

Matt Bowles: Hey everybody, it's Matt Bowles. And my guest today is Spencer Jentsch. He's the CEO of Hacker Paradise, which was founded in 2014 as the world's first international remote work/travel group. Since then, Hacker Paradise has taken over 550 people to live, work, and play together in 20 countries, and has attracted participants from companies like Google, SpaceX, and Y Combinator. On the trips, HP provides housing, a workspace access, and a community of cool people to explore the city with and party with. But HP also organizes weekly workshops, talks, skill shares, goal sharing sessions, and networking events to help participants with professional development and goal achievement.

Originally from Utah, Spencer was an eight-year-old hula hoop prodigy. He is also a bat catcher. And prior to HP, he was a program manager at a software IT company and co-founded a Tinder profile consultancy. He has lived outside the U.S. for a total of seven years across 28 countries. He speaks and teaches Korean, has a bachelor's degree in Korean language and culture, and a master's degree in Asian studies. Spencer, welcome to the show.

Spencer Jentsch: Thank you. I'm excited to be here.

Matt: Awesome to have you. Let me just set the scene here. You and I are in Seoul, Korea, and we are currently drinking a bottle of Australian Shiraz.

Spencer: It's delicious.

Matt: Which is not easy to come by in Korea.

Spencer: No. Korea only wants to give you soju and shit beer.

Matt: Indeed they do. And we have been drinking a lot of that as well.

Spencer: Yeah.

Matt: We have been here for five weeks now, and it's been my first time in Korea. I have been totally impressed and really, really enjoyed my time here over the last five weeks. But you, I know, have a much longer relationship with Korea. You've been here and lived here for years, and it has a really, really special place in your life. So, maybe we'll just start with that. Can you talk a little bit about, I guess first of all, what you love and what you're so passionate about in terms of Korea, and then maybe tell the story about your

upbringing and how that came about, and you came to be connected with Korea.

Spencer: So, for most people, Korea seems to be a stopover. It's like, "Hey, I'm going to China," or "I'm going to Southeast Asia, so I have a layover in Korea, so I'll be there for like 24 hours, 48 hours, and then I'm out." It seems to be a stopover place for most people and not a place they go to visit. But for me, it ended up being a big part of my life. When I was 19, I decided to go on a Mormon mission. And so, when you apply to go on a Mormon mission, you just say, "Hey, I want to go," and they send you somewhere. You don't get to pick. And so, I got sent to Korea. I didn't speak the language. I didn't know much of anything about the culture. I had never been out of the U.S. I'd never even been on a plane. And my parents were very trusting people, and put me on a plane and sent me to Korea, and then here I was.

So, when I first came here, I lived here for two years doing that, and learned the language, learned to love so many things about Korea, even though at the beginning, I wasn't sure I would like it. And then it became a big part of my life as I went through and ended up doing a major in it. I did my master's in it. I worked for Samsung headquarters for a while. I taught Korean language for several years. And now with Hacker Paradise, I come back and do this sort of stuff, and bring other groups of people here.

Matt: Well, I have been super impressed with it, and you and I have had an absolute blast here over the last five weeks. We've been out to drag shows and nightclubs till 5:00 in the morning. I have been to rap concerts and breakdancing shows, and we've been to the border with North Korea, to the demilitarized zone. We have been to historical palaces and secret gardens, and just eaten some of the most incredible food. It's been really, really a blast. So, I've personally just been blown away, and I totally see what it is that you and others love about Korea. It's been amazing.

Spencer: Yeah, it's a really cool place. There is so much richness to the culture here and things to do, and people just don't really understand it, because it's hard to break into when you first come. If people don't speak the language and you don't read the language, of course, you can't even see what a bunch of signs on the building say, so you don't know what kind of venues you're walking past. But once you're able to understand some of that, you realize there's so much to do, the people are really friendly, and

it's just a really, really fun place to party, to go out, to drink, even though they have shit beer. And the normal Korean cycle when you go out on nights of going doing karaoke, going getting some food, going drinking, going clubbing, and then making that rinse and repeat all over again, and going back and doing that cycle is a really, really fun way to spend a Friday night.

Matt: It's amazing. And all of the nightclubs are open until at least 7:00 in the morning. I mean, this is truly a 24-hour, 'round-the-clock city that, depending on whatever it is that you're into, whatever hours that you keep, this is really a 24/7 city. And that's been amazing to experience.

Spencer: It's one of those places that if you go out on a Friday or a Saturday night, you are committed, and you are not going home. 'Cause the subway shuts down at around 12:00 or 1:00 a.m., and it doesn't open back up till about 6:00. So, most people then say, great. The subway's down. There's no way for me to get home. You can take a cab, but nobody wants to do that. So, then they stay and party until 6:00 a.m. when the subway opens back up. When I used to live here, I joined a soccer league, a football league, and I played on Saturday mornings at 7:00. And so, we would actually come to an elementary school that's really close to where we are right now every morning, every Saturday morning at 7:00 a.m. And we would pull up, and we would drive into the parking lot, and we'd drive past all these bars here that were just still full of people out at 7:00 a.m. We were just waking up fresh, ready to play football. And everybody here was drunk and stumbling through the streets, and had been out partying all night. So, it's definitely a place where if you want to go hard, there are lots of places to go hard in Korea.

Matt: Let's go back now a little bit and talk about your upbringing. You kind of started at age 19, but let's go back further than that, and maybe talk a little bit about your upbringing in Utah. We mentioned in the bio here that you were an eight or nine-year-old hula hoop prodigy, so maybe start with that. But talk a little bit about your upbringing, and then sort of that cultural transition then as you went from that over to Korea, and how you developed personally through that experience.

Spencer: I spent most of my childhood living in Utah and growing up there. And when I was eight, I decided to go out for the school play, 'cause I was an aspiring young child. I thought I would be great.

And you know when you're young and you think you're a lot greater than you really are? I tried out for the lead role of our school play, and I did not get the role. I was terrible at it. And my older brother ended up taking the role and did a great job. But they gave me a consolation type role. It's like, we won't kick you out of the play, but we're not gonna give you anything important with the speaking lines. So, I was supposed to represent Saturn in a play that was about the cosmic system, the universe. And so, for ours, to represent Saturn, we had to do a hula hoop dance number in the middle, and I did not know how to hula hoop until that event. And we had hula hoop training by a hula hoop trainer.

And I turned out to be really, really good. And I was able to do this special move no one else could do where I would hula hoop around my hips and then pop it up to my shoulders, and then up to my arm above my head, and then all the way back down and all the way back up. And I'd just make this constant movement of it going up and down. Yeah, it was really impressive.

Matt: Wow.

Spencer: So, I was the only kid that was able to do that move. And so, I got a solo in our school play dance number, where everyone else kind of was like my background dancer hula hoopers, and I was front and center for this moment when I did my special move. And I got a standing ovation. It was beautiful. The problem with hula hooping as a child is like many other careers as a child, is once you hit puberty, lots of times, it wrecks it. So, as I started to grow and got hips, it really killed the move for me, and I was no longer able to do my signature hula hoop movement. And so, it just had to be one of those things that I moved past in life.

Matt: And so, then you moved on to bat catching. Tell us about that.

Spencer: I did. I worked at a summer camp for four years in a row, and I did a lot of things there. I taught Korean there. It was a Korean language immersion summer camp. I was a lifeguard. So, I used to pull leeches off kids when they'd come out of the lake and had leeches on them. That was always exciting. And then the other part that went along with it is there were bats that went into the cabins. They decided it was a good idea just to give us a 20-minute training on how to handle bats that might have rabies, and that that would be sufficient. And it's clearly not, for anyone who has any sense. But they gave us a little training and said, "If there's a bat in

the cabin and a kid has been asleep, and we don't know if a bat has bit the child, then you must capture that bat, because we have to take it to the vet and test them for rabies. Otherwise, if you're not able to capture that bat, then we have to take every kid in and test them for rabies, which you do not want to do." So, they gave us this really sham training of how to catch a bat. And our tools were a baseball mitt, I believe, and an ice cream bucket. And once we used – they had a tennis racket that we were supposed to hit them in with. I don't know. It was really hacked together.

And so, there was a couple times when they would call us, and there would be bats in the cabins, and they weren't sure if the kids got bit, so we would have to catch that bat. And it's not an easy thing to do, if you've ever tried. I don't think it's a common thing many people have tried.

Matt: I have never tried to catch a bat.

Spencer: I can teach you in 20 minutes, though it probably won't be good training. But there was this one time where we went to go catch this bat in the apartment, and the kids had trapped it in the bathroom. And the electricity was out in the bathroom for whatever reason, so there was just this bat circling in there alone. And they sent us in and shut the door behind us to lock us in till we caught the bat. And it was a scene straight out of a horror film, where you can't see what's going on. You just have this thing flying around you, hitting you every once in a while, kind of making all these noises. And without any light, we're trying to wave around a baseball mitt, a tennis racket, and an ice cream bucket, and somehow catch this bat.

We generally weren't very successful, as you can probably tell from my story. But there was a couple times we caught them. I was impressed, the times we did catch them.

Matt: That is an impressive feat, and not something that I feel like I would be very talented at, so kudos to you for whatever it was that you ended up catching.

Spencer: Let's go to Minnesota, and we'll do a test. We'll put us both in cabins and see who can catch more bats.

Matt: So, this was a Korean immersion camp where this was happening.

Spencer: Correct.

Matt: So, you had gone to Korea, then you had come back, and then you had gone back. And you've been back and forth to Korea now how many times, and for how much have you lived here?

Spencer: Oh, this is probably the sixth time I've been here. And it's been about three years total that I've spent in Korea. And the first chunk when I was a missionary was the longest. That was two years solid. And then after that, it's been months here and months there as I was doing my degree in Korean studies, so I came back for a couple different things. I worked for Samsung for a while, and then I've come back with Hacker Paradise now twice.

Matt: So, let's talk about that Samsung thing and how that came about.

Spencer: Let's do it.

Matt: Go ahead and tell that story.

Spencer: I lived in Vancouver when I was doing my master's degree. And while I was in Vancouver, they had the 2010 Winter Olympics. So, they actually closed down campus because there was events there, and the students were on break for a month. So, I thought, this will be great. I will volunteer for the Olympics. What a great experience. And I told them when I applied, I'm only really gonna do this if I get to use my Korean. I was pretty selfish in that way. I didn't want to be in a parking lot directing traffic. I just thought that was not a good use of my skills. So, I said, "I want to do a Korean-speaking role," thinking I was gonna get assigned some small Korean athlete. I'd get to know them and their parents really well, and it would be a really heartwarming story about how I bonded with this Korean family, and we would have a great time.

Instead, they assigned me to be the partner of Lee Kun-hee, who is the CEO of Samsung. He's an Olympic Committee member, and arguably the most powerful man in South Korea. So, I got assigned this guy instead, instead of a small little athlete. And what they didn't tell me, though they probably knew, was that he wasn't gonna come alone, and I was gonna be his chauffeur and be his personal escort the whole time he was here. He brought an entourage, as of course, he would. He's the most powerful man in Korea. So, he brought an entourage of 40 people who took care of him and I labeled his minions, because the interesting thing about

him, and I don't know if this is a Korean thing or a people in power thing, but he didn't even have to say anything. He would just send a look across the room, and the minions knew what it meant, and they'd run over there and try to solve whatever was happening. And it was really actually cool to watch this happen as they tried to read his mind and see what he was dissatisfied about.

So, I got to be his personal escort to a lot of these things. A lot of the times, I just ended up moving around his entourage. But the one event where they wanted me with him specifically was the Olympic Opening Ceremonies. So, when we went there, we were sitting down. We'd gotten him and his family and most of the minions there safely, which is a whole other story. We did this whole caravan thing where it's like the movies, and you all pull out from different entrances and make this caravan, and then go different secret routes through the city to make it there. We had to practice it like five times, and then did it for real. It was really, really hilarious, 'cause I get he's an important man, but it seemed a bit of overkill to me.

We got them all there, we got there safely. We're sitting down, and they're starting the event. And he sends his look to the side, and everyone's trying to figure out why he's upset and what he's upset about. I'm just sitting there, because I don't know this is all going on. One of them comes over to me, and they say, "Hey, we've got an emergency. He's older. He's a bit frail. He's having difficulty lifting his cup to his mouth, so he can't drink his drink. This is an emergency." And I just – I mean, you know me. I'm a real person, and I'm really – I like to cut through the bullshit, so I'm just like, "What? That doesn't make any sense to me." And they're like, "He needs a straw. We have an emergency. The CEO of Samsung needs a straw." So, I go, "Okay. I'll just go ask for a straw." So, I went up and I asked for a straw. Apparently, there was no straws in the entire building, which was really strange. But I had taken it upon myself to solve this emergency, so I ordered the next volunteer that I found that was working in concessions upstairs, and I was just like, "Hey, we need to find a straw." And he said the same thing I did. He's like, "Is this a big deal?" And I said, "Yes, this is life or death. This is an emergency. We need you to get a straw." So, it took him about 20 minutes. I think he had to leave the premises and go over to a Starbucks a 15-minute walk away, and find it and come back and give me a straw. So, I didn't really do much of the work. He did all the work. And then I walked down and delivered it to them, and you should have seen, everybody was

waiting in anticipation as he put the straw in the cup to see if that solved the problem. And then he sipped from his straw and gave a little nod, and that was it. Problem solved. That's how he was like, this is great. It's all better now.

Matt: That is amazing.

Spencer: Yeah. It was a pretty funny experience just to see how such little things in that type of environment become such big things. And everyone who's trying to keep him or other important people happy just run around like mad to try to keep them appeased.

Matt: Right. And then what happened from there?

Spencer: So, not too long afterwards, he did his bit. There was a part where he stands up in the middle, and he had to be there for that. And then after that, he decided that he wanted to go home. He was done. He's an old man, he was a little bit sick, so he wanted to go home. And so, they came up to me again and said, "We have another emergency. He needs to get out of here. And he is a little bit older. He has a bad knee. He doesn't want to walk through all the people. There's a lot of steps. There's crowds. He shouldn't have to deal with that. We need to get him out of here now, and we need you to help us solve this problem." At this point, I was drinking the Kool-Aid, and I was like, this is great. This is an emergency. Of course he has to get out of here.

So, the problem was, there was stairs and steps and security lines to go through, and there's a fence, and there's crowds outside. And his car was parked so far away. And so, I went, and as the English speaker, was in charge of solving all of those. So, I actually went, and we co-opted a golf cart. We drove down and picked him up so he didn't have to walk, drove him all the way around the arena until we could take him up to the exit level. And then I had to negotiate with the police that were there standing watch at the building, 'cause it's all fenced off, and they have policemen and undercover people circling the area on bomb watch and all sorts of things to make sure nothing happens.

And I convinced them – I still don't know how – I convinced them to open their security gate and hold the crowds of people aside physically, and then let a random car drive in up to the venue. And actually, as it drove up, there were people that jumped out of nowhere and started screaming, and talked about how they thought

the car had a bomb strapped to it, and they had to do a full bomb sweep of the car. I don't know where these people came from. It was a bit of a miff in my plan. But we actually got them to allow us to have the car, drive it right up to the Olympic venue, breaking all the rules that they had set themselves. And we got him in the car, and he drove away. And after that, his minions were so impressed at what I had done that they called me the Korean word for the savior after that, because I had saved their god.

Matt: That is absolutely amazing. And then that presented itself, I'm sure, quite the networking opportunity and quite the business opportunity then after that for you to follow up with?

Spencer: It did. I got to know lots of members of his family through that. And so, as I left, they gave me their business cards and said, "Call us if you need anything." And people do that, I don't think ever expecting that you're gonna call them up, but I did, of course. I had finished my degree in Korean linguistics and thought, I want to work in Korea for a bit, and I know a family that runs a powerful company in Korea. So, I emailed them, and they gave me a job as assistant in the fashion department at Samsung, which most people don't know exists, but it does. And I had two major roles that are of note to say while I was there. One, I was like the trophy husband of the office. So, they would take me to the fashion events, and because I was a white man that spoke Korean, they would take me around as a show pony and just make me talk.

So, they would be like, "Here's our new intern. He's our assistant who's here. He speaks Korean. Go," and just expect me to say whatever, which was really demeaning, but I put up with it for a while. And then my other big job that I had was during the Christmas season, the CEO's daughter, who was the head of the fashion division, had to write Christmas cards to all of her colleagues in the fashion world, so Marc Jacobs, Dior, Chanel – she has to write cards to all of them. And so, they had to write them in English. And I, in their opinion, had the best English handwriting out of anybody. So, they said, you get to write all the Christmas cards. Here's the messages, and let's see what you can come up with for her signature. So, I did about four versions of her signature, and then they picked one and said, "That's the one. You do that every time."

And I handwrote all the Christmas cards to all the designers around the world and signed them with her signature. And then I had

someone next to me checking each and every one, and they'd say, "No, you smudged, next." And they'd just throw it away and make me write a new one. And then they'd be like, "Okay, that one's perfect." And they were really critical judges. So, I wrote and rewrote cards to every major designer in the world that Christmas.

Matt: That's amazing. So, Marc Jacobs received a Christmas card written by Spencer Jentzsch.

Spencer: Yeah. He probably doesn't think that's special at all, but to me, that's a little bit special.

Matt: And I will say, it has been amazing hanging out with you and roaming around Korea. And we roll up to wherever it is that we're going, and you just start speaking fluent Korean, and it is amazing to see how people respond, 'cause they are really not expecting that.

Spencer: They don't expect it at all. And the funny thing is, in lots of other countries you go to in the world, they expect you to speak, and so even if you speak the language, they're not impressed. Here, you just walk around and say "Hi" in Korean, and people will be like, "Oh my gosh, you're so good." So, they're really easy to please. I know they've said it to many of the people here in the group who just know how to say "Hi" and "Goodbye" and "Thank you," and people will stop them and say, "You're so good at Korean." And it's like, I only speak three words. But for me, yeah, they're really taken off-guard. And a lot of times, I'll have them stop and say, "Oh, can you say that again?" because even though I said it in Korean, they're expecting to hear English, and so they're just not expecting me to speak Korean.

So, then I repeat it again. They're like, "Oh, that was Korean. Oh, oh yeah, of course I know what you're saying. I just wasn't ready for that." But it's a nice little trick that I like to have, especially here in Korea. It's fun to eavesdrop on people, 'cause they don't think we can understand. As we're moving through the subway, and I hear people talking about that group of foreigners, and that tall handsome guy and that really pretty lady that's with us, and I just laugh all the time, 'cause I can hear what they're saying, and they have no idea.

Matt: Well, and your Korean is particularly nuanced. I remember you were able to negotiate with sass.

Spencer: With sass.

Matt: With the woman for a group discount on gym memberships.

Spencer: Yeah. I should be clear to listeners at home that I have sass in no matter what language I speak in. It's just part of my personality. But yeah, she was giving me a hard time about something, and I was in a bad mood. It was the end of the day, and I just wasn't having it. So, someone had offered me a deal the day before, a different person, and so then I went in and tried to get the same deal. And she was like, "No, we can't do that." And I was like, "What do you mean? The guy said it yesterday." She said, "Oh, there's no way we could do it at that amount. There's no way." And she gave me a lot of sass. And I had just had it. So, I told her there was no way she could do it? The guy yesterday was gonna do it, but there's no way she can do it? And I just – I don't know, I just had had it up to here. But she put her foot down and won that argument, and I ended up paying the amount she wanted. So, even though I was sassy in my response, it didn't get me anywhere in the negotiations.

Matt: But it was impressive to see, though, I have to say.

Spencer: She wasn't impressed.

Matt: She was not impressed.

Spencer: She was not impressed, no.

Matt: She was not impressed being on the receiving end of your sass.

Spencer: No. That's how you know you've landed a good sass remark, is the other person is not impressed.

Matt: Speaking of sass, one of the other things that we briefly mentioned in your bio in your string of interesting things that you've done along your way to becoming to CEO of HP is that you also cofounded a Tinder consultancy.

Spencer: Damn straight.

Matt: And I went to the webpage for your Tinder consultancy. And underneath your picture, it says as the description of your role,

“Your token gay best friend, professional douche spotter. Once cup of rosé, and he’ll give you the brutal truth of why people are swiping left on your profile.”

Spencer: I’m about a glass-and-a-half in of wine right now, so I’m in perfect form to look at profiles.

Matt: But yeah. I mean, I know we have done this before with several people here, and I know I’ve looked at your profile before as well.

Spencer: I think it’s a thing that everybody should do, whether you have a professional look at it or you have a friend look at it. Everybody doing online dating needs somebody to review and look at their profile. People are embarrassed, they don’t want people to see. Well, I’ve got news for you. Thousands of people that you’re trying to get with are seeing this, so you might as well have your good friends look at it and give you some good feedback before the general public that you’re trying to meet with to be friends, or date, or whatever your goal is. Before they see it and have a judgment of you, you might as well have a friend look at it and give you their opinion.

Matt: So, for people that are doing online dating that are on these apps, and whether it’s Tinder or whether it’s another one like Bumble or whatever else it is, what are the main tips – well, let me ask you this, I guess, both ways. What are the primary mistakes that you see people making on their profiles, and what are the primary tips that you would give people that they could implement immediately for improving their profile today?

Spencer: Yeah. People seem to make the same mistakes over and over, so it’s really easy to catch after you look at a lot of profiles, the same type of mistakes people make. So, one common mistake with the text is they won’t have any. If you don’t write anything with the text, it just looks shady and like you have something to hide. Just write something. It’s not that hard. And we can get into it later in the tips section what I would say you write. But you should just write something. If you nothing written, that’s a mistake right away. When you’re looking at your pictures as well, you need to have someone look at them and make sure that they look like you. You need to make sure that they represent you well, because lots of people will pick pictures that they think look sexy, or look fun, or look outdoorsy, but then it doesn’t really represent them or doesn’t look like them at all.

There was someone I was looking at their profile the other day, it had a picture of their shoulder and then a beautiful scenery. And I said, “Why did you pick this picture? You can’t even see you. All I can see is your shoulder.” And they’re like, “Yeah, but it shows I’m outdoorsy. Look, there’s nature.” Okay, sure. You can have outdoorsy photos. But you can also take an outdoorsy photo that has you in it besides more than a shoulder. Unless your shoulder is your best quality, which maybe it is – mine’s not. Unless your shoulder is your best quality, you should not be leading with your shoulder.

The advice that my cofounder of the agency would always give is really clear in terms of photos, and I think it’s really helpful to pass along. And just for some clarification, she’s a social media consultant for her real job, and is an expert in this, where I’m just a sassy token gay best friend who will tell you what I’m thinking if I’ve had a glass of wine. But her advice that she would always give is, especially for your first main profile picture, if you have a photo that shows your eyes, your teeth, and your hands, scientifically, that instills confidence. So, the other person on the receiving side is gonna think, I can trust this person. They’re not someone who’s gonna pull the wool over my eyes. They’re not catfishing me or whatever. This is a real person. So, I usually try to tell people, that’s the first kind of thing you should go through when you’re looking at your profile. Make sure you lead with a photo like that that’s really clear.

And then just basics. Make sure it really looks like you. Make sure it’s not weird angles. Make sure you don’t have sunglasses in all of your photos. And just make sure it represents you the best that you think it could.

Matt: And what was gonna be your tip for the text portion of the profile in terms of how to optimize that?

Spencer: Yeah. It’s like applying for a job when you’re on a dating app. You need to fill something out, but you need it to be exciting. It should represent you and not be a lie. But you don’t want to write that you like sleeping and eating and watching movies, because everybody likes that. That’s not debatable, and that doesn’t make you memorable or set you apart in any way. So, the advice that I generally give to people when they’re writing their profile is write a line or two about you, something simple but something that represents you. So, instead of saying, “I like eating food,” you

could say, “I always try to find and try the spiciest food I can,” or instead of saying, “I like movies,” you can say, “I can’t watch a horror movie ‘cause I’m too shaky. I just can’t watch it,” or “I cry with every romcom I watch.” Things like that make you endearing and make you a real person, instead of just a generic text. So, write something like that about yourself. And then the last line, write something about what you’re looking for, whether you’re looking to make friends, whether you’re looking to share a bottle of wine with somebody. Mine while we’re traveling is generally, “I’m looking for some good street food in town, so let me know if you know somewhere.”

The reason I tell people to keep that last line is that when you have a match, generally, if you haven’t before, people will read your profile after you’ve matched. And then, as they’re figuring out to say hello and lead off to you with what type of question or comment, that generally is a really good place to help people know what to talk about. So, I’ve had places where there’s people that I match with, and because I have that line, they’ll start off and just say, “Hey, the best street food I know in town is this place. Do you want to go this Friday night and go have it together?” Boom. You’re already so much further into the conversation than you are if you don’t have that, where in normal conversation, it’s “Hi, hello, how are you? I’m good, how are you? Where are you from?” for 10 days before you ever get to that point. So, having a lead-in really helps the other person be able to jump into something with you that’s meaningful to you.

Matt: Yeah. And I feel like, for single people, and I’ve been traveling the world now since 2013, and for part of that time, I’ve been in committed relationships, and for part of that time, I’ve been single. So, I’ve had both experiences. And I feel like for single people, when they’re traveling to different countries, using dating apps like that – and these dating apps, by the way, Tinder, or Bumble, or those kind of apps, they work all over the world. And so, you can go to most any country, and you will be able to use them –

Spencer: Right.

Matt: – and match with local people. And I have found that that experience, while of course, they’re dating apps, so of course, there’s a romantic pretext, but I have found that provided you filter well enough, and you’re sure you’re going out with a smart, interesting, respectful person that’s gonna be an enjoyable time,

then even if that first date doesn't end up going in a romantic direction, or there's not chemistry, or that's not what it is, it's never a failed date because you always are able to have a really interesting connection with a local person to have a cultural experience, and that coffee, or that lunch, or that drink, or whatever it was, even if it doesn't go in a romantic direction, was still a really interesting way to connect with local people and have a local experience.

Spencer: I agree. A lot of people give first dates a bad rap, and they say, "Oh, I hate going on first dates. They're terrible." And I think if you're out around the world and you have the mindset of trying to meet other people, then you should be open to that type of concept, of you meet people, and you just get to know them for who they are. And that could be one great date. It could be one shitty date that turns into a really funny story. It could be something that goes on a little bit longer. I mean, I've met people in everywhere I've gone around the world through dating apps. And sometimes, it might be a two-week fling while I'm there. Sometimes it's just one great dinner where you just have an interesting chat with people, get to know them and a little bit of where they come from. And it doesn't lead to anything, but it's a cool opportunity to connect with local people.

Matt: So, let me ask you this. And I'm sort of just pulling back to the very macro level. You have lived outside the U.S. for over seven years now, across 28 countries. Most of those are long-term stays in those areas. What does travel mean to you? What do you get out of it? Why do you do it? What does it mean to you?

Spencer: For me, if I look back at my life, I grew up in a very homogenous community, where people thought the same way, people dressed the same way, people looked the same way. And I didn't know any better at the time. It was just what I was surrounded by. And when I first flew out to Korea when I was 19, as we were getting on the plane to go, I looked around. And it was me and five other people that were with me that were white. And then everybody else getting on the plane was Asian. And that was a whole new feeling for me, to feel like I was surrounded with and with different people that were different than me. And at first, that's something that's a little bit uncomfortable. I don't know how to react in this situation. Should I feel weird? Should I not? What am I supposed to do? Can I treat everybody the way I've treated people my whole life?

And so, for me, that was a really learning experience when I was 19. And I lived in Korea for two years over that time period, and fell in love with Korea and the Korean people, and the thought of living abroad. And when I came home, the weird thing was, I had even worse culture shock the other way. I came home. I couldn't eat American food. I was really weirded out by the way people acted, 'cause I had acclimated quite a bit to life abroad. And so, for me, that was a really life-changing moment for me when I moved abroad at a young age. That really helped open a lot of things in my life to just other ways of thinking, other ways of living, other people with different perspectives that I think shaped a lot of my life. As I continued to move through life, I changed a lot after that. I made a lot of development as to who I was as a person. I did a lot of decisions that my family or the people that I grew up with might have disagreed with.

And it was a big experience about learning who I was and who I wanted to be that wasn't who I thought I wanted to be when I was younger. And so, I think traveling for me was the catalyst that started that self-discovery process for myself. And I lived in Korea for several years, and then I lived in Canada for several years as I was doing my grad program, and then I went back to the States when I had a job, like you mentioned, as an IT project manager, and lived there for several years. And there was just a part of me that always wanted to get back it, that thought, I like being here in the States. I have great friends. It's lovely. But there is such an experience of moving somewhere else. And for me, that meant abroad. For everyone, it might not be that. But for me, it meant moving abroad, where you can experience a lot of different people and meet people who are lovely, but have lots of different perspectives about life and are very different from the people that you can meet at home.

So, for me, that's what traveling and living abroad represents, is that opportunity to just make a lot of connections that make you look at yourself internally and say, I've always thought this way my whole life. Now I've met somebody who thinks differently where I haven't previously. Am I wrong? Do I need to change? This is a new perspective. Let me think this through. And I find that when I live abroad, I have a lot more of those types of experiences than when I was back at home. So, that's why it was important to me .

Matt: Can you think of any specific things that you can share in that

regard over your sort of journey of world travel, which obviously goes back quite a while now, in terms of kind of moments where you came up and really questioned something, or changed your view on something, or sort of developed as a person in a particular way? Like that self-discovery process, can you give any specific examples of changes you can recall?

Spencer: It's hard to talk about specific changes, because I think they take longer than a moment. Usually something happens, and you don't even realize it's happened, or you might react to it really negatively the first time someone says something to you or whatnot. I remember the first time I thought that someone was treating me poorly because I was a white person, which I had never felt before. And when I look back at it now, it was a really silly way for me to feel in the situation. But it made me stop and think about just – I'd never felt this way before, and I've heard about other people saying they have felt different ways because of their race, or the way they look, or their religion, or things like that. And so, it really made me stop and think about it a lot more than I had. I just had never experienced that before. And so, there're situations like that where I just felt that things that come up that I'd never thought about or experienced, that once it happens, it just gives you a whole different perspective.

Matt: Right. So, let's move on and talk a little bit about Hacker Paradise. You are the CEO. And can you just start by basically describing what is Hacker Paradise, who is it right for, and what type of experience does it offer?

Spencer: Hacker Paradise is a community on the road for digital nomads. And I think the "digital nomad" term is a lot broader than people think. A lot of people think it's people like you or me who have sold all of our stuff at home and are traveling all the time. And it's a much broader term than that. It's people who just want to work remotely and not sit at home during it, when you get down to its roots. So, we have people who come out with us to join our group who are from all nations, all races, across all industries. Age, diversity is a big thing here as well. And it's just people who coalesce on the fact that they want to try new things, they want to go new places, they're open-minded, welcome, lovely people in general.

So, we have people join us for anywhere from two weeks to a month to a year, and go with us to different places that we go to.

And so, for us, the big thing that is really important to us is the community aspect of it. It's not hard these days to grab an Airbnb and buy a plane ticket, and go across the world and do something like this on your own. There's so much technology these days that just makes it so easy. But the problem with that a lot of times is that people get really lonely. Most people are not structured and set up in a way psychologically that we can spend time like that, an extended period of time where you're just alone and don't know a lot of people. So, the nice thing about our group and our community is you come in, and from the first day, you're welcomed in, you're part of the group, and you have this group that's with you the whole time that you're with us.

I think for a lot of people who are first traveling or who haven't traveled a lot, the common phrase is "Make friends with locals and meet the locals." That's a lot more difficult than people think until you've tried it. And depending on what country you're in and if you speak the language or if you know the culture, it can be really, really exhausting to try to meet people when in some countries, it's hard to break through that local barrier. And so, to be there with a group of other people as well who are not from that place and are discovering things for the first time like you are, are happy to go meet local people like you are, I think can be really, really comforting and a really powerful way to experience a country, as opposed to just doing it on your own.

Matt: And how are the Hacker Paradise experiences structured? So, when someone comes onto the program, how is the structure? What should they expect out of the experience?

Spencer: A lot of fun. And a lot of work. I guess I should say both of those. So, we have a structure that's set up on a weekly basis where we have a lot of things that we do, a lot of activities that we run. The big thing is you say, yup, I'm gonna come. We start onboarding you, we start sending you logistical information. From the moment you arrive, we help guide you in, get you situated. We do an orientation. And then those of us who are running the trip who work for Hacker Paradise are here the entire time to help you when you have problems or concerns, or just to help have a good time. In terms of your daily life, a lot of times, it's work. We work while we're out here. That's no surprise to people. So, you work the hours that make sense for you. And then on top of that, we have a lot of activities, whether they're social activities or professional development activities, that you can opt into.

So, you do your own work, and then if there's an activity that we're doing, whether it's a workshop, or a networking event, or going to go to a puppy cafe down the street, or hiking a mountain, whatever it is, you get to choose what interests you, and then you opt in to those events. The big thing that I tell people is you will not get bored on a Hacker Paradise trip. And actually, you have to learn how to say no to things, because on certain weekends, there might be four things that are going on, and you can't do them all, so you have to make a choice of this is the one that's most important to me. I'll do this, and maybe these other things, I'll do another time. There's just always a lot of fun options of things to do, and lots of cool people to do them with.

Matt: Well, and just to clarify too for folks, we are currently on a Hacker Paradise trip right now in Seoul. I am a participant on that trip, and I have been – this is my third Hacker Paradise trip of the year. I was in Da Nang, Vietnam with HP. I was in Osaka, Japan. And then now I am in Seoul, Korea, so this is now my 12th week of the year that I've spent with HP. And those weren't consecutive. I spaced them out. So, I did Vietnam earlier in the year, and then I've just done Osaka recently. I'm doing Seoul now, and just finishing up that trip. And my reflections on it, I've noticed a couple amazing things that have really impressed me personally.

So, the first one is the level of diversity on the trips. So, on this particular trip, for example, we must have people, participants from over 10 different countries.

Spencer: We do.

Matt: I would say. And then, so that's one thing, is that in addition to being in a new foreign country where we're experiencing Korea, and interacting with Korean people, and all that, we also have people from 10-plus different other countries around the world that are all here with us. So, you're learning about those people and those cultures, and interacting with the Korean culture alongside those people from all of their cultural backgrounds. And so, that provides an incredibly interesting experience. The other type of diversity that I have noticed is that on each of the three trips that I've gone on, which have been for about a month each, there have been participants – in terms of age, there have been participants in their 50s on every trip, there've been participants in their 40s, and there have been participants in their 30s, and there have been participants in their 20s on every single trip. And one trip, we even

had a couple people younger than their 20s. There were 18 and 19-year-olds on one of the trips also.

Spencer: Right.

Matt: So, you have the age diversity, and then you have the international diversity. And then people do all sorts of different things, right? There's obviously a lot of people that have computer, hacker – right? – related jobs, programming jobs, or they're doing something relating to that. But there're plenty of people that don't, right?

Spencer: Right.

Matt: I mean, I, as you know, run, obviously, Maverick Investor Group, a real estate investor company. I don't know a thing about computers, but you know what's great for me? Everybody else does, so whenever I have a computer issue or a question about technology, man, am I in the right place.

Spencer: So happy to help out all the time.

Matt: It's outstanding. But the other thing that I've been impressed with about these trips is the way that Hacker Paradise cultivates organic community skill-sharing amongst the community. And I feel like, one, it just adds a lot of value because there's a lot of talented people that have a lot of skills to share, and I've learned a lot. But, two, it really creates this really nice intrinsic organic community dynamic where people are getting to know each other, not just socially when we're out, but also, you get to see people in their element, presenting on their area of expertise. And a lot of times, you just have no idea that this person is so good at this or that, and then all of a sudden, they're presenting a workshop on it. And whether it's on photography, or if it's on this or if it's on that, you're like, wow, that's really impressive.

And you sort of develop this level of appreciation for people as you learn about their areas of expertise and how smart they are and how interesting they are in those areas. And I think it's also really good for the participants, 'cause a lot of people maybe have never even presented on something before, or some people, especially some of the really young people here, have never presented on something, or didn't even know that that would add an enormous amount of value. And then you're just like, yeah, you know tons

about this. Do a presentation on it. They do it, and they crush. I mean, it's amazing. I've gotten a lot of value from all of the different people on the trip. So, that's been a really nice thing to experience as well.

Spencer:

Yeah. There's a lot of different skills that we find that the group has on kind of both points that you touched on. So, just the fact that people come from different backgrounds and are different ages, and all those different pieces, so they have a lot of different perspective. And then also, their actual skillset that they have, whether they know it or not, that can be really valuable as part of the community. I think, touching on both points, lots of people think that this digital nomad movement is a bunch of privileged 20-year-olds who are just running around or running away from life, and don't want to settle down and have a job, and that's not true. That's just not who we are as a community. That's not who this group is here that's here with us now. We have people from all different backgrounds, all different age groups, all different places in their life.

Sometimes they're married or have children as well that have come with us. We have people who pop in and out, and might be home for six months and then with us for six months, or might just be traveling this out for a while, or traveling with us long-term. And everybody that comes with us is working, so it's not trust fund babies who are traveling with us and just living a fine life. That's just not the group that we have. So, everyone has a lot of cool diversity of experience and perspective that they bring to the group. Also in terms of skills, we've realized since early on that we have a lot of people that are experts in specific areas, whether that's something they do for work, whether that's something they do as a hobby, whether that's something about their personal experience. And so, while we're here with this group, it seems silly to not tap into that.

And so, we started early on doing this sort of skill share thing, which now has evolved into a really lovely program where we have people give talks, we have people give workshops. We have an event where people ask for help, and people volunteer to help them. And there's such a community and a concept of sharing inside the group that people are like, "I need help with this. Will you help me?" And people just say yes. There's not even a question about it. People are happy to help. People are happy to give some advice, and point you in the right direction, and teach

you basics of something. So, while I've been here with Hacker Paradise in the last two years, I've learned so many things that I never thought I would do. I am not a hacker either, but I've learned how to do basic coding, and have made my own webpage. I made a Learning Korean website, because I had people helping me out and teaching me. I used to take some learn how to draw workshops from one of the other people that was traveling with us, and now draw on a regular basis. Not that I'm great, but it's just something that I really enjoy now that I always was too afraid to try or embrace before.

And as soon as someone that you know is like, "Let me help you. I'll teach you how to do this. Let me walk you through some concepts," and kind of break down stereotypes and restrictions and barriers you have built in your head, then it opens you up to explore that area a whole lot more. So, through being with Hacker Paradise, me and other people have all talked about how through skill shares and workshops, you're able to learn a lot of different cool skills that you wouldn't have access to otherwise.

Matt: Yeah. I really like the reciprocity concept and the way that it's been formalized and institutionalized on the weekly basis in terms of people being able to say, this is what I can contribute. This is what I'm an expert in. And also people being able to say, this is what I need help with, or this is what I want to do. And it can literally be anything from a work thing or a professional thing, I want to learn this or learn how to do this; or it can be, I want to go on this side trip and go see this thing, and I want somebody to go with me, or whatever it may be. And then people will just raise their hands and say, "Oh, I know how to do that," or "I'll do that," or "I want to do that too," or "I'll do that with you. I'll show you how to do it." And that, I think, really is an incredible framework for building an actual community.

Spencer: We are terrible as people at asking for help. It's something we're taught, that if you ask for help, it's shameful. You're reaching out, and you shouldn't. You should be self-sustaining and self-sufficient. And that's bonkers. It's just not true. And so, one of the things I really like about reciprocity too is we have the rule that you have to ask for something. Sometimes people will be like, "I don't need anything. Pass." And we say, "No, we're coming back to you. We'll make a full circle and come back to you." 'Cause I think it's a good exercise for people too, to just get in the habit of saying, "I need help with something." And it could be something,

like you said, that's anything. It could be, I really want to go dancing this weekend. I want to go hiking, or I need someone to give me some feedback on my new website or whatnot. But the rule is, everybody has to ask for something. And so, it's a good practice for people who aren't used to it to say, "Help me. I need some help."

Matt: I want to ask you about a little bit of behind the scenes HP and CEO questions for how you do what you do in terms of running the company. And I first want to start with the question of hiring, and the way that you select your program leaders, and bring them and cultivate them and so forth, because I feel like the groups that I've been on with Hacker Paradise, I have been very impressed with the caliber and the skills of the program leaders. And I think that it is a very unique skillset that they possess. And I want to ask you about how you go about hiring for that position. You can talk about other positions as well. But that one in particular, because I think it's a very unique skillset, and that you've done a very good job in finding the right people for that role. So, what's sort of your hiring process?

Spencer: It's not an easy job. It's one of the things that I probably stress out most about, as the person who does most of the hiring decisions, is figuring out and making sure we have the right people. For us, because community is such a big thing, having the right people in charge is what really makes that happen. We learned early on that facilitators set the culture 100%. And so, having the right people that instill that right culture is what makes the trip magic and what makes the trip successful. So, I stress out about it a lot as we're hiring new people. For me, the big thing that I've learned while being a facilitator myself and as we've hired other people is that it's really important for us to hire people with really high emotional IQ. It's something that I think is underrated in the job market as a whole. There is no way – people don't put it on their resume. It's not something that you have a certificate for.

But in a lot of roles, it's really gonna make or break how you do there. And for ours specifically, where we're working with people all the time, we live together, we work with you, we see you all day long, being able to know how people are feeling, being able to read a room, being able to make people feel comfortable, communicate in a way that people need to be communicated with – all those things are critical to the success of our job and making sure that our community stays cohesive. And so, for me, that's the

big thing that I try to pick out when I'm interviewing and hiring new people.

Matt:

I think that you personally, from what I have observed over the last five weeks, have an extremely high level of emotional intelligence. And I want to ask you about that a little bit and see if we can probe a little bit deeper on that, and learn a little bit about that, because I think that – I have watched you interact with the different participants in this group. And I think that what you're able to do at a very high level is to be able to – we have a very diverse group of people here, and not just culturally and internationally diverse, but diverse in the sense of what people are interested in, what people are comfortable with or uncomfortable with. And of all of that kind of stuff – I mean, this is very different.

And I feel like your ability to connect with people on a level that makes them comfortable, and you relate to them on a level that they're familiar with, and thereby make them feel cared for, and make them feel empowered, and make them feel included – I think that skillset – I think you execute that at a very high level. And I think that that is a very unique skillset. And so, I wonder if you could reflect at all upon that. How much of that for you do you think is innate? How much of it was learned? Where did that come from? How did you develop that? And is that kind of part of what helps you identify that in other people?

Spencer:

I think it's both. Part of it is innate. Part of it is learned. A lot of it, I grew up with. So, first, my dad is a very charismatic salesman. So, storytelling and being able to interact with people and find what motivates people, and kind of use that, not in a nefarious way, but use that to your advantage, is a skill that I learned growing up. It's something that my dad always embodied, making people feel like you care about them and not just about something else about them or getting a job done. I also am a middle child, so I had to mediate a lot of times between my siblings. I have five siblings, so in a family of six, there is a lot of different personalities. And yeah, it takes someone in the middle a lot of time to mediate, and that was often my role.

I think the big thing that I learned as I was growing up, which is something that people who want to be in this type of work need to learn, is that being a leader doesn't mean that you're the loudest person in the room. It doesn't mean that you're the one always standing up and telling people what to do. That is shallow

leadership. Real leaders are people who walk into the room and they listen. They want to know about people. They're observing things. They're noticing things, and they're taking note of it as well, so that it's something that you can address. So, for me a lot of times, when I'm in an environment for the first time, I am loud and tell some stories, but then I try to prompt other people to talk. And then I listen and kind of watch around the room and try to see what's going on. A lot of people make jokes that I here at Hacker Paradise know who's interested in who before they even know. And a lot of that is because I watch.

So, if I'm sitting in a room, or at a potluck, or at some event, I just sometimes will sit back, and I'm eating some cake and watching what's going on. And I'll see some people chatting with each other. And I'm thinking, huh, I saw them chat together yesterday, and now they're chatting together today. I think they're maybe interested in each other. And I'll talk to one of them later, and I'll say, "I saw you chatting to so-and-so. I think you're interested." And they'll go, "No, there's no way. I'm not interested in that person." And then two or three weeks later, they'll start dating or seeing each other. Then they'll come back and tell me that I knew what was going on.

But I think being able to listen and observe is a better sign of a leader than being the loudest one in the room. The other thing that I've learned is just to trust your gut. A lot of people see things and observe things and think things, and go, nah, that's not right, or no, they looked a little bit upset, but I mean, they said they were sick. They're probably just sick. Let me tell you, if someone says they're sick, it's almost always a cover for something else, so there's other shit going on that you should dig into. But you learn to trust your gut. If something looks awry or something feels weird or whatnot, trust your gut and just go ask someone about it, or just go talk about it. And people will be really impressed that you saw that, you felt that, and you took the initiative, 'cause most people just don't.

Matt: So, let me ask you a little bit now about management. So, you hire the right people, you get them into the right places in the company. And then, Hacker Paradise obviously is a company where your staff is spread out across multiple continents.

Spencer: Right.

Matt: So, how do you manage your staff, I guess, in general, right – as a CEO, in general, management questions, but then adding in the components of different time zones and all of that kind of stuff. How do you structure that management operation?

Spencer: Yeah, that's a good question. It is not something that is easy. As we've grown, we went from all of us being in the same place, and now I think my team is in four or five different locations right now. And so, that was a big learning thing for us. Part of it goes back to what we just talked about. Hiring the right people is a big step. So, we make sure that we hire people that are self-starters, that are problem-solvers. And I am quick to teach my team when they first start that if they have a problem, I don't want to hear about it. I don't want you to bring me problems. I want you to bring me solutions. So, instead of saying, "This is a problem, what do we do?" I want you to come to me and say, "This is a problem. Here's three solutions I've thought of. I think option A is the best. What do you think?" And that's such a better place to start from as you're solving problems.

So, being able to hire and train those people on is a big thing. In terms of us and being remote, I think one of the things that is the most difficult is being in different time zones, like you said, and communication. It is difficult when my team is 14 hours behind me, and we barely have any overlapping working hours during the day. So, for us, being able to put in processes and documentation to have clear communication has been really critical. Even though we're spread apart, and you think, oh, if I go remote, I never have to have any more meetings. I can just type everything out on our online community tool – that's not true. You still have to have meetings. You still have to talk to people. Even for the fact that seeing people face-to-face, even if over a camera, bonds you to that person and makes you more cohesive as a team. Just even that element makes it worth having video calls.

But we've had to set up a process where we have documentation that's laid up that we update. We have a process where we communicate asynchronously. Then we have check-ins for different areas and different functional groups, and then check-ins with me on a monthly basis as a manager just to talk about how you're doing overall. So, even though you move across the world, a lot of those same processes of communication that you had originally still need to stay in place.

Matt: And how do you personally structure your day and manage your time for optimal productivity? Do you have morning routines? Do you have a specific day structure? How do you optimize your work productivity to get the most out of your days?

Spencer: For me, having a routine is important. So, a lot of times, when people move abroad, they move to a new place, they'll lose that, and they'll just start waking up whenever they wake up, and they'll do whatever during the day. And then they realize it's already 9:00 p.m., and it just can be really upsetting to your productivity. For me, having a good structure is really important. So, I will wake up, like I did this morning, at 7:00 or 7:30. I like to go to the gym, so today I went and smiled as I walked in at the lady that gave me sass the other day. She smiled back at me. We both know we don't like each other, but we smile, because that's what you do. So, I'll go to the gym in the morning, and then I try to have a healthy breakfast. And that's something that starts me off on the right track.

The other thing that I've learned for me in terms of productivity is everybody has things that they put off, where it's like, ah, I just really don't want to do that. I don't want to have that hard conversation with somebody, or I don't want to write that email that I know someone's gonna react to poorly, or not. So, we all have things that we put off. And I have one day a week where I say, today's the day. Today's the day I'm gonna do everything I've been putting off for the whole week. And it's usually Mondays for me. I don't know why I'm motivated on Mondays. Most people aren't. But on Monday, I'm like, fuck it. All these things that I put off all last week, I'm going to do today, and I just knock them all off. And for me, that helps clear up a lot of the mental checklists that I have in my head of tasks that have been building up, which starts to cause anxiety once the task list gets too big. And so, clearing all of those out helps me start my week fresh and be able to jump into the other tasks that I need to focus on.

Matt: So, in terms of anxiety and in terms of stress, the stress of running a business, which I can attest to and relate to and all of that very well, how do you – what techniques have you developed, or how do you handle stress when you have, let's just say, a setback, or whether it's a cumulative anxiety build-up situation like you just mentioned, or whether it's a setback, or a stressful situation, or something going on, how do you as a CEO manage that stress so that you can keep moving, keep executing and doing the things you

need to do?

Spencer: One of the things that's been really helpful to me is just being able to realize that when I'm not in a good mental space, and saying, I'm not in a good mental space. I'm leaving for the day. And if that means I have meetings, sometimes I just cancel them, because it's not worth being in a meeting where I'm not gonna be helpful, and no one else is gonna be productive because of my mood. So, there's times where it might be 2:00, and I'll say, "Hey, I'm leaving for three hours, and I'm coming back," or "Hey, I'm gonna go to the beach," or "Hey, I'm gonna go play some volleyball or something to clear my head." So, being able to step away from things instead of just muscling through meetings or activities when it doesn't make sense 'cause you think you have to work till 5:00 was a big realization for me of how to handle anxiety a bit better.

The other one for me is having a good support structure. The hardest thing, I think, about being the leader or a CEO of a company is you feel like you are the only one that knows what's going on. You are the only one that's holding all the keys to this. And there's no reason that you have to bottle that all up inside. And if you have a good support structure, whether it's people you're traveling with, people back home, a significant other, where you can talk through things, it just makes you feel so much better.

Matt: Yes. Totally agree with that. What have been the biggest challenges or setbacks that HP has had along the way, and what have you learned from them?

Spencer: Scaling has been hard. I have always worked in jobs before where I came into an existing structure, and even though the work might be demanding, there was a structure in place. I knew what was going on. The processes were clear. This has been really difficult, in my experience, to take a company from a two or three-person company to a 13-person company, because all of a sudden, just sitting down for dinner at night and talking between the two of you is not a sufficient way to communicate with the whole team, so you have to do documentation. You have to have processes in place, like we've talked about. And there're a lot of bumps that we've hit along the way as we – the first realization is, oh, we are bigger than we thought. We can't do it this old way that we used to do it, so we have to set up meetings. We have to communicate more through our public channel so everyone knows what's going on.

So, for me, scaling has been what was the most difficult and will probably still continue to be the most difficult as we grow. Changing from 15 people to 16 people is not a big jump, but changing from two to three and three to four people on the team are massive jumps. So, for us over the last couple years, going from two or three to 13 has been the biggest thing that I've had to deal with.

Matt: And as you continue to grow and evolve, what is your vision for the future of HP?

Spencer: Drinking more wine like this. This is what every Thursday night should be. I'm starting a new Hacker Paradise activity. For us, we are a boutique travel organization, and we really like that about ourselves, and our community members really like that about ourselves. It's not an organization where if you have a complaint, we send you to someone else to talk to. You just come and find me. I'm sitting at the table next to you at the workspace, right? So, we really like that we're not a big corporation. So, whatever happens, we always want to keep that same boutique community feel.

For us, we would like to, over the next year or so, be able to roll out maybe another trip. So, right now we have two going on at the same time. We could potentially roll out a third, which would be fun, because right now, we have two locations we go that are cool sort of locations. And if we had a third, I would maybe roll out another third location that would be a bit more experimental, a bit edgy. It would be fun places. Like maybe we'd take a ship down to Antarctica. I don't know. You have just more ability to experiment with a third trip, so I think it would be really fun.

Another thing we've thought about doing if we were to roll out a third trip is do more niche type trips. So, right now, everybody comes on a trip. It's a lovely, well-rounded community, but some people might be looking for a community that's really similar to them in terms of their industry. So, maybe a group of founders or a group of entrepreneurs, or people who want to do a lot of yoga while they're on a trip. So, it'd be interesting to try to experiment with the different trip formats in that regard.

Matt: And can you talk a little bit about once someone participates in an HP trip, and then when they leave the trip, the extent to which they remain connected with the HP family through the alumni network,

and that kind of stuff, and what that means?

Spencer: We are like the Mafia. Once you get in, you can't get out. So, you are connected to us for life, whether you want to be or not.

Matt: Which is amazing, why the way, because – and I will say this – I, as I mentioned, have been on three HP trips so far. And when I have been outside of HP and not on an HP trip, most of the cities that I've gone to, I've literally run into or made arrangements to meet up with other HP people that are going to be there who I had met on previous HP trips.

Spencer: Right.

Matt: So, for example, I am leaving tomorrow, Korea. I'm leaving Korea tomorrow. And I'm flying to Nairobi, Kenya. And I am going to be there for a month meeting up with another person who I met on an HP trip back in March in Da Nang, Vietnam. And so, even if you somewhere HP is not there, they don't have a presence there, it's not an HP trip, but I'm going there. Who from HP is gonna be there, this kind of stuff, and boom, I find that I'm gonna know someone from HP that's gonna be there. Or another example, I went to Valencia earlier this year in May. I wasn't on an HP trip, but HP was there and overlapped with me for a little bit of the time. The same program lead that was running the Vietnam trip, so I knew some people there, and again was able to connect and hang out and all this kind of stuff. And so, once you come on these trips and you're part of that alumni network, and you start meeting these people, it's amazing how your paths overlap as you continue to travel, even if it's in a non-HP capacity.

Spencer: Our alumni network at this point is over 500 people from all over the world. And very different, like we said. But everybody has the same sort of vibe that we've talked about. They're open, they like new experiences, they like meeting new people. They're welcoming and lovely people in general. Usually they do really cool, interesting things and have wild, crazy, lovely lives. And so, yeah, we have a lot of people that are similar to you that will meet up with other HP people they've met on trips, even when they're of-trip. And then there's a lot of people that meet up with people they don't know. They'll just post in our communication tool that we set everyone up at and say, "Hey, I'm gonna be in Belgrade for two months. Is anyone around?" Five people respond, and then they all go out to hang out, and end up hanging out while they're

there.

For me, I had an experience too. I know almost everybody that's come on HP because I have been an integral part of this for several years. But there was someone who lived in Hong Kong who one day just said, "Hey, if anyone stops in Hong Kong, I have an extra bedroom. And any HP person is welcome to stay, because I know the caliber of HP people. I like meeting new people. So, if HP people come by, just message me, and you can stay." Which I thought was great, 'cause I was going to Hong Kong. So, if you've ever looked at apartments or hotels in Hong Kong, you will research that this is a huge perk.

Matt: Not cheap.

Spencer: Not cheap.

Matt: Yeah.

Spencer: So, I messaged him and I said, "You don't know me, but I run Hacker Paradise these days. You were before my time, and I'm coming to Hong Kong. Can I stay?" And he said, "Yeah, of course." So, I didn't know him. I showed up, spent five days staying with him. Lovely guy. We had a great time. And then I left, and actually, as I was leaving, he was cleaning the room for another HP person that was coming that same day. So, yeah, there's just this connection between people that even if you haven't met them on a trip, there's a sense of, you're an HP person, I'm an HP person. We had a similar experience. We'll meet up. And even if we have nothing else in common, you can always talk shit about Spencer or something, 'cause you'll probably both know me. That's how you can bond from as soon as you go.

So, yeah, for us, it's something that's hard to explain to people before they come on a trip. But being able to – after a trip, you can be connected online to the rest of our entire community that's come before you is a huge perk.

Matt: And it's particularly nice, if anyone's listening who is not in the digital nomad space, or the travel circuit, or that kind of stuff, and they might be coming from a place like Utah, where they haven't done a lot of traveling, and maybe there's not a lot of people around them that have done it, but they kind of are listening to podcasts like this and want to get into the game. Just coming and

dipping your foot in. And you can start with HP for two weeks. Some people just literally come for two weeks, right?

Spencer: Travel around.

Matt: Yeah, travel around. If they take a vacation or they get a two-week remote work arrangement or whatever, and they come for two weeks. And once you do that, not only do you experience HP, but now you're all of a sudden connected with tons of other people that do this, and it really, I think, as a first step, just opens the door to incredible possibilities by simply being in a social network of other people that think this way, and appreciate the values of travel and living abroad, and are passionate about that.

Spencer: Yeah, we've had people come with us who it was their first time moving abroad, their first time doing this type of thing. And they love the people, they love the experience. And not to sound trite, but they get inspired by the people who are doing this type of thing. And I've had people that I know who I've been with on trips who then go home and say, for the last 10 years, I've been working at this company on a job that I didn't like and I didn't care about. And then I came to Hacker Paradise, and it just changed the whole way I thought about things. So, I got home. The day I got home, I quit my job. I called my best friend, and we just started the company that we talked about running since we were little. And it's rough right now. We're gonna make it work, and we're trying to make it happen. And then as soon as it happens, I'm coming back out to a Hacker Paradise trip.

And just hearing those stories is really powerful for me, because we have a lot of fun. We do a lot of fun things. But there's a lot of people who, through this type of experience, their life changes, similar to how mine did when I first started traveling. There's a lot of people that this is a totally life-changing event that helps them look at life in a different way, find a new sort of energy. And so, being able to be there with people and see when that happens is really, really incredible.

Matt: That is amazing. How do you see the digital nomad ecosystem evolving? Let me maybe contextualize this question a little bit, just from my personal experience. So, I put all of my stuff in storage, got rid of my apartment, got rid of my car, downsized my personal possessions. And I started traveling the world. I left the U.S. in 2013. That was before Hacker Paradise or any of these other

work/travel groups existed at all. And at the time, when I left in 2013, I went to Buenos Aires. That was the first place I went. I was there for about three months. And I was like, wow. I can't believe how amazing it is that we have Airbnb. Because – but seriously, though. Because I said, we have Airbnb, and we have Uber, and we have these services. Because 10 years ago, you wouldn't have been able to do what I was doing in 2013.

Spencer: No.

Matt: You would have had to either find a broker and get an apartment and do this, or stay at a hotel and just, I mean, have a car. And so, Airbnb, the advent of Airbnb for world travel, where I could just pick any city in the world, and I can book in advance for the exact number of nights I wanted to be there, and I could go in and I could go out. I could land at the airport. I could get an Uber to my Airbnb, even if I didn't speak the language. I just put the address in on the Uber, and they'd pick me up, and they'd drive me. And in 2013, I was like, wow. I'm so appreciate of these amazing things that are allowing me to travel the world, which 10 years ago, I just simply would not have been able to do it in that way. And then after that, HP came into the space in 2014, and then other companies started coming into the space that started adding additional types of value, right?

Spencer: Right.

Matt: You guys said, oh, by the way, in addition to a place to stay, you're also gonna need a co-working space with 24/7 Wi-Fi so that you can work, and whatever hours you want to work on, and do that. And oh, by the way, if you do this for a long time, you're actually gonna get pretty lonely trying to do it by yourself, so you're really gonna need a community of people.

Spencer: Right.

Matt: Which is 100% true, because when I started doing it, initially I was traveling with a relationship partner. But I can tell you this. Even if you're traveling with a relationship partner, or a best friend, or one other person, if you do it long-term, you do it over a year type of timeframe, it gets lonely if you're not grounded in a social community. I really was feeling that. And so, when I saw, like wow, these companies are out there, and they're putting together a social community. So, I can land in a city, and not only do I have

the accommodations taken care of, but I have a co-working space and I have a community of people that know I'm coming –

Spencer: Right.

Matt: d – and they want to meet me, and they want to hang out with me and explore the city.

Spencer: Care about you, right?

Matt: Care about me, explore the city with me and have a good time? That's amazing, because it solves for the social sustainability pillar, if you will, of living a healthy life. So, all of that stuff, and watching that evolve in 2013 to now has just been amazing. I mean, it's been an explosion of infrastructure to facilitate world travel in ways that I never would have imagined when I started in 2013, right? What do you see as sort of where the digital nomad movement is and where it's going in terms of how this ecosystem is evolving?

Spencer: It's not going away. It's not a movement that I think is gonna die out any time soon. Now, as technology is improving and people are starting to catch wind and hear about this, it's just growing even more. I think there's a lot of times people think everybody knows what this is. Everybody knows what digital nomads are. Everyone knows that this life is an option. And that's also not true. I find people every day that I tell them what I'm doing, and I have to explain it four times before they even understand what it is. My family still thinks I'm just on vacation all the time. And my mom questions my life decisions and why I'm doing this eternal vacation. 'Cause they just don't get it. It's hard for people to wrap their head around. And so, it's definitely something that's growing and people are learning about more.

So, as we continue to move more into the future, I think there's gonna be a lot of different other businesses that spring up to help solve digital nomad problems. So, even things like Project Fi that Google has rolled out to make sure that people can have data anywhere they go around the world is something that has changed a lot of digital nomads' lives. So, you don't have to worry about getting a SIM card in every country you land in. That's something that has made life a lot easier. So, there'll be a lot more things like that business-wise that spring up. I think there'll be a lot more things in the space of trying to help solve the loneliness issue as a

digital nomad. You're right that that's a huge problem, and a lot of times, people don't realize that if you read a blog post about digital nomadism, there are pictures of people with their laptop on the beach, enjoying life and laughing, and talking about living their dreams. And while that part is true, there's also the part where you need to have a good social structure, or you're gonna fail when you come onto a hard time and you're not ready for it. And that aspect isn't talked about well enough. So, I think there'll be a lot more companies that are trying to think creatively of how to make these types of communities for people who are living this lifestyle.

One of the things I love about Hacker Paradise, like you mentioned, is you see each other around the world in different times, and there's a sense of continuity. We know the same people. I saw you in one country, now I'm seeing you in another country. And I like to explain to people that Hacker Paradise is like my family on the road. I only see my family maybe 20 days out of the year. There're people who I've been with in the last year here with Hacker Paradise that I've spent nine months with, and they are 100% my support structure and my family while I'm here on the road. And that has been the reason I've been able to do this for so long. I think if that wasn't a thing and the community aspect wasn't here, I would have said, this is so hard. I can't do this. I'm so lonely. I'm gonna go back.

The other thing about the future of remote work and digital nomadism is it's becoming so popular and trendy, for lack of a better word, these days, that it's something that companies are being put to the task of having to offer to their employees, because their employees know it's an option other places. So, I think as it even gets bigger, people are gonna say, "Hey, I know my job doesn't require me to be here. You're either gonna have to let me work remotely, or I'm gonna go somewhere that will." And so, companies are gonna start to lose their top talent if they don't start offering working remotely, whether it's all the time, or for chunks of time, or whatever. I think people are gonna start to lose their top talent if they don't offer that as a benefit.

Matt: Agreed. All right, Spencer. Are you ready for some lightning round questions?

Spencer: Give 'em to me.

Announcer: The lightning round.

Spencer: All right. What is one book that you would recommend that most influenced you?

Spencer: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. I read it when I was in high school. I loved everything about it. I realized you could question society.

Matt: What is one app or productivity tool that you would recommend?

Spencer: Everyone should have Google Translate on their phone if they're gonna travel. It's a lifesaver. And then I have another app called Habits that I have that helps you easily keep track of whether you're doing daily tasks.

Matt: What is one blog you read or podcast that you listen to regularly?

Spencer: You already know what the answer to this is.

Matt: I do. I'm just allowing you to share it with the world. Your favorite podcast. Go ahead.

Spencer: I am a huge advocate of a podcast called My Dad Wrote a Porno. And it is not biographical. It is not my own. My dad is a Mormon bishop. He did not write a porno. But it is this lovely group of three friends in the UK. One of their dads wrote some erotic literature. And so, they read a chapter every week, and sit there and talk through it, and make fun of it as they read it. And it is delightful. We listen to it on Hacker Paradise. After a potluck, we have potluck after hours, and we listen to a couple episodes. For people who want to stick around, it's a really good time. I will warn people if you're gonna download it that you will laugh really hard, so if you're in the subway or a public place, be aware, 'cause people will look at you. I also had one time when I was listening to it while I was lifting weights at the gym, and I dropped a weight on my face 'cause I was laughing so hard. So, please be cautious when you're listening to My Dad Wrote a Porno.

Matt: All right. What celebrity or author or public figure who is currently alive today that you never met would you most like to have dinner with?

Spencer: I mean, I go back and forth between whether I'd pick a reality TV show character just to meet them in real life and see if they're the same way as they are on the show. But I think I would actually

pick Andy Cohen and just go for a dinner and a gossip sesh about all the real housewives.

Matt: All right. Knowing everything that you know now up to this point in your life, what advice would you give to your 18-year-old self if you could go back in time?

Spencer: I think I would tell my 18-year-old self just to embrace who you are, and don't let anybody else tell you who you should be or what you should be. I mean, I had a big experience when I moved to Korea and learned a lot about myself. I went back home, and as I was growing older, I made the choice to leave the Mormon church, and I came out as gay. And that was a big thing that changed my life in a lot of ways. And I think there is a lot of things that I dealt with when I was younger or when I was 18 that were out of places of fear or places of just not knowing what my future was. And if I would have been in a better place where I just would have accepted things and loved who I was for who I was, that I would have been able to achieve the love and peace and happiness that I think I've found now a lot faster.

Matt: Awesome. What are your top three travel destinations that you've ever been to that you would most love to return to and live for at least a month, and that you'd recommend other people definitely check out? Top three.

Spencer: It's hard to narrow it down to three. There're a lot of cool locations. I mean, I have three in my head because I know I'm going back to them this year anyway, so I guess they count, because I've already picked them. So, I know I'm going back to Barcelona in October, and so I'm excited to go back there. I love that city. And then at the beginning of next year, I'm planning on going back to Buenos Aires, and then a couple cities in Brazil. But the one that I really love is **Floripa**, so I can just go to the beach all day.

Matt: Nice. I've never been to Floripa, but I have spent a couple months in Brazil living in Rio, which was unbelievable. We just went to San Paolo last year for the first time. Also unbelievable. And I will be back in Brazil in the beginning of December of this year. I've got that 10-year visa.

Spencer: Is it about to run out?

Matt: No, no. I've got a number of more years on it. But I'm just saying, with a 10-year visa for Brazil, I feel like I really need to maximize my number of trips to Brazil, so.

Spencer: You definitely to maximize it. I might be there in December. We can hang out.

Matt: Well, I'm gonna be in Barcelona in November. Are you still gonna be there in early November, or –

Spencer: I have to go home for my brother's wedding.

Matt: You're gone. Okay.

Spencer: Yeah. It's once of the few times I go home during a year.

Matt: Well, I've already been to Barcelona once this year. I'm going back again in November, because I agree with you. That city, it's unbelievable. And then Buenos Aires, of course, I've lived there for a total of probably four months. So, an amazing choice. Okay. What are your top three bucket list travel destinations you've ever been to that are right on the top of your list where you want to go most?

Spencer: I'm an interesting case because I don't feel like I've been to a lot of places, even though I guess I have when you check them off. But I've always gone places and stayed there for a chunk of time. So, I've never done a standard backpacking trip through Europe, where you go and hit 15 countries. And I'm not interested in that at this point in my life. I like staying in places for longer periods of time. But because of that, there's so much of Europe I haven't seen. I haven't gone to any of Central or Northern Europe. I've only been along the Mediterranean coast, really. So, I would love to go check out Copenhagen or Prague type areas. I've just never been there, and heard really great things. And then I also am a sucker for beach destinations. I love to lay out on the beach. And so, places like Costa Rica have been calling my name. I don't know what city I'd go to, but I just want to go somewhere with a beach that I can lay on for hours.

Matt: Awesome. All right. So, let's wrap this up and tell people how they can find out more about Hacker Paradise. Maybe just say a little bit about what would be the first steps for somebody that's interested in learning more and possibly coming on a trip.

Spencer: The best way to learn about Hacker Paradise is to go to the website, www.hackerparadise.org, and start to poke around. There's a lot of information there. It has links to our social stuff. You can see what we do on a daily basis and learn a lot about us. If you're interested to know more, the best thing to do in that process is to apply. The application is really short, and the next screen will take you to set up an interview timeslot with me or one of the other facilitators. And then the interview, it's really just an opportunity for you to chat with us, get to know more about the program, and for us to get to know a little bit more about you. So, that's the forum where you can ask your specific questions about your specific scenario and really feel out if this is a right fit for you.

Matt: And there are varying lengths of time if somebody does want to do it that you can do it for. So, you can do it for as little as two weeks, or you can do it for a month, or three months, or six months, or 12 months. And the larger package that you buy, the more time that you buy upfront, the cheaper it is per week. So, I bought a three-month package this year, for example, as I mentioned, and I used those three months to go to Da Nang, Vietnam; Osaka, Japan; and then Seoul, Korea. But when you buy the three-month package, what I like about it is that you can pick and choose where you want to go. So, if instead, I had preferred to go to Brazil, or if I was gonna be over in South America, I could have been with you in Floripa, or I could have gone to some of these other places instead. And so, they'll be able to see your whole itinerary online in terms of where you're going, and then they can pick and choose both when they want to participate and what cities they want to participate in, so they have that flexibility as well.

Spencer: Correct. We try to give people as much flexibility as we can. It's your trip. You want to have a great time, so I shouldn't be telling you how you should be spending your time abroad. You should be telling me in some ways. So, we tell people there's different locations you can flip between. You can come for different periods of time. You can pop in and out, kind of like you have talked about with your experience. So, there's a lot of flexibility with our program to make sure that we're here as the community you need when you need it.

Matt: Right. And then if people want to connect with you personally, follow you on social media, how do they find you?

Spencer: I'm hidden everywhere. No, just kidding. I'm all over the place.

The best place to find me is to find me on Instagram. It's just my name, <http://www.instagram.com/SpencerJentsch>. And you can get in touch with me there.

Matt: I highly recommend following Spencer on Instagram. I think you have over 13,000 followers now. And I have to say, you're definitely a good person to follow on Instagram. So, what we're gonna do is we're gonna put the links to Hacker Paradise, as well as Spencer's personal social media handles, we're gonna put all that in the show notes. So, you can just go to the show notes and find everything that we have talked about and mentioned in this program, all of it in one place. We're even gonna put his Tinder profile consultancy in the show notes.

Spencer: Dangerous.

Matt: So.

Spencer: Very dangerous.

Matt: It's all gonna be there in one place. So, Spencer, thank you so much for being here. This is really great. Appreciate it.

Spencer: Thank you. I hope we can do it in another country.

Matt: Absolutely. Goodnight, everybody.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 94 minutes