



Jay Abraham Interviews Josh Linkner

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Jay Abraham: Welcome. Today we're going to be talking to somebody who's very accomplished in a multiplicity of entrepreneurial fields. It's a pleasure and honor to introduce Josh Linkner.

Josh Linkner: My pleasure. Great to be here.

JAY: And I should add that you're CEO of Detroit Venture Partners, a very inventive and innovative venture fund committed to really re-animating the Detroit area with dynamic, highly technical enterprises, correct?

JOSH: Yes. We are backing passionate entrepreneurs in Detroit to help rebuild our troubled city through entrepreneurial fire. And by investing in start-ups--mainly tech start-ups--we are able to create jobs, urban density and hope.

And we're working very hard to re-establish Detroit as a beacon of innovation and entrepreneurship and we think there's a great economic opportunity here, as well as an opportunity to truly make a difference in our community.

JAY: You say it's not just about finding businesses that will make you money; it's about finding businesses that can make a difference in the community, add value to the





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consumer and then be profitable.

If you could start with some fundamental beliefs, lessons, or recommendations that might help any and all business owners and entrepreneurs to accelerate, advance, enhance, expand, or compete more passionately, purposefully, in whatever they do, I would love to start with that.

JOSH: Well, it would be my pleasure. I mean I could really chat on that topic a long time because I am really passionate about entrepreneurship; I look at it, together with small businesses, as vehicles for impact in the world.

So, the first thing I would say is to follow your passion. If you're working just to make money, you're going to end up probably not making as much money, and also certainly not making as big of an impact, as you may be capable of.

I've studied the most successful people in the world, and typically what happens is they look at money as a by-product. In other words, they pursue their passion, they focus on making a giant impact, and the money comes as a result.

We always say in our group that "Money follows; it doesn't lead." Let your passion lead, let your desire to make the world better, to serve customers, to build an organization that's enduring and the money will take care of itself.

JAY: Also, even in this digital age, you can't underestimate the value of grit and determination. In Detroit, we've been kicked around a lot; we're the Rocky Balboa of cities, fighting for life and glory.

And I think that what will re-establish our city, and what will help your listeners is the spirit of grit and determination that is part of the American fabric.





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So often today, you hear of people making billions of dollars in a few short years, and people think that building businesses are easy. And we know that that's not the case; success rarely follows a straight line. And what I've found is the most successful people are not just the ones who can celebrate success, but who can slog through adversity.

I think that the business journey is a challenging one, and that the people who are most persistent—the ones who have that will of steel, who are able to forcefully fight through the natural gravitational pull that's trying to hurt and pull down small businesses—are the ones who use their passion and determination and commitment to follow through. They're the ones who end up making the biggest mark.

I was impacted many years ago by someone who said that the key to the greatest achievements possible is to not fall in love with your product or your company but to fall in love with the marketplace you serve and the impact that your product service at work in their lives, protecting, enhancing, entertaining them makes. What do you think about that?

JOSH: I think it's exactly right. The world has changed fundamentally over the past five or six years and the rules of the game are no longer the same. Today, an entirely new set of skills is needed in order to win. In today's complex world, creativity is mission critical and the companies and individuals able to nurture and develop their creativity as a source of sustainable competitive advantage are going to be the ones that will win in the future.

So, creativity is something that exists not just for its own sake. It's to be applied to drive success. And if you look at companies that are the most successful—whether we're talking about Groupon or Google or Facebook, or even companies like Ford Motor Company—it's the companies that doubled down on innovation that are the





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ones that win.

And by the way, creativity isn't only about product innovation. In other words, if you run a life insurance company, you're not going to innovate the product but you can innovate on how you connect with customers, how you market yourself, how you build your culture to attract the best people. So, people in companies who apply creativity to their daily lives—let's call it everyday creativity—are the ones who really win.

Think about creativity as a resource. We're all busy managing resources like cost, and money, and time. Managing the creativity within your organization can be an enormous windfall in terms of success.

Many of us don't feel very creative; we think you're either born with creativity or you're not. And the good news is that the research findings show us that the exact opposite is true. In fact, a 2008 study by Harvard University revealed that creativity is 85% learned behavior, which means that you and I on our groggiest day have 85% of the creative capacity of a Mozart or a da Vinci or a Picasso. But many of us don't feel creative, so we fold our arms and say, "Oh gee, I'm not very creative."

All children are creative; they're abundant with creativity. The creative roots we had as children run deep. And so, rather than creativity being an attribute that we're either born with or not, turns out it's really more of a capacity that needs to be rediscovered and nurtured in many adults.

JAY: I agree. I've tried to be a gauntlet for entrepreneurs, challenging them to delve into their childlike curiosity and innocence because it's very liberating when you tap into creativity. It lets you see life from a different paradigm. All of sudden it's like viewing the world through 3D glasses.





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JOSH: And today, we live in a world of dizzying speed, exponential complexity and ruthless competition. And to get ahead, whether it's in our companies, our communities, or our careers, we're each saying, "Alright, what can I do to drive progress? How can I win for myself and my family?" And sometimes, working harder isn't the right answer.

You can only cut costs so far in most organizations. So, if you can put on those 3D glasses, you're going to find ways to create, and when you're able to create, you're able to drive significant progress.

If you run a local dry cleaner, maybe you can find a new way to serve customers or a new way to market it or a new way to make the experience of people coming to your dry cleaning shop more powerful. So, creativity is out there for all of us. I think each of us has a big blank canvass and it's up to us, individually and collectively, to paint that masterpiece. And we've been given an amazing set of paints and brushes as human beings because we all have incredible capacity to create, so now it's up to each of us.

JAY: What one or two little steps would you recommend to encourage someone to discover and tap into his or her creative being?

JOSH: One thing you can do to really, to get started is awaken your curiosity. The more curious people are the more creative they become. And the simplest thing to do to awaken curiosity is to ask three simple questions again and again and again: Why? What if? and Why not?

When you ask these three questions, it forces you to challenge conventional wisdom. It forces you to imagine the possibilities instead of focusing on just what is today. And when you do that—when you start asking these questions—all of a sudden you do see the world through 3D glasses. The world becomes very vivid and you can start to look





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for opportunities for change and advancement.

And by the way, I would encourage not just worrying about the big stuff. Sure, it takes creativity to change an industry or invent an iPod or something, but little teeny acts of creativity can add up to big things. So, try taking a look around and saying, "What are some small improvements that I can make in my organization that can make a difference?" I would start with small stuff and then expand your creativity outward from there.

JAY: In one of your blogs, you talk about discovering your super powers.

JOSH: It seems that the people we admire most are the superheroes of the world. It turns out many of us have a superpower too, but nobody has all of them. Even if you think about Superman who can leap tall buildings in a single bound and has x-ray vision, there are many superpowers that even he doesn't have. For example, he can't spin spider webs.

The thing about the most successful people is that they often have one or two things that they are fantastic at and, rather than worrying about all the things that are their shortcomings, they've focused on nurture and build on their strengths. So imagine Superman being bummed out that he wasn't Spiderman. Ridiculous, right?

Instead, he is going to go out and change the world and solve crime and get the girl, because he's celebrating and nurturing and building on his superpowers. So the point I'd like to make is that everybody has his or her own superpowers. Maybe you're great in math, maybe you're a wonderful communicator, maybe you have a vivid imagination or maybe you really understand your customers. So, discover what those powers are and nurture them and build on them.





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And similarly, even Superman, the greatest superhero of all time has the challenge of Kryptonite. Kryptonite stripped him of his powers. I think each of us probably have a Kryptonite or two of our own. Maybe we're not so good at math or maybe we get clammy in tough situations, or maybe we don't negotiate well.

In my blog, I talked about how silly it would be to imagine Superman slumped over some bar, bummed out about his Kryptonite as opposed to leaping over tall buildings and saving the world.

We all have some superpowers and we all probably have some Kryptonite. The problem is that many people spend much of their lives obsessing over their Kryptonite, obsessing over all their shortcomings, and wallowing in doubt, self-pity, and fear when they could be saying, "Wait a minute. I may have some Kryptonite, but darn it, I have some super powers and I'm going to focus on those. I'm going to acknowledge my weaknesses, but rather than letting them hold me back, I'm going to let my strength shine. And I'm going to grab on to those super powers and make the best possible impact I can make."

JAY: The title of another blog is "How to Be Attractive."

JOSH: Sure. And the reference in the blog "How to be Attractive" obviously wasn't about physical attraction. Rather, it was about how to remain attractive in the business world while also trying to persuade somebody to do something, whether it's persuading a customer to buy something or a team member to join our team or seeking investment or banking relationship.

In the blog, I included a couple of tips. One of them is about not faking it. I think today so many of us have enormous fraud detectors. So if you're trying to fancy talk your way around the real issue, forget it. It's more about being authentic and being real. People





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can truly relate to that.

JOSH: Another tip involves really standing out. So often, companies and individuals try to fit in rather than stand out. They're so busy trying to keep up with the herd that they end up blending in and not getting noticed. So to me, whenever I see a flock, I sprint in the opposite direction and say, "How can I be truly remarkable?"

The world doesn't need another commodity. The world doesn't need another "me too" player. The world doesn't need another "me too" anything. What the world craves and will pay handsomely for is originality and creativity as well as imagination and new thinking. So, I would say, celebrate your uniqueness rather than try to conform.

JAY: Do you have a couple of suggestions to help entrepreneurs stand out?

JOSH: Sure. One thing that's fun to do is a technique I like, call The Opposite. Basically, you take a piece of paper and draw a line straight down the middle. On the one side of the line, you list all the ways you're currently doing something. Let's say, it's trying to sell the customers. So you list all the ways you're doing it; you list all the ways your competitors are doing it and you list all of conventional wisdom. You don't judge, you don't analyze, you just list. So let's say, you list thirty different things on the left side of the paper. Then, on the right side of the line, without judging, without analyzing, you just write the polar opposite of each item on the left.

Now, when you look at the lists, some items may be crazy and not even doable. They could even be illegal. But, you start to ask, "Is there an kernel of an idea here that I could turn into something that's really practical and that could make sense for my business by allowing me to stand out from the pack?" It could be about how you sell your product, it could be about the actual product, it could be about how you price it or it could be about where you're located.





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When you see breakaway success, so often, it's tied to somebody not following conventional wisdom; so often, it's the opposite—it's somebody who dares to be different.

JAY: Can you give us any dos or don'ts to help us, not just make money, but to help us make a difference using social media?

JOSH: I've found the most success using social media is through blogging. I write a blog once a week and I do it in what I believe is an authentic way. I write about things that will help the audience, not me. I never sit around and promote something of mine. I never say, "Oh, go buy my book," or "I can help give a speech" or something. I'm only thinking about the audience. I collect ideas throughout the week and I enjoy writing these blogs. And it's become a platform. And so, people think of me as an expert on various things like entrepreneurship, venture capital, creativity and so on.

And, you know, people choose to follow it, or someone might get the blog and forward it on to their company or their friends. And so, that's allowed me to have a voice that's authentic, but in a serving type of way, not in a selfish way.

I would say that the worst mistake someone can make in social media is trying to think about it only from a self-serving standpoint because people see right through that. If you're genuinely giving to the world, you're becoming an expert and you're adding real value. People will take notice and your social media stats will climb.

JAY: So if we can subordinate our own interests and almost get rid of the word "I" and start thinking in terms of the "you"—the reader, the listener, the prospect, the market, the community—it would seem that approach would catapult our connectivity with our target audience because our message would be driven by a totally different intention.





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JOSH: To some degree, we must think about advertising and social media as polar opposites.

Let's say, you run an insurance agency, and you place an ad. The ad might say, "My insurance agency is so great. You should come check me out." Me, me, me, me, me. Social media is exactly the opposite. So if I ran an insurance agency, I'd write a blog, or I'd contribute content to the world about how people can use insurance to help their lives improve or tell about the common mistakes people might make or pitfalls to avoid. So it's all about you the audience, not me the business. The old adage that we learned in kindergarten, "The more you give the more you get," applies 100% to social media.

If you look at social media as an opportunity to give sincerely and authentically, the getting will come back tenfold. And it's weird because it can come in from different places. You may be helping one person and all of a sudden you just get some random call from a dream customer.

The call seems to come out of the blue, but it happened because you've contributed so much into the world that it comes back to you.

JAY: So providing value has totally to do with what the market desires, appreciates, respects and fears. It has nothing to do with what you want for them, does it?

JOSH: It's all about the audience. It's not about you as the provider, if you will. And so, I think it's important to have the right sense of empathy.

One of the classic mistakes marketers make is thinking of themselves as their target market.





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So, if a room full of middle aged white men are thinking about their own needs and wants, but the product they're selling is for urban teen girls, you know they're going to just totally miss the mark.

And so, having a sense of empathy for your audience—whether that's your customers or your employees—and speaking to them in a voice and with examples that are meaningful to them, is so much more important than serving yourself.

JAY: We're talking social media primarily, but the truth of the matter is that business is business. The tenants of social media are merely factors causing business owners and entrepreneurs to become externally focused, don't you think?

JOSH: Yeah, very much so. I'd love to chat for a second about Earvin Magic Johnson, my partner in Detroit Venture Partners. There are four partners, and I'm one of the four and so is Earvin. And I tell you, getting to know him had just been such a blessing and not for the obvious reason.

Sure, he's a revered athlete and all that. But to me, what's way most special about him is who he is behind the scenes. This guy is not who we would think. So many celebrities drape themselves with bling and they're about entourage, and they're demanding and egocentric, but Earvin is exactly the opposite. He's the warmest, most caring, most genuine person you could imagine. He comes completely from a point of service. He doesn't come and say, "I want this," or "Me, me, me." Instead, he says, "How can I help, Josh?"

How can I create jobs in Detroit? How can we work together? What do you need?" He's so focused on other people and, in turn, of course, he's done fantastically well. He has unbelievable humility and he makes everybody in the room feels like a million





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bucks. And, in turn, you want to do everything you can to be connected to him. To me, that's the real magic behind Magic Johnson. He's not focused on what he can get. He's focused on how he can serve.

One thing I really admire about Steve Jobs is that he was able to imagine an ideal situation without being confined of the potential limitations. In other words, he didn't say, "Oh gee, I want to have an iPod concept, but, but, but, but, but..." He just said, "This is the ideal manifestation of my vision and let's figure it out."

I feel that so many of us have incredible ideas. We might have an idea on how to transform our business, or our community, or our career and yet, we end up doing the yeah-buts. We say, "Yeah, but this..." or "Yeah, but that..."

We let our yeah-buts talk us out of achieving our true potential. When Steve Jobs imagined his ideals, he didn't let any yeah-buts get in his way of realizing his dreams. Any naysayers simply served to emboldened his resolve.

And when we think about our heroes, whether it's Steve Jobs or someone like that, we imagine them never having a bad day. The truth of the matter is that all of us have challenges and setbacks. Success is not linear. And so, the tough part of running a business or building your career isn't when things are going great. It's when you have the inevitable setbacks. And so, how do you overcome them? How do you keep the momentum?

One thing that I think is helpful is to realize that the most successful people in the world have also experienced the same thing. Consider, for example, James Dyson who invented this incredible Dyson vacuum cleaner and today he's a billionaire. Well, part of the story that you may not know is that Dyson failed 5,100 times in a row before cracking the code. Literally, he had 5,100 failed experiments in a row. And what Dyson





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learned is that mistakes aren't failures.

Mistakes are simply the portals to discovery. So, instead of judging a setback as something negative, it's helpful if you can say, "That's an interesting data point. That's something that I can learn from so I can grow and continue on my journey."

So if you can remove some of the judgment and realize that the most successful people not only win more, they also fail more, you start to build a confidence and a resolve that can get you through even the most challenging times.

JAY: Whom do you admire and respect and follow in any form of social media including blogs?

JOSH: Well, one that I would really recommend is marketer, Seth Godin. Seth is a brilliant blogger. I believe he blogs seven days a week. His blogs are often just a sentence or two and he is the master at making poignant, insightful remarks that can inspire an entire day just in a short sentence or two so, absolutely worth following. It's sort of a daily blast of inspiration and insight.

In addition, I think Apple Fellow, Guy Kawasaki, does a terrific job of Tweeting. He'd not only Tweets, "I'm at the coffee shop," but he Tweets little observations throughout the day, again that can be a little source of inspiration and encouragement. Beyond that, I think it's a good idea in social media to follow not only your heroes, but also your competitors. In today's day and age, you can see exactly what your competitors are blogging or Tweeting or posting about.

You don't want to necessarily copy them, but it's good to understand what they're thinking.





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One of the neat things about social media is that all the thinking that was previously private has become in public for all to see. If you're in a hotly contested competitive landscape, you certainly want to understand how your competitors are thinking because it can help you position yourself in a way that can be effective.

JAY: You can learn so much more from studying, not just your competitors and related and derivative type businesses and services, but also what their market is saying. It's all right there on a platter for you.

JOSH: What a lot of people do if they're looking for inspiration for their business is to look around at others in their field. So, typically, if I manufacture peanut butter, I go look at all the other people who manufacture peanut butter. In addition, I suggest looking for sources of inspiration in completely different fields.

For example, there's a hospital in town, here in Detroit, and surely they studied the healthcare industry in other hospitals. But, to differentiate themselves, they decided to study the hospitality industry. And in fact, the CEO of this hospital is not a physician; he was a senior executive at the Ritz-Carlton Corporation.

JAY: Wow!

JOSH: And what they've done as a result is that they've transformed the experience of a hospital. You walk in; it doesn't smell like a hospital. It's this wonderful, incredible experience and it's very comfortable and soothing. If you're in a car accident, you're going to the nearest hospital. But, if you have to have an elective surgery, you know exactly which one you're going to choose because it's head and shoulders above every other hospital.

I say to people, if you admire a company that is outside your industry that might be a





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good one to follow. Perhaps, if you're in automotive, start studying fashion or start studying arborists; find inspiration from unlikely sources to drive meaningful breakthroughs.

JAY: In your blog you wrote that you don't believe in trying to be all things to all people is the path to greatness, to success, or to really making meaningful impact. You want to talk about that?

JOSH: You know, I think that's so true because if you play it safe by being in the middle, you really run the risk of delighting no one and just getting lost completely. So, I'd rather see a company that perhaps, completely alienates 15% of the population but delights the other 85%, rather than just being sort of bland, mediocre soup to everybody else.

So many of us live our lives trying to play it safe, only to discover that playing it safe has become the riskiest move of all.

And in today's competitive world, I don't know that any of us have the luxury of cowering in fear trying not to get lost in the pack, because that's just not going to allow us to reach our dreams and our goals.

JAY: Yeah, perfect answer. What's the one question I should have asked you but didn't, and what would your answer have been?

JOSH: Wow, that's a thoughtful question. Well, sometimes people ask, "What's one technique I can use right away to get more creative?" I tell them about a technique I call "rolestorming."

We've all heard of brainstorming, where you sit around and come up with as many





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ideas as possible without judging them. So often people hold back their best ideas because of fear. So, instead of sharing your great idea, you hold it back because you talk yourself out of it. You say, “Well, if it was such a good idea someone else probably would have already said it.” Or, “What will my boss think?” Or, “Will I look foolish?” Or, “Who will fund my idea?” So, even though we have interesting ideas, we dismiss them very quickly. Brainstorming helps break through such fears.

In rolestorming, you remove that entire layer of fear, because when you rolestorm, you brainstorm, but in character. For the sake of argument, let’s imagine you and I are brainstorming and you’re playing the role of Steve Jobs. Okay? Well, in this case, you’re going to come up with bold, gigantic ideas. And if you come up with a big, crazy idea, no one’s going to laugh at you—at Steve—for coming up with an idea.

So, because you’re removing personal responsibility, if you will, nobody’s going to laugh at you for being foolish; it frees you to come up with crazy, big ideas.

Let’s say I’m playing the role of Charlie Sheen. Well, I might come up with inappropriate, illegal, obnoxious or unethical ideas. But, you know what? That’s okay, because it’s just a rolestorming session. So, once I come up with some really stupid idea that’s illegal, that Charlie Sheen might’ve come up with, we might be able to morph that idea into something that’s really meaningful that we would’ve never thought of before.

Rolestorming may seem a little goofy at first, but it is an incredibly powerful technique. Pick your favorite author, superhero, movie character, villain, sports figure, politician, a movie star, anybody you want, and try brainstorming in character. The process removes all these boundaries and it really liberates and unleashes creativity.

JAY: What’s the one thing you’d like people reading and listening to this to remember





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and grasp most from what we've just talked about?

JOSH: Never underestimate the impact you can make. If you think about it, there are all kinds of obstacles we all face. We weren't born into the right family, we don't have enough background, education or money, we don't look good enough, whatever. We can make all the reasons and excuses that we want, but often the people who have had the biggest impact on the world were not born with incredible opportunity. But they forged ahead and realized the power one individual can make. I believe that every one of us on this planet has enormous potential. If you can tap into your creativity and connect with your passion and then follow it through with persistence and determination, boy, the opportunities are limitless.

I really hope readers seize their full potential, seize the enormous opportunity that's waiting for all of us, and use that as a platform to just make a big difference in the world. If we all did that, wow, what an incredible planet that we'd live on.

JAY: Great conclusion. I have enjoyed this. Thank you very much.

JOSH: My pleasure. Thanks again.

