

**The Maverick Show Episode 13**  
**HOST: Matt Bowles GUEST: Daraja Asili**

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Matt Bowles: Hey, everybody. It's Matt Bowles, and my guest today is Daraja Asili. She is the founder and owner of Happy Trees Entertainment, which produces creative experiences in local places. Her events include Plant Night, where you can spend two hours at a local hot spot creating a living, tabletop garden with friends and plant everything from zen gardens to quirky terrariums with the materials provided and a host to guide you. Her other brand is called Paint Night, where, for two hours, at a local bar or restaurant, you can paint on canvas and express yourself and your creativity to the fullest.

And her latest event category is called Farm Fresh Yoga With Goats. Daraja is passionate about designing transformative processes, curating creative experiences, connecting people, and helping people discover something inside of themselves that they may not have known existed by way of activating art, culture, and entertainment in unique spaces. And last year alone, over 100,000 people attended her events. Now, she also runs Daraja Consulting, which helps small and medium sized businesses to develop and implement accelerated growth strategies.

And perhaps the most impressive, from an entrepreneurial perspective, is that she has built all of this with a location independent infrastructure, so she can run her company, including managing a remote distributed staff of over 30 people, from anywhere in the world. Daraja, welcome to the show.

Daraja Asili: Thank you, Matt. I'm super excited to be here.

Matt: We're super excited to have you. And just to set the scene for people, you and I are now in Nairobi, Kenya where we have hung out for the last month or so together.

Daraja: Yes, that is correct.

Matt: And we're having a bottle of South African Pinotage, which is, typically, the best wine that you can get on this entire continent.

Daraja: Oh, I didn't know that.

Matt: I would say. South Africa is sort of the primary wine region, the most prominent one. And the Pinotage is one of the most famous types of wines to come out of that region. So, we are going to be

enjoying a bottle of that throughout our conversation. So, maybe we can just start a little bit of just kind of setting the scene for people who have never been to Kenya. What has this experience been like for you, over the last month. And maybe talk about some of the cool stuff that we've been able to do like the safari we went on and that kind of stuff.

Daraja: Yes. Oh, my gosh, it's been amazing. This is my first time doing some sort of group travel. So, I feel super blessed that I met you and everyone else that's part of the group because it really has been amazing and life changing. It's really interesting. I really appreciate the relaxedness of the culture. It definitely has caused me to slow down a little bit. And the nature that we've seen has been beautiful, especially the safari and the animals and the food has been really good. Really good.

Matt: And we're here with a program called Wanderist Life. And can you talk a little bit about Wanderist Life, why you selected that particular program, and then, basically, what they provide and how that particular experience has been?

Daraja: Absolutely. So, Wanderist Life is a company that curates these excursions to other countries. So, for a month, they took care of everything. The owner is Labrea Jones. She's amazing. And so, my place was taken care of, the co-working space I was going to work out of was taken care of. There were tips and tricks, as far as what I may need to know, as far as coming here like the visa and any vaccinations. So, it really gave me a lot of great information to help me plan A) my first trip to the continent, and then, B) to also, I'm trying out running my business, while in a completely different country.

And I've been in different places in the US but never physically tried to run my business, while I'm in another country. And I chose it specifically because of the diversity. And I really loved her story that the reason she started it is because she wanted to test out herself the living location independent. And the programs that were currently out there didn't really accommodate her having her child. And so, after reading that, I was like oh, wow, yeah, I want to definitely support her and experience one of her trips.

Matt: Awesome. Yeah. And they do different durations of the trip. So, there is a yearlong version of the trip for people who want to

commit to a 12-month journey. And then, there are month long trips like the one that we're on now in Nairobi where you can just come for a month. And what I love about these kinds of things is that you can just go to an amazing place that you really want to see. And you don't know anybody there, but you show up, and, all of a sudden, there's a community that wants to hang out and explore the city with you and do cool, fun stuff and all of that kind of stuff. So, it's been awesome.

Daraja: Yes, it has.

Matt: All right. So, let's talk a little bit about, I've got to start off, we read through the bio. And I've just got to start off by asking you, initially, about goat yoga and what that is exactly.

Daraja: Okay.

Matt: And maybe you can talk about it in the context of sort of the larger offering that your company makes, in terms of the different types of events because, obviously, there are a lot of very different types of things. But the goat yoga, in particular, I would love for you to explain what that is. And then, what the other events are as well.

Daraja: Sure. Absolutely. So, I guess, maybe it's been about two years now. No, actually, beginning of 2017. A friend sent me this article, I think, CNN had done about this woman in Portland, Oregon. And she was doing these goat yoga events. And she had a thousand person waiting list. Yeah. That's exactly, your face, was what I was thinking. And I was like wow, that's really fascinating. I've never heard of this. That sounds really interesting. And so, no one else was really doing it, as far as on the east coast. There was someone else that was doing it in Arizona.

So, I think, I learned about it in January. And then, in March, I was like, you know what, I'm going to fly there and check out one of her events and see what it's about, why are people going to it. And so, I got a friend of mine from DC to fly with me. We flew in to Oregon and attended to the event. It was in a small city just outside of Portland. And I was a little nervous. I was a little afraid. And it was a really cool experience. And there were probably about, I think, between 20 and 30 people there. And everyone had smiles on their faces. And even when the goat peed on your mat or pooped on your mat, I thank God that it never peed or pooped on

my mat, but other people, people were still happy.

And I was like wow, this is really a fun experience. And then, I started researching a little bit more, and I found out that goats are therapeutic animals. And so, I thought let me see if I can do something like this in DC and see what the response would be. So, I found a space to do it in Arlington, Virginia, actually, which is just outside of DC, in this open area next to a We Work building, We Live. I partnered with them. And I think we had about 40 people attend. And the tickets sold out within pretty much 72 hours. So, that was the first event. So, that was kind of my test event.

And we played around with a few things. And so, we were hoping to kind of launch more this year and in 2019.

Matt: Amazing. And so, can you talk a little bit about what some of the other types of events are that you do as well and where they are primarily located?

Daraja: Sure. Our primary events are under the brand Paint Night and Plant Night. As Matt said, Paint Night, we bring everything that's needed. You have your canvas, paint, an instructor. You sign up on the [www.paintnight.com](http://www.paintnight.com) website of the painting you want to instruct. We, currently, host events in DC, all of DC metro, Richmond, Virginia, and Baltimore, Maryland, and Westchester, New York. And as far as plant night, you're creating terrariums, which are mini gardens that people can take to their home. And we use succulents, so it's like super, super hard to kill the plant. If you're someone that's like oh, my gosh, I kill all of my plants, no worries.

Literally, you have to really work hard to kill the succulent because the succulents, actually, only need to be watered about once a month during the winter time on the east coast, and about once a week during the summer. And they'll be happy and grow and add nice greenness to your home.

Matt: Wow. So, that is amazing. And it sounds like a really cool – the next time I'm coming through DC or the northeast corridor, I definitely want to stop by at one of these events because it sounds like a really cool, fun, and very different type of night out.

Daraja: Yes, it is. And the fun thing is, so primarily, for Paint Night, typically, 90 percent of our clients are primarily female between 25 and 35. And the interesting thing, when I first launched Plant Night in Baltimore in 2016, we actually got quite a few more men, which was a lot of fun. And, I think, also, we got people who were a little afraid of Paint Night because I know, for myself, I'm actually not a painter. So, though I was running these events since 2014, it took me two years to actually do an event, as a participant, for Paint Night and actually paint because I was so afraid that I was going to mess up.

Matt: Well, I'm smiling right now because I'm 100 percent as well, right. I'm insanely not talented as an artist at all. So, probably like super self-conscious of any art that I would do. But what's amazing about this thing is that my business partner, Valerie, who is based in DC, actually, she's technically based in Maryland right outside DC, she's in Hyattsville, so she's right between DC and Baltimore, she's an amazing painter. She just does it as a hobby. So, she's like oh, look what I painted. I'm like that's unbelievable. That's like super talented. So, she will totally be into this. And I'm going to tell her about this.

And, of course, she'll hear the podcast. And I can pretty much assure you that she and I will probably show up at one of these two nights the next time I swing through to visit her in DC for sure.

Daraja: Awesome, I can't wait. And, honestly, too, after my first time, I go back now, and I'm like wow, my painting actually looked like what the painting was supposed to look like. So, I was pleasantly surprised. And that's what a lot of guests will experience, when they go to one of these events is that they've now accomplished something that they didn't think they were going to be able to do. And it's always rewarding to kind of see people come in and be like, oh, my gosh, I can't do this. And then, walk out, at the end of the night, wow, look at this painting that I just created.

Matt: Yeah. So, let's go back a little bit. And I would love for you to talk a little bit about your entrepreneurial journey and how you came, I guess, both to this specific choice of you want these particular types of offerings to be your business, but also, how you came to decide that you wanted to be a business owner, and you wanted to be an entrepreneur, and you sort of came into that life choice. I'd love to hear about the path and trajectory that sort of led you there.

Daraja: Sure. So, I think, innately, I've always had an entrepreneurial spirit. I don't think I, initially, knew what that was, at the time, when I was growing up. I was always inquisitive and loved trying new things, loved meeting new people. And I was an avid reader. So, I think, my first kind of real introduction to running a business was when I moved to LA. And I moved to LA with no job. So, I had no job. A friend of mine introduced me to a business owner that had a couple of businesses in LA. And he was looking for someone to help him out with his cellular store. And, at the time, he didn't really have a lot of merchandise.

The items weren't selling very well. And so, I was like sure. It's a job. I'll do it. And one of the beautiful things I'm so grateful that he gave me is he really allowed me full rein. So, I was able to build his business as I saw fit. And he provided the finances. So, I, literally, didn't know anything about the cellular business. So, I researched. And I learned more about it. And then, as a result, we had a fully merchandised store, by the time I was done. We had a sales team. We were selling to corporations as far as the cellular plans. And then, after a year, I helped him to open up a wholesale division of that cellular company.

So, now, we weren't just selling retail, we were selling the items we were buying in bulk to other retail locations. So, I think that experience really gave me the confidence to realize that 1) I loved building businesses in this way. 2) I was really good at it. So, yeah, that was probably like my first introduction. And then, I had the opportunity to be a part of a mortgage company with three friends that had started one back east. And that really led into more of getting into the entrepreneurial world.

Matt: And then, what was the path from there to Happy Trees Entertainment and sort of conceptualizing this business model and sort of moving into that as your full-time thing?

Daraja: Sure. So, I left the cellular company I think about after two or three years. At the tail end, I was starting to work with the mortgage company. And I ended up moving back to the east coast and delved in full time. We were very successful for quite a few years. And then, 2008 came around, and the market crashed.

Matt: I heard about that.

Daraja: Yes. So, very traumatic. So, I remember, I had several deals in the pipeline, and I couldn't get any of them through. And all of these things that we had built, I just saw them quickly falling away. And it was very scary, very depressing. And so, in 2009, we did shut it down. And I decided to go to this place that I would go to a lot of times called Optimum Health Institute, in San Diego. And I volunteered three months of my time at their campus. They're a health retreat that believes that raw vegan food will heal your body. And I had the opportunity to work both in their organic garden that they had and in their greenhouse where they grew wheat grass.

And so, I think, there was where I was allowed to kind of heal myself and figure out what I wanted to do because, to be honest with you, with the market crashing and everything that I had gone through with the mortgage company, I was super afraid of having my own business because, if it doesn't work, you have no money. You have people that are relying on you. So, it was just very stressful. So, I really thought about is that even the right path for me. And so, there, I was really able to kind of put the pieces back together. I did end up going back to corporate America and, actually, had a really great opportunity to work on a team that was auditing some of the banks.

So, I kind of got to close out my experience with the mortgage company and actually audit the banks that kind of caused some of the downturn. So, that was really exciting. And while doing that, I started, on the side, dabbling in working with some consulting clients as well as producing some art showcases in the DC, Baltimore, and Richmond area. And so, that was kind of my introduction back into working for myself. And then, I think, by 2014, I was running probably about six events in DC a year and about five events in Richmond producing showcases that had like thirty to fifty artists that were showcasing film, fashion, music, art, performing art.

And as a result of that, I was able to meet a lot of really amazing, creative people in the DC, Richmond, and Baltimore area. So, then, I learned about Paint Night that had just started in Boston and was doing really well in Baltimore. And they were looking to expand into DC. And so, I was like these events that people will come and pay a ticket for and paint. I wasn't quite sure if it would work. But I had some artists that wanted some extra money. They

said something they would love to do. So, I was like I'll put up a few events.

And, honestly, at that time, too, in 2014, I was studying to get my mortgage license back because I was like I'm going to go back into the mortgage business. I did really well. The market had turned around. I'm ready to work for myself again. That's going to be my path. And then, little did I know that these events would take off. So, my first event was in July. By October, I had expanded to Richmond, Virginia. And by the end of the month, I had generated over six figures of income from these events, in addition to having about twenty people on the team and wasn't working for anybody else.

That was my full-time thing. Still doing some showcases, but that was about to wind up in 2015, when my Paint Night business just took off.

Matt: Amazing. So, you get the license for Paint Night in your area and Plant Night as well. And then, you also started some of these other ventures, eventually, with the goat yoga and things on your own all under that rubric of Happy Trees Entertainment.

Daraja: Correct.

Matt: Yeah. So, would you say then, given your experience, any tips or advice to people that are at that juncture where there is the fear barrier that you described, which I think is pretty much ever present with almost everybody. You'd have to be a pretty extraordinary person just to not even have that at all, but for people that are thinking that I'd like to pursue the entrepreneurial thing. I'm a little bit scared and afraid because, again, if it doesn't work, then, it's all on you, right?

Daraja: Yes. But in terms of overcoming that fear barrier and taking that entrepreneurial leap, would you recommend, based on your experiences, the path of building up that side hustle and sort of demonstrating to yourself the minimum viable product that this can work, this can sell? And if I jumped full time into it, I could scale it at a certain point and then, kind of transition? Or what tips might you have for people?

Daraja: Yeah. So, for me, I think, especially in this day and age, it's so

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much easier to kind of jump in and still have a side hustle. So, everyone's financial piece is different. So, if you have a full-time job, and you're making good money, you have this great idea, I do recommend staying at it, so you have that support because I've definitely found that it was so much easier to make decisions, when I wasn't stressed about money. And so, even through my entrepreneurial journey, with these creative events, at the beginning, I drove Lyft and Uber. That was an amazing side hustle that A) allowed me to promote my events.

So, when people got in the car, and we were chitchatting, they were looking for something fun to do tonight, I was like hey, here's this event you can go to. Here's a coupon code for you. And I could kind of clock in, clock out, when I wanted to or when I needed cash. But if I was all good, then, I didn't have to do it. So, kind of figuring out what works best for you. And I know I was able to leave Comcast, when I realized that what I was making for them I know surpassed in what I was making for myself. And if I freed up that time, then, I would be able to make even more money with that.

But then, I still had the Lyft and Uber. And if I had to, I think, too, that's an important thing. I think people have to be okay with doing those things you wouldn't necessarily do because, if I had to, I would go and waitress to help me further my business more than what it was. And those are things that I thought about sometimes, when times have been a little bit tough because we're definitely slower during the summer. And so, how do I make sure that I have all of the cash flow coming in, my employees are getting paid? Because if we're slower, I'm the first person that's not going to get paid.

So, I definitely recommend to people that are starting is to figure out what our thresholds are. If you have a full-time job, and you're okay with it, then, continue to build and put in that time to build up that business, that passion that you have in. And then, once it's kind of reached the scale, and to me, it's not always monetary, but it's also your happiness. If you hate the job that you're in, get out. You shouldn't hate it because that's going to be a drain on you producing anything. But if you're like oh, I'm okay with my job, I get a paycheck every week, keep on doing it.

Build up your other thing to get to the point, whether it's money or

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happiness, and then, allow that other thing to go or reduce the hours or go remotely or work from home type of thing. So, I think there are a lot of things that people can do to kind of build up their business and what they're passionate about while also still remaining stable.

Matt: So, did you, personally, have sort of a breakthrough moment like a lightbulb moment or an a-ha moment or a wave of comfort come over you, when something happened, or you hit a particular threshold, and you said okay, I've made it in my business? Like this I going to work. I'm comfortable. I'm confident that this is the thing. Did you have sort of that moment? Do you remember that?

Daraja: Oh, I don't know if I've ever had a moment where I've like made it. But I do have to say, right now, in this very moment, I feel comfortable. Though I've had to scale back with my growth, definitely, this is probably the happiest I've been, the least amount of stress that I've been. And part of it, too, not because I, initially, have less stress in my life or result of my business. It's because through the different things that have happened, I've learned how to manage it better. So, I remember, at the beginning, a restaurant closes. I have an event that night, 40 people. My artist gets there. The doors are locked to the restaurant. What do you do?

And so, I remember, when that instance first happened, I was crying. I was stressed. We figured it out. So, we found a restaurant nearby. But I remember, all of those first-time instances that happened, within my business, just the stress that I felt about it. And now, having gone through all of these different stages, I know that everything is able to be figured out. There's a solution to everything. I just have to deep breathe. And I really try to make sure my team realizes that, especially in the business we're in with events. Things happen. And there's always a solution to it. We just have to take a breath and think about what that may be, and then, start taking action.

Matt: I feel that, at the very core of entrepreneurship, is the art of creative problem solving.

Daraja: Absolutely.

Matt: I really feel like that's it. Every stress or every setback that you have, every failure that you have, every mistake that you make,

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which will be plentiful, if you're anything like me and my entrepreneurial journey. It happens all of the time. That is going to happen. And anticipating that that will happen and continue to happen, even as you implement lessons learned, there are going to be new things that come up all of the time. And it's about really the art of entrepreneurship, I think, is being able to take those mistakes and setbacks and failures and challenges as a business problem that needs to be solved by you, the entrepreneur.

Daraja: Correct. I 100 percent agree.

Matt: So, that really is the art. And I think it's important to have that perspective because people going into it, a lot of times, will be like oh, I had like five failures, or I made all of these mistakes, and I had these setbacks, maybe it's not for me, and they get out of the game, or they fold their business, or they do this or they do that. And I think the successful entrepreneurs are the ones that realize that this stuff is going to keep happening. And your ability to problem solve more effectively, to anticipate, to prepare for, and then, to be ready to solve those problems is really what's going to be the path to success.

Daraja: Absolutely. And I know, for me, along the way, I remember kind of, for me, it was comfortable to have this kind of safety net. You could always get a job. I could always put my resume out. I could always go work for a Fortune 100 company again. They're all there. And, at the same time, just because I get that job, there's no security. At any point in time, they can let me go.

Matt: One hundred percent, which is exactly what happened to me, by the way, because the way that I actually got – I think your advice is great about you have a job that you kind of like. And you're building up a side hustle, until it works. And then, you can just kind of leap over and just kind of run with it. I think that is probably the best opportunity and the best way to do that. But what happened to me was that I, unexpectedly, got fired from my job one day. I walked into work, and it was like yeah, it's not working out. And it's 2:00 p.m. And we need your company phone, and get your stuff, and 5:00 you've got to be out.

And it was a total unexpected massive life transition for me. And in that moment, on that day, as I was literally my head was spinning, I had to drive to the Verizon store because I didn't have a

phone because they took my company phone, to buy a phone, to call my mother, to tell her I got fired. Do you know what I mean? It was that dramatic. But I remember, on that day, literally, as I was driving, I said to myself I'm not going to apply for another job because this could happen again. Anyone can let me go at any time unexpectedly. And I'm going to figure out how to start my own business.

Now, I had no idea how to start a business. That was the whole other journey. I had to go to the book store after I went to the cell phone store and start reading books on how to start a business. And that was an entire journey in and of itself. But for me, that was sort of the catapult. And I kind of think, when I think back on it, I'm thankful, actually, that that happened because the type of job I was in, I was working in the nonprofit space for a number of years. And for many years, it was amazing. And then, we had a change of management, and stuff got not amazing. And so, that's what all led to this.

But for me, it was kind of like, if you have a job that's sort of mediocre, it's kind of okay, it's pretty good, it's kind of not that bad and whatever, then, I might have just stayed there. I might still have been there, if this hadn't happened for me. I kind of was the person that needed that real kick in the behind to say okay, this is a transitional moment for you. Start thinking bigger, thinking differently, and it's okay to pivot. This was at age 30, by the way. I had no business background at all. And I was like I'm going to figure this out, and I'm going to go on a different path, which is what I then began charting.

But, I think, if you can do the side hustle thing and pursue the entrepreneurial thing after work, come home from work, build your business in the evening hours, on the weekend, get it to a point, and then, leap over that's probably a less stressful way to do it. But, as you mentioned, and I want to follow up on this, there are still, no matter what way you do it, if you're a business owner, there are going to be a lot of stresses that are going to continue. And you had mentioned that, over the years, in your experience, you had created ways to better manage the stress. Can you talk about some of those?

Daraja:

Yes. So, one of the things that helped me is actually still now meditation. I try to meditate with a CD for at least five to ten

minutes every morning. And I find that, when I do do that, I have a better day. I don't know, maybe nothing actually happens that day, but I definitely always find I have a better day. Whatever is thrown at me, I'm able to kind of handle a little bit better. Also, too, when stressful things do come up now, I try to take deep breaths for myself. And sometimes, too, I've gotten into the practice of you come to me. There's this problem. And if it's something that I feel super reactive to right away, I may say, okay, great.

Let me call you back. And so, for me, giving myself a little bit of space from it for a moment will allow me to process how I'm feeling about it and then, go back. It's not very long. Maybe I'll call them back within five minutes. And then, we can solve the problem. So, then, I'm coming from a space of more centeredness versus a space of potential fear or scared or whatever it may be. And I'm finding, when I do that as well, whatever the issue may be, it tends to resolve itself a lot of times quicker. Also, for me, delegation has always been really hard. So, I've also, with my team, kind of put it back on them, as far as wow, I hear you.

I hear what's happening. What is your suggestion, as far as how we should handle this? And so, then, it employers my team to then think about oh, wow. Because nine times out of ten, whatever it is, it's probably going to happen again. And so, I want my team to feel empowered that they also know the solution and to kind of help them work through that. So, then, when it does happen again, we have a quicker solution to it.

Matt: I think that's really important and really significant. Let me just follow up on the meditation thing. Can you talk a little bit about what type of meditation you do? And just for you, personally, what does that look like, in the morning, what does that ritual look like?

Daraja: Sure. So, I'm not a big ritual person per se, and I have no idea what type of meditation it is. I know there are different types out there. So, I've listened to Gabby Bernstein. She has a five or ten-minute meditation on, I think, YouTube that I'll listen to sometimes. It has nice music. I have another guided one that is by, I can't remember his name now.

Matt: Guided though? Most of your mornings are guided meditations, right?

Daraja: It's mostly guided. They're mostly guided. And I don't sit in a particular position. I don't sit up in my chair in lotus or anything like that. I tried. And I found it just really didn't resonate with me, at least where I am right now. So, I may wake up, stretch in my bed, and put on the guided meditation, depending on how I'm feeling. And I found that, for me at least, when I'm less rigid with it, I am more apt to do it. And it's still beneficial.

Matt: Yeah. And then, do you have any other morning routines? And even we can probably move this discussion into my question about day structure because I'm really interested in how you structure your own personal work day, especially because you're not in a traditional office environment. You don't have a situation where you're going in an office and managing all of your people that you can see them and stuff. You have a whole staff that's across all different states. And now, you're in Africa, and they're mostly in the US. And you're, literally, on different continents and different time zones and stuff like that.

And you're running your business. So, what does your morning routine look like? And then, what does your day structure look like, in terms of time management and optimizing your own work productivity?

Daraja: So, for me, I never have a day that kind of looks the same. And also, I try to structure my days on my energy ebb and flow because I know, some days, I'm feeling super productive. So, those are the days I really try to get in like 10 or 12 hours. And then, there are other days I'm feeling a little less productive. So, those are the days, especially since I've been here, that I might try to include some sort of outing in the morning. And then, by 3:00 p.m. in Nairobi time, it's just 8:00 a.m. on the east coast. So, I've had a little bit of fun. And then, I'm not really kind of getting into things, until maybe like 3:00.

But everyone on my team really hasn't started their day yet. So, we're good. As far as time management, I've recently started using a system called Toggle that I've been finding very insightful. And so, literally, it allows me to kind of track what I'm working on and how long I'm working on those items. And so, it was a little challenging to kind of be disciplined about using it, when I was at my computer. But once I did, I really liked the ability to kind of go back and see wow, so this day, I got all of these things done. And

then, also, I could see did I do my morning routine? Did I do some meditation that day? Did I work out in the morning?

And start seeing some patterns. So, then, I can, ideally, start duplicating those patterns. I also try not to check my emails first thing in the morning. So, I try to do one activity or project that kind of needs to be done and do that first. And then, check email, as well as check email only two or three times a day. So, not just staying in my in box. And the Toggle, I found, has really helped me kind of manage that because, if I see like check email, check email, check email, it's like oh, I'm not really getting anything done. I'm just responding and reacting versus if we all still used a project management tool called Base Camp.

If I'm using Base Camp, and I'm getting some of these projects done, now, I'm moving things forward. So, Toggle has been really helpful. Also, something that I've been using for about a year now, which I am loving, is called Calendly, and that's their basic service is free. And it allows people to schedule time with you to talk or meet in person. You can decide whatever that is. And it automatically syncs with your calendar. So, the great thing about it is before, I just had people randomly calling me. It would interrupt my day. It would interrupt whatever my work flow is. And now, I have really conditioned people, hey, my team, here is my Calendly.

Any time you want to talk to me, just schedule a time, and I'm going to be available. And it automatically links up to my calendar. So, then, I feel very comfortable shutting my phone off for a couple of hours, as I'm working on whatever project I'm working on. So, Calendly has been an amazing tool as well.

Matt: I agree with that entirely. And I think that, actually, was a major breakthrough for me. And I think it is, too, for a lot of entrepreneurs, in terms of the transition from being reactive to being proactive, which, in terms of your time, which is one of the themes that you're talking about, both with the phone calls and with the emails because inside of your in box are other people's priorities, things that other people want from you.

Daraja: Absolutely.

Matt: And when other people are trying to make unscheduled calls into your phone, same thing. They're going to disrupt whatever you're

doing to try to ask you to do something that they need. And so, that's, basically, what that is. And so, being able to organize that, so that you are responding to those in blocks and putting both emails and inbound phone calls into pre-scheduled time blocks, so that they're not disruptive of your other time blocks for execution of your priorities, I think, is a huge breakthrough for entrepreneurs and really helps to accelerate overall productive output.

Daraja: Absolutely.

Matt: So, let's talk a little bit about you've mentioned your team a few times so far in this. And I would love to hear a little bit about your team building process, how you think about that, as well as just detailed, tactical stuff about how you hire, how you on board and train, and then, how you manage your team, especially because they're distributed. They're in different states. At the moment, they're on different continents and that kind of stuff. So, I'd love to hear a little bit about your team building process.

Daraja: Sure. So, it definitely has been a process, over the years. And it's very interesting. I think, when I first started, I definitely hired people. I talked with you. I liked you. You're hired. I didn't really put you through a lot of process. And then, I learned really quickly I didn't ask the right questions. I didn't ask enough questions. So, now, our process is for any hosts, those are the people that are the instructor for the event, they, typically, go through I think like a four or five part hiring process. So, the first part is, of course, you submit your application. If you're an artist, you're submitting some sort of sample of your art work.

The next step is a phone interview. And then, we have a set list of questions now that we ask every single person. And then, we check in with you. And we tell you a little bit about the job. Does it sound like something you'd be interested in doing? If we like them, they like us, we go on to the next step. The next step is they go to one of our events. So, they come to one of our events, check it out. They need to arrive a little bit before because there is a kit involved that they would have to be transporting. So, they get to meet the current team that's working that event, as well as get an idea of what their life would be like doing one of these events.

So, and then, they have the ability to possibly stay as a guest during the event as well. So, after they do that, we ask the team

that worked that event what did you think of the prospect. And if they're like oh, I would totally want to work with them, we take that into consideration, and whatever the feedback may be. And then, we also check with that person again. What were their thoughts? And, sometimes, it's not the right fit for them, which is great because I don't want to hire someone, get you through training, and then, after four weeks, you realize this isn't what you want to do.

So, it's totally fine. And we're like no worries, great. And if it is, it's like no, I totally want to do this, then, you come in for an in-person interview. Now, we meet you in person. And in this one, you'll be able to meet with the area manager, possibly myself, and also do a mock event. So, for an artist, they're going to take us step by step through a painting. And for a Plant Night host, they're going to take us step by step in creating a terrarium. And we have little flash cards for them. So, then, once again, we get to kind of see a little bit more technical skills. How do you show up in person?

And then, we'll check in with you again. Is everything good? Then, we'll start you in training. And you'll start off as a co-host for your first two to six events. And then, we'll check in with you again. So, I found, very quickly, that checking in with people, and I always tell my team that, too, it's okay if it's not a good fit. There's nothing wrong with that. I believe that people should enjoy what they're doing. And I want people on my team that enjoy what they're doing. And if this isn't what you want to be doing, then, I encourage you to find what does make you happy, what does make you passionate about it.

So, I'm always looking for people, not just that person that's just looking for the paycheck. And, I think, what I found is this process eliminates those individuals. Because if you're just looking for a paycheck, you've got to go through a lot to kind of get to the hire. And there are way easier jobs to get that will just give you a paycheck. But if you're looking for something, then, you're going to have a lot of fun, you're going to meet some amazing people, you're going to be able to share what you love to do with other people and see how that transforms them. And those are the people that I'm looking for to be a part of my team.

Matt: And then, in terms of people operations, in the broader sense, once

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you hire those people, and you find the right people, and you bring them on, what does your sort of communication infrastructure look like with them? Do you try to foster a cohesive company culture? Especially because people are in different states and, sometimes, in different countries. How do you go about communicating with your team, both managerially as well as sort of companywide?

Daraja: Sure. So, we use a scheduling system called When I Work that allows our team to let us know when they're available, when they're not available. It sends them text messages, when it's time for their shifts. It also allows them to communicate with other people on their team, if they needed to swap anything or anything like that. Just within the last month, I've moved also my entire team over to Base Camp. And that's where I found we can now chat with each other. It also has significantly reduced our emails back and forth.

So, any reminders that we want to let people know about, we'll put into Base Camp into what we call our treehouse, which is everyone from Team Happy Trees is where they can find information. It also houses all of the employee handbooks, any training they may need. I also try to have at least one in person meeting in market each quarter. So, DC will have its own team meeting in person. And then, I try to do, once a quarter – so, if we do a team meeting this month, next month, we'll do a team outing. So, we've done things such as going to escape room or just something different in team building that everyone can participate in.

Matt: Awesome. So, for you, you mentioned a little bit about scaling up. And then, you mentioned scaling back.

Daraja: Yes.

Matt: Can you talk a little bit about that and those types of decisions and how businesses should think about them? To some extent, I think there are some people who think growth is inherently positive. And the more people that I have on my team, the better of a success metric that is. And then, in many cases, that's not exactly the case. So, can you talk a little bit about how to think about scaling and also what your experience has been in that realm?

Daraja: Sure, absolutely. So, I think, very quickly, I started to grow and have a team, though the majority of everyone was part time. I

think, by 2016, I had about 50 people on my team. And we had just introduced, as well, a new night type. And that was Plant Night, which really didn't have a lot of – there were so many issues with that. There were supply issues. There were plants dying. Where do you get the soil in Baltimore, when it's winter outside? So, it was very, very different than paint, in a lot of aspects. And I wasn't really prepared for it.

And so, I remember, when I launched that in my first events were February of 2016, I sold out the entire month of February within, I think, like two weeks and for my following months, March and April, and then, I also launched in DC shortly afterwards. And then, I ran out of planters. So, some of the projects that I put up, I couldn't source them because the industry wasn't prepared really for us to buy these planters in the bulk we were buying them in. So, for a 40-person event that means I need 40 rose bowls. Or I need 40 wooden, 6 inch planters that I'm not walking into any local store and buying them.

So, I remember there, I literally had to scale back from what my original projection was simply because of a supply standpoint. I couldn't keep up with the supplies. And then, even with the people, I think, at the time, I was also at 50 people. And then, I didn't really have a strong HR Department. And I also think that was about the time I didn't really have a strong hiring process. So, the hiring process I just shared with you about, I didn't really have that. And so, though I had 50 people, I was also going through people. So, we were bringing on people, and they were maybe staying a couple of months.

And then, they were leaving. So, all of that was happening, in addition to running these events in DC, Baltimore, Maryland. I wasn't in New York as of yet. It was really stressful trying to figure out these pieces. I'm not an HR person. My background is sales and marketing. I'm really good at selling events. I'm not as good at all of the laws that are out there. So, the hourly laws that are coming out now, making sure that I'm paying people appropriately. And so, I had to find resources to help me with that. And so, it was definitely a super challenging period.

And then, it brought me to 2017 where then, I expanded into New York City. So, I ended up taking over another licensee's business. And that added another 30 people to my team, in an area where

now, we have a delivery system, a delivery truck. And there are additional issues with that. And so, I think 2017 to 2018, it was really, really stressful. And I think, in that moment, I didn't realize how stressful it was, until I decided to get out of New York City. So, I still have events, in the Westchester, New York market because that was more comparable to what my DC was in Richmond.

And it was a super hard decision because I had fought so hard to be in that market. And I had always wanted to do business in New York City. But, at the end of the day, I wasn't happy. And so, I remember when my last day, in that area, I stopped doing my last event, I took like a week completely off. And I felt the weight lift from me. And that's when I realized how much stress I had been under really over the last two years. And then, in combination of that, just this past April, I started a program with Goldman Sachs.

And so, then also, part of being in that program – because I realized probably like November, end of 2017, I had reached a point of kind of what my growth cap was. So, there was something additional I needed to know. But I didn't know what that was. And no one else around me, at least as far as I knew, was able to advise me. And so, I had heard about the Goldman Sachs program, Ten Thousand Small Businesses, so I applied. I had actually had the opportunity to get in for January, but it didn't work out. And then, I started in their April cohort. And that was by far the best decision I have ever done in my entire life because, suddenly, I'm in a room with, I think, like 30 other CEO business owners.

And the business owners range from being in business for two years to twenty-five years to having been in their business for one hundred years. And in talking to these individuals, they were all having similar problems to me. There was business owner that I think he had been in business for like 25 years. He said he didn't even get his HR stuff situated, until five years in. And so, my business wasn't even five years old yet. So, it just started making me feel so much better that all of these things that I expected I should know, now, I had 30 different people I could reach out to, with any of my problems and, potentially, get a solution.

So, it really was amazing. And I just graduated this past August. We will still meet once a month as a group. And that was the first business program I had ever been in. And it, literally, took you

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through there was a track on HR, your people. So, I got to learn what type of person am I. What type of leader am I kind of naturally? And what type of people are the people on my team? And how can I make it the type of community that I want to make it and be more intentional about it? Because I know, for me, in growing this, some of this stuff wasn't intentional. I just wanted to put on great events.

And then, I remember, one day, looking up, holy crap, I've got 50 people. Oh, wow, there are all of these different things that need to be done. And so, that program really helped me figure out who I needed, what I needed to do to scale the business. And so, as a result of having gone through that program, I realized that I needed to scale back, in order to move forward. And if I didn't, I think, my health was going to be at stake because I couldn't sustain where I was, if I didn't scale back. And so, that's what helped me lead to the decision of figuring out how do I really want my life to be. Is this in alignment with how I'm running my business?

If no, what do I need to do to get there? And then, that's where I had the thought, oh, wow, so I can work anywhere in the US. Could I work in another country while doing this? What does that look like? Will I still have a successful business, when I leave? So, I had all of these stories in my head and scares. And that business program definitely gave me the confidence I needed that yeah, I can try this. And then, everything else, I think, kind of lined up where I learned about Wanderist Life, and I got on that plane to come to Nairobi.

And I really do thank God that two of the individuals in the program, yourself, Matt, and Ally, have been doing this living locally independent in other countries. You for a decade, right?

Matt:

So, my trajectory, and, actually, interestingly, in terms of what you were just saying about the international leap, is that I similarly built – I started my business in 2007, with my business partner. So, we've been running Maverick Investor Group since then. And we built it, from Day 1, on purpose as a location independent infrastructure. So, I've, literally, never lived in the same city as any of my business partners on purpose. And our staff is distributed as well around the country and internationally. And we grew that way on purpose. But I was living in LA for the first five years of my business.

**The Maverick Show Episode 13**  
**HOST: Matt Bowles GUEST: Daraja Asili**

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You and I, by the way, have crossed paths in so many different places because you were at Howard University for a little bit.

Daraja: Yes, in DC.

Matt: In DC. I was, literally, six blocks north of Howard University on Georgia Avenue and Gresham.

Daraja: Wow.

Matt: Yeah. I was, literally, right there. That's where I lived. That was, actually, my first real estate investment. The first house I ever bought was on Gresham Place and Georgia, literally, six blocks north of Howard.

Daraja: Wow.

Matt: I bought the house. And this was back in 2004. It looked very different than it does now, Columbia Heights.

Daraja: Yes.

Matt: And what I did was I rented out three bedrooms. I bought a four-bedroom house. I rented out three bedrooms to friends of mine. So, we had a four-person house. I had three streams of income.

Daraja: Nice.

Matt: And then, that was in the boom period. Houses were going up. So, it was like wow, the house appreciated, cashed out, refinanced. And I started buying rental properties in different markets around the US. And that's what led me through my real estate education. I was reading everything I could read about rental properties. I started to buy properties in different states and all of that kind of stuff. But yeah, so, you and I were very close there in DC. And ten, we were both in LA as well.

Daraja: Yes, we were both in LA. We were both in Cleveland.

Matt: We were both in Cleveland where I went to college. And we, literally, overlapped in Cleveland in the '90s. That's unbelievable.

We were like –

Daraja: And originally from Buffalo, right?

Matt: I went to middle school and high school in Buffalo.

Daraja: So, I went to high school in Clifton Park, New York.

Matt: What?

Daraja: Between Schenectady and Saratoga Springs.

Matt: That's amazing.

Daraja: I know.

Matt: And then, before Buffalo, for three years, before middle school, in elementary school, I lived in Westchester County. I lived in Rye right outside of New York City.

Daraja: Oh, wow. Okay.

Matt: So, we have all kinds of overlapping.

Daraja: We do. The universe was like you two are going to meet.

Matt: Yeah. And then, here we meet in Nairobi, Kenya and now doing a podcast interview. It's perfect. But so, anyway, the first five years of running my business, I was location independent. I could live wherever I wanted. I was choosing to live in LA. I liked LA. I didn't have a business purpose there per se, but I loved LA. And then, I was in a relationship there and everything else. And then, what happened for me was my relationship partner, she was doing a PhD at UCLA in Egyptian history. And she was like I've got to go to Cairo for a year to do my dissertation research. I was like cool, I'll roll. I'm location independent.

I think I can run my business from Egypt for a year. Let's try it. But there was no reason why I couldn't. And other than the time zone difference, there really was no difference. It doesn't matter if you're in LA or if you're in Egypt or if you're anywhere else. As long as you can adjust to whatever time zones you need, and depending on how asynchronous your business responsibilities are,

that makes it either more or less of a change. But you can adjust to those time zones. And you can do that, if you need to be on a particular time zone. And I did that. And for me, that was just revelatory.

That was just like wow, if I can run my business from Egypt, I can run it from anywhere in the world. So, literally, after that year in Cairo, we were like well, we don't need to go back to LA because you've got your research. You've got to have a year to write your dissertation. Let's just go live in cool places around the world. So, we, literally, just pulled out a map of the world. And we were like what would be our top five bucket list destinations that we'd most like to live anywhere in the world. And let's just go and rent an Airbnb in each one of them for two months.

Daraja: Wow. I love that.

Matt: So, we were just like Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town, South Africa, Barcelona. We were just cherry picking them. And we were like Airbnb. And then, we just knocked out a year itinerary of traveling the world and living and working like that. Now, I left the US in 2013.

Daraja: Oh, wow.

Matt: So, this was before any of these types of programs like Wanderist Life or any of the other programs existed.

Daraja: Right.

Matt: Airbnb was there, and we relied on that.

Daraja: Were co-working spaces around, at that time?

Matt: I didn't use them, at that time.

Daraja: Okay.

Matt: If they were, I was not aware of them. I became aware of co-working and co-living and then, all of a sudden, these work travel programs and these communities. And so, when I got out of that relationship, then, I was sort of aware because I was in that space. And I was getting information in my social media feed and

everything else about, hey, there are these programs. And they're putting communities together. And they're traveling the world together and doing this stuff. And so, it wasn't really relevant to me, at the time, because I was in a relationship.

But then, when the relationship ended, I was like, you know what, this actually would be great because I really feel like there's a major social need to plug into a social community because I'd been traveling the world for a couple of years. And even if you're doing it with one other person, if it's like a relationship partner or a best friend or anything else, without a social community, it still gets very lonely. And there's a lot of isolation there, if you're doing it long term.

Daraja: Okay.

Matt: For years. And so, I was like I really feel like I need a community. This is amazing. And so, I started plugging into groups like Remote Year, like Hacker Paradise, like Wanderist Life and these types of companies that come up to offer the opportunity to not only travel the world but to do it with a cool community of people. And that's been a super amazing thing to realize that you can work and also experience the world, if you have a location independent income stream.

Daraja: Absolutely.

Matt: So, let's talk a little bit about your Daraja Consulting that you do. And I know it's mostly focused on helping businesses to design and then, implement plans to accelerate their business growth. So, can you talk a little bit about, I guess, in your experience doing that and working with different companies, what have you seen as some of the prime areas, sort of impediments to growth? And when you come in as sort of the outside consultant, what are you seeing, and how are you helping them to transcend that and move in a more accelerated growth direction?

Daraja: Absolutely. So, I think, a big thing that I've seen is their own self awareness and being okay with not being the expert of every single thing, in order to run their business. Because, I think, too, as a business owner, we're sometimes told we need to wear all of the hats. And there are a lot of hats to wear. And, sometimes, we're just really not good with some of the hats. So, for me, I realized really quickly, I'm not good with bookkeeping. I'm not an

accountant. I'm good with numbers and figuring out numbers for sales. But as far as the accounting piece, that's not my strength. So, I need to outsource that.

I need to find a good accountant. I'm not a lawyer. I need to outsource that part of it. I'm not an HR person. I don't know all of the ins and outs and the laws to protect my business. So, I need to outsource that segment of it. So, being okay with recognizing what your skill set is and what your, I hesitate to use the word weakness, but those that you're not as strong in, and find someone or people that are to kind of help you move forward. And so, when I was working in the corporate world, I did a lot of work with sales and marketing, yellow page ads, and TV commercials.

So, I had the opportunity, at the beginning of my career working in the corporate world, of working with business owners and helping them. And I got to see first hand here is this plumber. He's really good at plumbing, but he's not getting all of the business in. So, referrals are great. And, at the same time, you need to have additional marketing to bring in additional business other than just word of mouth because then, that new business you bring in from advertising will then, also be more word of mouth people for you. So, what I found is my strengths are sales and marketing and, in a way, of implementing getting more people through your door.

So, making sure people are aware of what you do and then, how they can utilize your service. And then, more importantly, in this day and age, social media. Social media, right now, is the least expensive place for you to spend your advertising dollars that has the greatest return. I, literally, built my business off of Facebook ads. That's how I sold tickets. That's how I got butts in seats. And so, of all of the things that I've learned in kind of growing this in this creative entertainment space, that's what I'm sharing with my clients, as far as how to make sure that they're taking advantage of that as well, to make sure that they're having the connections that they want.

And another piece, too, is relationship building. So, one of the ways that I also grew my business, and I help others grow theirs, is connecting with larger groups that can talk about your business. So, since I know that primarily females attend my events, I'm looking to partner with female centric organizations that have large groups, whether it be a sorority or a mommy and me group

because then, we're going to be able to partner together. I'm bringing some awesome activity that they're able to do. So, finding those places where you can align with other businesses and also tap into their networks. I think that's a really big piece.

Matt: You've mentioned a couple of really important points here. And I want to just ask you to maybe expound upon this or talk a little bit about what some of your conclusions or insights have been, as you've thought about it. But I think there are a couple of things you've mentioned, which are, often times, people are good at one particular thing. So, they're either, as Michael Gerber and the E Myth refers to it as they're the technician, where they're amazing at plumbing, or they're amazing at doing the thing that there is to do. But that doesn't necessarily mean that they're an entrepreneur or a business owner or that they can generate business or they can do any of that.

On the other side of it, you have some people that are amazing at sales. They're just extraordinary sales people. They can sell anything. They're super talented at it. But just because they can sell something, and sometimes, they try to scale themselves a little bit and sort of leverage themselves and maybe hire a couple of other people to also sell stuff, that doesn't mean that you can build out a business with all of the things that it takes to be the CEO of the company.

Daraja: Yes.

Matt: Because there's a difference between being a good sales person and being a good CEO. And there's a major difference between being a good technician and actually executing the product or service yourself versus being a CEO. So, how do you sort of approach that, in terms of self-awareness for people to, if they're able to identify what they're really good at, and they're able to identify their weaknesses, how do they then go about building a business knowing what they're good at and knowing what they're not good at? What's the process there?

Daraja: I think the process there is I'm a big believer in lists. So, for them to list out everything that they're really, really good at. And then, list out all of the things that they don't think they're good at or even the things that they don't like. Because if you don't like that thing that you're having to do every single day, that's also a drain

on you and your energy. And that's probably something that someone else can do. For me, I realized I don't like a lot of people calling me. It stresses me out. I love talking to people, but I don't like – so, if 50 people were calling me from my team every single day, I would be miserable.

So, I realized I needed to put into place managers that, when my team did have questions, they could easily reach out. And sometimes, the calls are just like oh, I want to just chit chat, which is totally fine. And my managers, they kind of like doing that. So, it's a good fit. So, I think lists are really good to really figure out, okay, here's what I'm really good at. And here's what I enjoy. Here's what I'm not so good at. And then, figure out what can you delegate, what can you outsource of what you're not as good at.

And as far as me, what I'm able to kind of help businesses with is how can you take that product or service that you have and make sure that more people are aware of what you're doing and make sure that that awareness then, also turns into revenue for you. And I think that's a big thing. I think just because people know about you, and there's like – I've seen people with websites where they have beautiful websites, but I can't actually buy your product. I can't find the button. These simple things that you would think would be easy, and it just kind of gets lost. Of course, people know how to do it. No.

If someone is trying to get in contact with you, and they can't find your number, they can't easily get in touch with you to get whatever that thing is, you've lost the sale. And so, that's what I'm able to do is figure out where are you, where do you want to be, what are your strengths and weaknesses, and how can we get those weaknesses off your plate and onto someone else that has those strengths. And then, at the end of the day, your business will be stronger.

Matt:

All right. So, I want to ask you to kind of drill down a little bit and ask you for some specific detailed tactical suggestions because there are a lot of business owners that are listening. And a lot of people, I think, use some of these different mediums to be like oh, I hear Facebook ads is a good thing to do. So, they do Facebook ads, and the results are just a really not impressive ROI on the way that they're doing Facebook ads. They're not getting the types of results, either the number of leads, in terms of traffic, or the

qualifications of the types of leads that they need to be getting and that kind of stuff.

So, since sales and marketing is your strong suit, if you can give to the business owners that are listening some specific tactical advice about – and feel free to get into the weeds a little bit of really what are the biggest tips that you would give, on either Facebook or Instagram, other platform advertising to really generate the right types of leads.

Daraja:

Sure. I think the No. 1 thing is I hear business owners say oh, I want everyone as my client. Everyone. Well, it's really hard to market to everyone. And the budget you would need to market to everyone is like Coca Cola. As a small business owner, we don't have those budgets. So, one of the things I find successful is choose that first niche that you have some sort of connection with. So, is your partner a nurse, and they have access to all of these nurses in your local hospital? And they all, potentially, may want to buy a house. So, then, when you're marketing to them, you can be very specific because nurses, as a whole, they have an association they belong to.

You can partner with the association. As far as on social media, you can target that particular city, a particular age range. So, if you're talking about say this is a real estate agent, and they want to sell more houses, and they want to focus on nurses in Baltimore, Maryland, they then, know they're going to reach out to how many hospitals are in Baltimore, Maryland. Johns Hopkins? They're going to probably – there's Nurses' Appreciation Day. And so, in social media, specifically Facebook, they can target their ads. Most likely, a nurse is going to be how old. You've got to go to nursing school, so probably 26, 27, 28 to maybe like 45.

Get a really specific range. Get a really specific radius. And then, what are some of maybe those interests? And then, selecting those and now, you have a really specific market that you're targeting to. And then, on top of it, not just making your ad, oh, come use me, ABC Brokerage. I'm going to sell you a house. No. Tell some sort of story. So, what could be a story that would be interesting to someone that's a nurse? Some of them may work long hours. So, if you're a real estate broker, do you offer showing a video of a nurse getting off of work at 10:00 at night and being able to meet the realtor from ABC Brokerage?

So, really thinking about it. And I believe that the more specific you can be for that niche will help you grow your business. And you may have 10 more, which is awesome. And I always find it fascinating, when I talk about this with business owners. They're like no, no, no, I want everyone. I also want them and them and them and them. Great. But once you lock into that first niche, you will see the revenue coming in. You get your process down, so you know who you're targeting. You do your ads. You have a system that comes in that you've told your story to them. You have the system that comes in to bring in that lead.

And then, bring them through your funnel. Once you have that down and are generating revenue, go on to the next group. If you also love plumbers or whatever it may be, then, go on to the next one. And I'm a big believer in that. And that's, once again, how I built – I was very clear. My target demographic were females 25 to 35. I can't tell you how many times people are like why don't you advertise to me. They're not really trying to go to the events right now. The only time they're trying to go to the events is maybe for a date night. So, at that time, it wasn't my strongest demographic. Now, once I had that going, then, I could start focusing on other groups.

I started focusing on museums, doing activities within their space. I started focusing on associations. So, then, you can start focusing, once you do that one thing. But I find that businesses, a lot of times, will try to be everything to everyone. And, at the end of the day, you can't, and that's okay. And the more specific you are, and the more niche you are, the easier it will be for you to grow your business. And I believe the quicker you will grow your business.

Matt: Right. So, two things in what you're saying. One is to understand who your target demographic is that's most interested in buying your product or service.

Daraja: Yes.

Matt: And then, the other one is the concept of affinity marketing.

Daraja: Yes.

Matt: About why someone might choose you over a competitive

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company. Well, if you have this thing in common with them, and they relate to you, it would be like oh, that person is the same whatever that I am. I relate to them, whatever it may be. Oh, they're a fan of the same sports team, or they're this and that or whatever. I relate to that person, on an affinity level, then, I'm going to select that person over the competition because I connect with them, and we have this in common personally, right?

Daraja: Absolutely.

Matt: I think that makes sense, in terms of the marketing. And then, in terms of sales, once you bring those people into your funnel, and you do that ad for the nurses in Baltimore, to continue on your example, and they're like oh, cool, this person is also a nurse. And the person who specializes in selling houses to nurses in Baltimore, that's clearly the person I'm going to use, since I'm a nurse. And then, they click on your ad, and they go in. What then, from there, does the sales process look like? What tips do you have for actually selling?

Daraja: So, tips, as far as selling, I am more of a relationship seller. I believe in fact finding. And really, that's just asking questions. I equate it to dating or getting to know a new person. Asking them questions, finding out what it is, in the example of real estate, what exactly is it that they're looking for. Giving examples of your top five areas you would love to live in, top five things you definitely don't want in a house. So, also, I'm a big believer in it's as important to know what you want as well as what you don't want. Then, to get to the perfect middle ground of oh, wow, here is the perfect thing for you.

So, I'm a big believer in really having some sort of set questions that you're going to ask that new person, so you are creating that relationship with them.

Matt: Yeah, I agree. I think the concept of consultative selling is a really important one because then, it allows you to authentically be able to give customized prescriptive solutions to people, once you have actually listened to their feedback, as opposed to just trying to hock them some general thing where they're like how do you know what I need because you don't know my specific interests and my personal needs and my criteria.

Daraja: Absolutely. And another piece with that, too, be okay with letting people go. So, if you do get a prospect that comes in, and for whatever reason, you realize in a fact finding that either something they're saying doesn't really resonate with you, and you're not really feeling it's a good fit, or you're sensing – I'm a big believer, too, in getting feedback from that person I'm going to be working with, am I the right fit for you. And if they say no, it's okay.

Matt: One hundred percent agreed.

Daraja: And I refer people on. If I'm not the right fit for you, that's okay. I can guarantee you I probably know someone else that's probably a better fit for you. And the quicker I've learned I can get to the point, the happier I am, the better the relationship I have with that person. And I know the happier that individual is as well.

Matt: I agree with that 100 percent and making sure that you feel that this is the right type of customer that you want to be working with because, as a business, you're totally allowed to be selective and say I don't think it's the right fit for us to work together. And that's okay, too.

Daraja: Absolutely.

Matt: But 100 percent agreed. Conceptually, that's exactly what we do at Maverick Investor Group because, when people come in, we're like let's have a consultation to see if we both feel that it's a good fit to work together and so that we can understand exactly what it is you're looking for, in terms of buying rental properties. Is Baltimore going to be the right city for you to buy a rental property in? It might be, it might not be, I don't know, unless you tell me the answers to these questions about what your criteria is, what your investment goals are and that kind of stuff. So, we do full, extended consultations with every single person that comes in the door.

And, at the end of that consultation, we can say we do mutually think it's a good fit to work together. What we're offering and how we're offering it sounds like a good fit for you. And now, let's talk about which of the things that we're offering would be the best fit for you because it's going to be different for everybody. Each person is going to make a separate buying decision. They're going to choose a different market. They're going to choose a different

type of property, based on for them. So, we want help to customize the value that we're delivering to your needs.

Daraja: Absolutely.

Matt: So, I think that's a really important concept. And I think it works well because then, it's the best fit for everybody. And it's fine for people to say either way. It's not a right fit, and you refer somebody out, and maybe this would be a better situation over here. Or somebody says I'm really more interested in buying commercial or apartment buildings or something. Well, that's not what we do. That's a cool thing, if that's what you want to do. Let me refer you over to an expert that does that or does this. But here's why we do what we do. This is the value that we think this provides.

If that sounds like a fit for you, then, cool, let's talk more about it, and let me know about you and what your priorities are, so that we could help to introduce you to something that would be the best fit for you personally.

Daraja: Absolutely. And I think one thing that people will be surprised in and that I found people are surprised and that I've experienced myself is that, when you do that, when you're okay with not working with that client and referring them to someone else, they're going to remember you. And they're going to refer – even though you may not have been the one that worked with them, in this situation, they're going to remember you. And when they come across that person that is your ideal client, they're going to refer them to you.

Matt: Yeah. One hundred percent agreed. So, Daraja, are you ready for the lightening round?

Daraja: I am ready, Matt.

Matt: Let's do it. All right. What is the top book that you would recommend, a book maybe that has influenced you over the years, either in business or personally that you would recommend most to people?

Daraja: That would be *Blue Print for Black Power* by Dr. Amos Wilson. I read it. It's a super thick book and filled with tons of information and just really great knowledge. I read it, for the first time, I think

in 2004. I really, actually, need to read it again. And it really gave me a kid of a really great perspective on how someone of color can build a business in America. I highly recommend that book. It was just an amazing book to me.

Matt: Awesome. Cool. I have not read it. We'll definitely link that up in the show notes, so that people can check it out. What would be the top app or productivity tool that you're currently using that you would recommend to people?

Daraja: Top app or productivity tool? I would say, I think I mentioned it earlier, Toggle, loving Toggle and Base Camp. Base Camp is an app on my phone as well. And I'm really enjoying specially being location independent in Nairobi, Kenya. I'm loving the tools of Base Camp.

Matt: Awesome. What would be a favorite podcast that you're listening to or blog that you're reading or some kind of stream of information that you would recommend most to people?

Daraja: Gary Vaynerchuk. I don't even know, actually, how I got introduced to him. I first got introduced to him in like September of 2016. And, literally, consumed all of his videos. First, I didn't really care for him. He seemed a little harsh. And then, when I really started watching and really consumed quite a bit, I was like wow. A) This guy really knows what he's talking about. He's very clear on what he's trying to do here, what he's really good at, which I appreciated. And he's just a straight talker and has some amazing advice.

And I love the fact that he's a big proponent of take action because I do find a lot of people, especially within the entrepreneurs, especially if, I think, you're trying to start a business, we talk a lot sometimes. We're dreamers. And so, we have all of these great dreams of ideas or businesses we can do. And, until you take action and implement it, all it is is a dream. And I really appreciate just all of the knowledge and information that he shares. So, lately, I've been really listening to his podcast, when I'm in the car or traveling.

Matt: The Gary V. audio experience. I agree 100 percent. It's interesting because my business partner, Valerie, and I, initially, encountered Gary Vaynerchuk together in person almost a decade ago.

Daraja: Wow.

Matt: It was 2009. I remember it quite vividly. It was 2009, I believe, was the year. And he was the keynote at a conference that we were attending. We had never heard of him. We had no idea who he was. We were like oh, the keynote, whoever this guy is, is coming on to speak now. I hope it's good. If not, maybe we'll leave in the middle of it. And he came onstage. And we were completely captivated. He is, among other things, an extraordinary public speaker.

Daraja: Oh, amazing.

Matt: And just remarkably charismatic and just stunning from the stage. As an art form alone, you should watch him for that reason. But we were there. And he spoke from the stage. And we were just like wow. First of all, we're going to buy all of the books that this guy has printed and read them. Second of all, we're following him on every social media channel that he's on. And I recommend to entrepreneurs, as well, younger people that are coming into the game and that are coming to me for advice, who should I be following, who should I be listening to.

And among other people, Gary V. is one of the top people that I say follow him on every channel and just consume all of this stuff because it will be both motivating and also really tactically insightful.

Daraja: Absolutely.

Matt: And, to be honest with you, when I'm having a hard day or I'm in a period of stress, one of my stress relieving tactics is to kind of go watch some Gary V. stuff and just get really jolted by some of the stuff that he's saying and the way that he's saying it. So, totally agreed with that. All right. If you could have dinner with any celebrity or author or public figure, any person at all who is alive today that you've never met, who would you choose and why would you choose that person?

Daraja: Michelle Obama. I think she is just an amazing, brilliant individual. Yeah. I would just love to learn more about her story, how she got to where she was because she was successful, in her

own right. And so, then, to be First Lady to President Obama, yeah, I would just love to sit down with her. She just seems like an amazing, genuine, sincere, smart amazing person.

Matt: And let's say you and Michelle had a dinner, and you had just like a few hours. You're ordering food. You had the wine coming. It was just the two of you, nobody was interrupting you. There's no paparazzi, it was just the two of you kicking it, what types of questions would you ask her? What would you most want to know?

Daraja: I would like to know how she manages stress. That has to be stressful, right. She's not only a wife. She's First Lady. She has children. She has children in that environment. Yeah. What is your daily routine? How do you approach your day, so that you are this centered individual that you are?

Matt: Yeah. It puts our stress in perspective, doesn't it?

Daraja: It really does. Absolutely.

Matt: All right. So, next question is knowing what you know now and having gone through your entire personal and business and entrepreneurial and career journey and everything else, what advice would you give to your 20-year-old self?

Daraja: So, my 20-year-old self was very conflicted. And I would say you are enough. You're 100 percent enough. And to walk in yourself and be confident. That's what I would tell myself.

Matt: I feel like that's really good advice. And I feel like most people, at that 17, 18, 19, 20-year-old age, that's such an important piece of advice. Like society, and now with the internet and with the comments section and with all of the social media stuff and different things like this, online bullying and all this kind of stuff, I feel like people – there's just so much negativity and people trying to tear people down. And it can be so effective. It affects me. If somebody says something bad about me, that still hurts. That's hard. But when you're 18 to 20, that can be devastating.

And so, being able to instill confidence in yourself that you can do this and regardless of society is telling you or regardless of what people are commenting on that don't like you or want to just spew

some negative venom on the comment section or whatever it is, to be able to really just stay focused and have that level of confidence to keep pursuing your path, I think that's crucially important.

Daraja: Absolutely. And to point out the comments and those types of things on social media, remember, you don't have to listen to it. You can disconnect. That's the powerful thing about technology now. You don't have to have it on. And I think, sometimes, some people forget that. That I have to have this piece of technology on. And if you're finding that it's painful for you, for whatever reason, don't allow that person to inflict that on you. Shut it off.

Matt: Yeah. Totally agreed. So, last couple of questions, to close this out. I just want to ask you a couple of travel questions.

Daraja: Okay.

Matt: Of all of the places you have traveled, what would be your top recommendation for other people, someplace you'd like to go back and visit, and someplace you'd definitely recommend other people check out?

Daraja: Wow. So, you have caught me at my very beginning stages of my travel. I definitely would recommend people to do a safari. I thought it was absolutely amazing. It was like a fall camp, so it had a toilet, a shower, and everything.

Matt: It was like glamping.

Daraja: It was glamping, yes. That's a great term.

Matt: But yet, we had to get escorted from the dining hall to our bungalow by a dude with a spear just to make sure there was no big animals in the vicinity that might pose –

Daraja: Yes.

Matt: And there were, by the way, from the patio of my bungalow, I was watching wild elephants eat branches off of trees and consume plants and bushes and things like that. So, we were quite in the thick of it. It was extraordinary.

Daraja: We were.

- Matt: I had never seen anything like it. It was amazing.
- Daraja: Me neither. It was amazing. It was amazing, yeah. So, I would highly recommend that. I definitely know I'm going to do it again probably in another country. I have to say, I think I still have a love affair with Paris. Paris was probably my very first country I went to. I spent a month there, when I was in my 20s. And I just love it. I love the food. I ate all of the bread and cheese I wanted, and I lost weight. I was like seriously, can I have more? And yeah, it was just an amazing city. I loved, loved Paris.
- Matt: I agree with that totally. And it's one of those cities that get so much hype. It's like this is the Paris of this region or the Paris of this region. It's so glamorized and a romanticized city. But you know what? I feel like it deserves it.
- Interviewee: It does, it does.
- Matt: I feel like it earns it.
- Daraja: Yes. I could walk – I did, I walked so much, when I was there. Just even walking down cobbled streets. I just loved it, absolutely loved it.
- Matt: I was just back there in June. And I was there for a few days, so I did a couple of things there. But the main centerpiece of the reason why I went was I went to the Diner en Blanc event. Do you know about this?
- Daraja: No.
- Matt: So, “Diner en Blanc” is “dinner and white”. And it is a pop up, clandestine white party where everyone dresses in elegant white outfits.
- Daraja: Okay.
- Matt: And even the participants who sign up to go don't know where this is going to happen, until a few hours before the event. So, you're told to meet at a specific location. And then, your leader will take you to where the actual event is going to happen. And what it is, it's a pop up dinner party. And everyone has to dress in elegant white. It's a very strict dress code. Literally, no off white, no eggshell, no ivory. It's all white, everything you where.
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Daraja: Okay. Even your shoes?

Matt: Everything, shoes and everything. And you bring a table and two chairs. So, you have to go in groups of two.

Daraja: Wait, you bring your own table?

Matt: You bring your own table and your own chairs, and you're in groups of two.

Daraja: Okay.

Matt: So, it's a small table and two chairs, table cloth. And then, you bring a picnic basket of a gourmet dinner and wine and champagne, no beer or liquor allowed.

Daraja: Okay.

Matt: Only wine and champagne.

Daraja: How about rosé?

Matt: You can bring rosé, it's a wine.

Daraja: Okay.

Matt: Yeah. White, red, or rosé, totally fine. So, these are the parameters. And then, you show up at your location with your table, your chairs, and your picnic basket in your white gear. And then, your leader will take you, and you follow them to the actual destination. And then, what happens is a pop up, it's like a flash mob, but like a dinner party. So, it's like a pop up where hundreds or thousands, in some cases, of people all dressed in elegant white have this dinner party with white table clothes and gourmet food and wine from 8:00 p.m. until midnight.

And then, at midnight, they tear it down and go back the way they came, take all of their stuff away, and it's as if no one was ever there.

Daraja: Wow, that's cool. So, you did that?

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Matt: So, yeah. It started in Paris 30 years ago.

Daraja: Oh, okay.

Matt: And it has now franchised out around the world. They actually have them in Baltimore and DC and these areas in the United States. Once a year, they'll have a Diner en Blanc event, which you can go to. Now, the only way you can get into it is by knowing someone that's done it previously. For example, I could now give you access to go to the one in Baltimore or New York or DC, wherever you're going to be.

Daraja: Fantastic, love it.

Matt: But what they had in Paris this year was the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Diner en Blanc event in the city where it started, so they had over 13,000 people show up for this clandestine, pop up white party. And people flew from all over the world. So, there were people from Baltimore and DC and New York that, literally, flew to Paris just for this event.

Daraja: Oh, that sounds so amazing.

Matt: It was insanely epic, totally incredible, people from all over the world. It was totally magical. But it's always a pleasure for me to go back to Paris is what the point of that was. So, final question, your top bucket list destination, place you've never been that you most want to go. And if you want to name more than one, you can name two or three. But what's the top of your list right now?

Daraja: Yeah. So, honestly, I think, I stopped making resolution lists. But I remember, back in the day, when I did make resolution lists, one of my goals was to visit every single country in the world. So, that would be before I die, of course. So, I would say that would be my bucket list because I think that, yeah, there's not necessarily one of I definitely want to go there. There's plenty, right now, that are on my list. But really, I want to visit every single country. I want to experience every part of this earth because every part is so different.

And there's so much knowledge and information and amazing people that I know I'm going to be able to meet and experience along the way.

Matt: Yeah. And I feel like, once you start doing that, then, you're like oh, you get kind of drawn towards a place that you spent less time. Do you know what I mean? So, last year, I spent six months in South America, which was epic. It was so amazing. It was so special. I went to so many countries, and I was living like a month at a time in Columbia and Peru and these amazing places. And it was incredible. But I was spending so much time there that I was like wow, this is epic, and I love every minute of it. But then, I was like I've spent so little time in Sub Saharan Africa. I told you, I lived in Egypt for a year.

And I did Morocco for a month. And I've been in South Africa for a month. But between there, I'd done so little. I was like this continent is huge. There are so many amazing countries there.

Daraja: Yes, absolutely.

Matt: And then, that becomes the top of my priority list. So, then, I'm like how can I go to Sub Saharan Africa but also do it with a community and stuff like that. So, that's where this program came in. Wanderist Life said we're going to Nairobi, Kenya. We're doing it with a cool group of people. You get to hang out in the city, go on a safari, experience all of this stuff. I was like that's perfect because I haven't done that before.

Daraja: Now, you also went to Uganda. So, had you been to Uganda before?

Matt: Never before, no. This month –

Daraja: And Tanzania?

Matt: All new to me.

Daraja: Wow, so you had Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda?

Matt: All this month, totally new for me. East Africa has been magical. It's been delightful. It's been amazing. I have also felt super fortunate because I knew some people here in this region from other nomad experiences that I had. So, I went on the Nomad Cruise earlier this year and, literally, met people from Kenya and Uganda who said you've got to come visit. When are you coming

to Kenya and Uganda? So, I said, actually, I'll be in Kenya here. And you met a couple of my friends from Kenya. And then, I went and stayed with a Ugandan friend of mine who I had met from the Nomad Cruise but who is based in Kampala and Uganda.

So, she took me all around Uganda. We went to see the source of the Nile River, and we went to see all of these different spots in Kampala, and it was amazing. And so, that's one of the really cool things. As you travel more and you meet people, then, all of a sudden, you're also like, oh, Uganda hadn't been super high on my list. But now that I have this friend, and she's super cool, and she told me all of this amazing stuff about Uganda, and then, I heard reinforcing stuff about Uganda from the Kenyans and other people that have spent time in Kampala, that's now super high on my list. So, I'm going. And so, your list kind of constantly changes.

Daraja: Right. Right. Absolutely.

Matt: But you are going to South Africa in the near future, yes?

Daraja: Yes. So, actually, Nairobi, Kenya was my first introduction to can I do this remotely. So, I'll go back to the states for pretty much October. And then, November, I'll be in Thailand for the month. So, I'm excited about that.

Matt: Awesome.

Daraja: And then, December is still a little up in the – I'll be back in the states for a little bit. And then, December, New Year's, I'll be in Joburg, with Noire BNB and Afro Punk is doing an awesome festival there that I'm super excited about. And I'm going to fit in, I'm not quite clear where, I'll be fitting in time in Cape Town as well. And then, what you shared with me, Matt, about the Digital Nomad Summit.

Matt: The Nomad Summit in Chiang Mai, Thailand in January.

Daraja: Yes.

Matt: Yeah.

Daraja: So, I'm trying to make that in January. So, I'm super excited.

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Matt: That's amazing. Where are you going to be based in Thailand, in November, when you go?

Daraja: So, I think I may do Chiang Mai. And I found a couple of Airbnb. I'll send you the links to tell me if those are good areas, since you have been there.

Matt: Awesome.

Daraja: So, my goal is to get an apartment there on Airbnb and then, do excursions to Bangkok and Phuket and different other parts of Thailand, while I'm there for the month.

Matt: Awesome, yeah. So, I've been to Bangkok. I've been to Phuket. And I probably spent the most time in Chiang Mai. I was just there for seven weeks earlier this year. And it is a super special place on so many levels. It's probably the No. 1 Digital Nomad hub in the entire world. But it's just a super special city, on so many levels. So, definitely hit me up, and I will give you all the recs and introduce you to people that are there. And you'll know people when you arrive because I'll introduce you to them in advance.

Daraja: Fantastic.

Matt: It will be amazing.

Daraja: Thank you, Matt.

Matt: Yes, of course. So, Daraja, thank you so much for being here. It was awesome to have you on the show.

Daraja: This has been awesome.

Matt: Yeah. It's been super special. So, yeah, all of the links, everything that we've talked about in the show, the names of people and events and books and everything else is going to be in the show notes. So, just check that out for that. And we have about two more days here in Kenya.

Daraja: Yes.

Matt: And then, we're rolling out to the next destination.

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- Daraja: Rolling out, I can't believe it.
- Matt: But it's been an awesome month. It's been amazing hanging out with you and having epic experiences. And thank you, again, for being on the show.
- Daraja: Thank you, Matt. Thank you so much.
- Matt: All right. Good bye, everybody.
- Announcer: Be sure to visit the show notes page at [www.TheMaverickShow.com](http://www.TheMaverickShow.com), for direct links to all of the books, people, and resources mentioned in this episode. You'll find all of that and much more at [www.TheMaverickShow.com](http://www.TheMaverickShow.com).
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