but that felt like a lot to me in getting out there. Many of them were free local events. I remember the first time I paid a 100 bucks to go to a conference.

That was a big investment and I was wall flowering, scared to talk to people. I think sometimes when we hear this, we think folks have to be super aggressive or charismatic. I still don't have business cards and I meet people and I'm embarrassed. I go, "If you Google me, you can find me."

[00:16:59.6] AT: I'm on the Google.

[00:17:00.9] JG: Yeah and that's one part laziness and I am still not that comfortable with like, "Hey, have you heard of me?" it's hard and yeah, I went to this conference one time. I paid 100 bucks to be there and I was like, "Wow, I better get my money's worth" kind of thing. This better make my dream come true and standing on the sidelines, scared to talk to people and then somebody was like, "What do you do?" and I was like, "Oh gosh, I have to answer this question."

I go, "I'm a writer I guess" and "Oh, what do you write?" "I write a blog" and "Oh cool, how's that going?" and we just started talking and then another time, I was at a meet up in Atlanta for bloggers at this conference and I was thinking, "Oh man, I hope I get to meet so and so. That will be so cool" and I walked up to that person and said, "Hi" and I just quickly walked away because I didn't know what to do and again, I am standing on the sidelines.

And I see somebody else standing on the sidelines and this time, I reached out which was very uncomfortable and I said, "What do you do?" and we started talking. All these people are really good friends today because we stayed in touch. So I think we think like I need to be that outgoing or that charismatic or whatever and if you're standing on the sidelines looking into this big crowd of people and you're scared to death, maybe don't look at the big crowd of people, maybe turn to your right.

[00:18:22.6] AT: Turn to your right and go, "No way, you're scared too?"

[00:18:24.7] JG: It's really interesting the way that happens. I was at the World Domination Seminar that you and I go to, have been to together a few times and it just keep getting bigger

and bigger and bigger. I think the second year we went together there's 3,000 people and I started to get overwhelmed by that and so I was like, "Okay, I'm going to leave for a while."

[00:18:42.9] AT: They made it small again by the way.

[00:18:43.9] JG: Yeah, right. I'm going to leave for a while and I went to a coffee shop by myself and I started hanging out.

[00:18:48.9] AT: I remember that. You're like, "Hey, because we room together." walk around together and you're like, "Hey, I'm going to go now" and I'm like, "Where are we going?" You're like, "No, I'm going to go" "What are you doing?" "I'm just going to be not with you or anyone else" and I'm like, "Okay" and that's necessary sometimes but what happened at the coffee shop?

[00:19:03.8] JG: Well then I ran into somebody else from the conference who was also running away from the conference and we had a great conversation and so you're going to find the people like you just by being who you are.

[00:19:16.2] AT: I love that. Just look around to the side instead of upper, yeah.

[00:19:19.2] JG: Yeah, now that doesn't mean you're not going to have to step out and say, "Hey I'm so and so". It takes a little bit of courage to do that but it doesn't take some sort of super human strength and so what do you do if you feel like you're not enough? Find the other people that feel like they're not enough and hang out.

[00:19:35.9] AT: There's an abundant amount of those people, yeah.

[00:19:37.9] JG: There really is. You're not unique. I went to a conference one time. It was about finding your dream job and building a business around your dream and everybody had these name tags where they have their dream written on them. "I want to be in such and such" and I didn't have one. I didn't know what my dream was at that time and the speaker opened up the conference saying, "Okay, we did a survey. We asked what everybody what their dream was

and 60% of you didn't know," and I was like, "Oh." All of a sudden I felt shame for this and I realized that I was in the majority and I had no idea.

[00:20:10.5] AT: That's great.

[00:20:11.1] JG: Yeah, so you're not in the minority, you're in the majority. If you're at a conference or a meet up and you feel insecure and not worthy to be there and you're there to see speaker so and so or influencers or such and such, that's why everybody else is there too. You're in a really good crowd, turn to your side, meet a few people and then stay in touch. That's the other thing, it's what makes a community. We began talking about "how do you build a community".

Well, you start by joining a scene that already exist, then you find other people who are peers or to your right or to your left and then you reach out to them and you connect with them and then connect them to each other and lastly, as part of that, you stay in touch. This I think really is the difference between a network, a real network of people that will be valuable to you and to everybody else in the network over the long term versus just a random connection or meet up, it's that you stay in touch.

That's what a network is, it's a network of active relationships of people all working together to give and receive from that group of people and this I think is the difference between those who succeed at this and those who ultimately fail is the people who follow up, stay in touch. I'm not talking about an e-mail every week or whatever but reaching out a few times a year, staying in touch with these people so that when you do see them again, it's a reunion.

Not you're meeting them for the 5th time and you go, "What's your name again?" I mean that's how relationships are made in our personal lives and that's how they're going to be made in our professional lives too.

[00:21:43.0] AT: Thank you Jeff.

[00:21:44.6] JG: You bet.

[END OF EPISODE]

[00:21:51.9] AT: So where is that small pocket of other thinkers who are just like you? What are you willing to do to connect with them? To leave your thoughts on that question as well as any other part of this episode or to easily share it with a friend, go to goinswriter.com/116 and if you've benefited from this podcast, please share it with a friend or leave us a review on iTunes.

I'm Andy Traub and on behalf of Jeff Goins, thanks for spending some time with us. Now go build your portfolio.

[END]

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