

# Episode 46

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Harvest Hosts, Joel Holland, Storyblocks, stock video footage, entrepreneurial journey, eBay reselling, collecting Hot Wheels, RV travel and remote work, Starlink internet, bootstrapping a business, hiring your first employee, reinvesting profits, selling a business, fundraising, highs and lows, finding your why

## SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Joel Holland, Ethan DeLeon

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J

**Joel Holland** 00:00

I got kind of like, I got kind of scared. The question started entering my mind of like, was I a one-trick pony? Did I get lucky with this whole Storyblocks thing? Am I really not a good entrepreneur? I can't even figure out what to do next. Like, like the confidence started dropping by the day and I got to a pretty low point.

E

**Ethan DeLeon** 00:27

Hey everyone, my name is Ethan DeLeon and I'm here with our founder and CEO of Small Nation, Jason Duff. Today we're excited to have the CEO of Harvest Host, Joel Holland, on the show with us. We want to welcome you to the Small Nation podcast where we share some of the valuable lessons with what we have learned about entrepreneurship, real estate, economic development, and more. The point of this podcast is to create value for you as a listener and create a space to learn, talk about what's trending, and inspire others.

J

**Jason Duff** 00:49

Thank you, Ethan. Joel, welcome to the show.

J

**Joel Holland** 00:53

Hey, thanks guys. This is, uh, this is gonna be fun.

J

**Jason Duff** 00:56

Well, I'm especially excited because you're using somewhat of a new technology. Where are you connecting from us? Uh, where are you from today?

J

**Joel Holland** 01:05

Yeah. Yeah. So I'm actually in an RV parked in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Um, I, I, and I wish you could see this view, but every single window I'm looking at just the rolling Blue Ridge Mountains near Skyline Drive and Blue Ridge Parkway. So near the national park.

J

**Jason Duff** 01:19

Wow. Wow.

J

**Joel Holland** 01:20

Um, And there isn't even cell phone service out here, so I could not make a phone call if I wanted to. But I'm using Starlink satellite internet, and it's not perfect, but it's pretty darn close. You know, it's pretty— I mean, here we are having a live show.

J

**Jason Duff** 01:34

We'll put it to the test today, huh?

J

**Joel Holland** 01:36

That's right.

J

**Jason Duff** 01:36

That is insane. And it just shows like how technology and entrepreneurs are, you know, providing internet to these remote places that allow us to be able to connect today. And I have to say, I compliment like your background. You're in an RV that looks pretty awesome. Impressed, by the way. Like I see you've got your wine bottles there. Those are probably some of your favorite selections. Pretty comfortable furniture. Like it looks pretty swanky there, Joel.

J

**Joel Holland** 02:04

Yeah. I mean, honestly, this is why I fell in love with RVing, you know, 10 years ago. It's a tiny home and it's a tiny home on wheels. You can take it anywhere you want. I think that's the coolest thing in the world, right? It's like ultimate flexibility and freedom matched with all the comforts of home. I mean, I literally have my favorite pillow, my bed's exactly like I like it. And no matter where I am, in this case, Virginia, 2,000 miles from my actual house, I have all the comforts of home, just a different view.

J

**Jason Duff** 02:34

In the same way people— we've been talking a lot about remote work and people having the ability to have flexible work arrangements, that has probably also been a huge boost for people like you that can, you know, get Starlink internet, work from anywhere, and see more of the country.

J

**Joel Holland** 02:54

Yeah. So I've always been a person that's invigorated by travel and, and I've always— travel's always been huge. Um, but it's tough. Like in the past it was tough to travel and stay on top of work. You had to find the coffee shop with the internet, right? It was, it was really, you had to go outta your way to make it work. Today with Starlink or even your cell phone in most places, you can work from anywhere. And I think we're finally, like, I, I say this all the time, I feel like I'm living in the future, right? And, and like, it always, we always feel, we, I, I feel like we take a lot of things for granted in life. I don't take for granted the technology we have now cuz it lets me work and live anywhere I want. With no limitations. Like, I'm not, I'm not giving anything up to be, to be in this RV in Virginia. I can do everything I could do in an office. And that's pretty, that's liberating to me.

J

**Jason Duff** 03:40

That's awesome. And I'm thinking back to when I first met you and, you know, growing up as an entrepreneur or meeting other entrepreneurs, that was really my friends group, like going through college and then directly after college. And I remember seeing your name because of you got some media, you got, I think, just built a company and took on some outside investment capital. But what was impressive to me is I saw— I think I connected with you on social media and you had— were creating video content. And like, I think you were kind of the guy taking the video camera everywhere. Tell us like a little bit how you got started, where you're from, like, get, get listeners up to speed.

J

**Joel Holland** 04:29

Yeah, yeah, totally. So I've always been the kind of guy that, um, if there's something I need, I figure other people need it too. And, and, and that means if I can find a way to make it and sell it, I want to do that. Um, and because then it ends up fulfilling two things that I enjoy: one, solving a personal problem, and two, selling things to people and making money and making them happy, right? Like, that's it to me. The, the art of selling is like really sexy. It's fun to sell something, know that the other end's happy, and obviously I'm happy too. It's a great two-way thing. So I've been doing that since I was a little kid. I mean, I grew up—

J

**Jason Duff** 05:05

Tell us some of your first businesses because I know you're a collector as well. Like, we, we share that in common.

J

**Joel Holland** 05:10

So totally, totally. So I grew up not too far from here as a kid in Shandow Valley, and one of my first businesses was selling used golf balls. And so I'd go collect golf balls all over the golf course. I had a cart, Joel's Golf Balls, really, you know, hyper unique name.

J

**Jason Duff** 05:28

I love it.

J

**Joel Holland** 05:29

And I parked the little cart on the 9th hole. So you'd come off the 9th hole, you'd lost all your balls, you could buy them from me, 3 for \$2. And I wasn't there. It was self-serve, right? A little mailbox.

J

**Jason Duff** 05:38

Honor box was like honor box system.

J

**Joel Holland** 05:40

Yeah, yeah, exactly.

J

**Jason Duff** 05:41

Honor.

J

**Joel Holland** 05:41

Totally honor system. And it didn't cost me anything, so I didn't have to worry too much about stolen goods. And that was, that was my first, like, real business. Like, every day I'd come back on a good day, collect \$20, you know, as a 10-year-old. That was awesome. I'd pull my cart, put it away, and that got me hooked on— I think that got me hooked on selling things, right? I loved it. And then a couple of years later, the internet came around and, you know, I'll never forget the year. Like, there are always formative time frames in our minds. And 1997, to me, was like the year my life changed. And, and the thing that changed it was a PC, right? Like all of a sudden—

J

**Jason Duff** 06:20

was that that Gateway 2000 or was it a Compaq? What was it at the time? Do you remember?

J

**Joel Holland** 06:25

Um, oh my gosh, it's so funny. Just saying those things gives me the emotions. Um, it was a— it was an HP 2000. Okay. Like, and, and I love this thing. I used to like— I mean, this is the nerdy part— I would like smell it. I thought it smelled so good. I was like, smells like technology.

J

**Jason Duff** 06:40

I wouldn't tell too many people. The real entrepreneur talk comes out. Right, right. Yeah, I wouldn't say that on like a podcast. Yeah, just us talking here.

J

**Joel Holland** 06:48

But I loved it because all of a sudden it was a computer connected to the internet and it was a portal to like infinity. And all of a sudden, like instead of selling golf balls in my backyard because that's where I was physically located, I could sell anything to anywhere in the whole world if I could find the right thing to sell. And I really quickly figured that out. Like, I am a collector. You mentioned that I loved collecting Hot Wheels cars as a kid. Alright.

**J****Jason Duff** 07:13

I've seen this firsthand, by the way. We discovered, I think we were in the, uh, West Virginia, and there was a, like a vintage hobby shop that was in the town that Joel and I were hanging out within. Joel lit up at a level that I have not seen because they had an entire wall of cars and he remembered which ones were like really rare and special. And Joel, I think you spent like \$27, but walked out with like 2 bags. Bags. Yeah, bags.

**J****Joel Holland** 07:43

Yeah, dude, it was awesome. And you're right, that was— it like took me right back to childhood. The thrill of like collecting and finding something you love was real. And, and so the first real business that I came up with, I was like, look, I'm a collector of Hot Wheels. I don't have any good way to organize my collection. And by the way, as a kid, I got up to 2,000 Hot Wheels cars. So I had a ton of right? So I needed a way to collect, to organize them, and software is the way to do it. And so I started looking for like collection, uh, software that help you organize collections. Nothing really existed, but I found a guy selling some software that helps you do some stupid business thing, right? Like it had nothing to do with collecting, but I was like, I could take that and change it and make it collector, you know, focused. So I approached him, I was like, I played the age card. I'm like, hey, I'm 12. I'd like to buy perpetual rights to sell your software. I'm not going to compete with your industry. I'm not doing like the business thing here. No tax software. It's like I'm doing it for collectibles. I'm not a threat. I'll pay \$500, right? And I think he like negotiated me up to \$1,000, which is a lot of money for a 12-year-old, but I had saved a lot of golf ball money and I bought the rights and immediately, like, went gung-ho selling the stuff on eBay. Hot Wheels, the Hot Wheels collector's kit, I think I called it. And then I went on eBay and looked at every category of collectible— Ernie, Dinkle, Corgi, stamps, philatelic, right? Which I like, philatelia, numismatics, like terms I know today because I look through categories. And, and I was like, sweet, I'm just going to relabel the software for every I'm going to sell every single one of these. And within 6 months as a 12-year-old, I was a power seller on eBay selling like \$2,000 a month worth of this stuff.

**J****Jason Duff** 09:34

Wow. It was awesome. What in the world?

**J****Joel Holland** 09:37

Yeah, my parents were like, what were your parents saying about this? Like, yeah, they, uh, no, they were super supportive. I mean, I'm fortunate, like my parents have always been hyper supportive of every, you know, zany idea I've had. And I think that's really all you can ask from parents, right? Like, support your kids, even if you think they're crazy, right? And so it supported me. People used to have to mail checks for things, by the way. This was pre-PayPal. And so every day you'd go to the mailbox and have a stack of checks. And what I would do, because I like to collect things, I'd take the checks out, deposit them, and I'd take the envelopes and I covered my walls and then ceiling. And so all four walls and ceiling were covered in hundreds of envelopes from all around the country. From people that sent me money. I thought it was pretty cool.

J

**Jason Duff** 10:22

That reinforcement wallpaper, right, of the good, good things you were doing.

J

**Joel Holland** 10:26

Awesome.

J

**Jason Duff** 10:28

So let's kind of walk us through how did you develop an appreciation for photography and art and then monetizing it into a business?

J

**Joel Holland** 10:38

Yeah. So very similarly. So the software thing was awesome. Got, you know, I was making by 8th grade like \$20,000 a year, which is just like boo-boo bucks to an 8th grader who has nothing to spend money on but \$1 Hot Wheels cars. I got into photography because of technology. I've always loved anything new in technology, I geek out on it, I want to try it. I've bought every virtual headset, every 3D camera, all these things. I had the first Google Glasses. I buy all the things, most of them never go anywhere but some of them really strike my interest. And so as a kid, digital cameras came out. And so same time frame for the first time, Olympus.

J

**Jason Duff** 11:20

I remember I was like Olympus, Kodak, all these names.

**J****Joel Holland** 11:24

Yeah, dude, I could like— I went to Best Buy. No, it wasn't called Best Buy, it was called CompUSA. I went to CompUSA, bought a digital camera, and I was like, you got to be kidding. I can take a picture of something and it's just right there. And I thought that was the coolest thing in the world. So I started by taking all these photographs digitally, and I was like, all right, what can I do with these? Like, I think they're really cool. How do I like— what can I do with them? So I started creating screensavers out of them, and then I started selling the screensavers on eBay, and that went pretty far. Like, I sold a bunch of screensavers. That was neat. And then video technology came around, and so I bought the first digital video camera. I'm like, ah, neat. Like, this is the next level, right? Like, let's take some video clips. So I drove around Virginia shooting video, you know, beautiful video of the countryside. And again, I was like, I wonder who would buy this? And so I started, I mean, I had something that I loved that I thought other people would too. I didn't know who they would be. And so I put it on eBay again. eBay was my test platform and just started calling it like B-roll. I was like, you know, B-roll of Shando Valley. You know, and I was selling it for like \$30. It's like something stupid cheap, uh, for 1 hour of B-roll. You can do anything you want with it, royalty-free. And the first buyers were wedding videographers. And so wedding videographers started buying my stuff. I thought that was pretty cool. So I would take the money they'd send me, and I'd basically go do more trips, um, and shoot more footage. And soon, I mean, I remember this, the first time a television production company bought some of my footage of New York City. So I paid to take the train to New York, shot New York. It was for a Discovery Channel show called Mobs. And I was like, no way. Like, and I was like, I turned on the TV and like, sure enough, there's my footage I took of the train in New York put into a docuseries. Like, whoa. So television's interesting. And I started basically marketing to, you know, first video, wedding videographers, then TV production companies, advertising agencies. And I just kept rolling the earnings into paying for more trips. And this kind of took me through high school. Um, and I took a year off between high school and college, and for one year traveled all over the country. And I would just fly somewhere, fly to a city I'd never been, like Columbus, Ohio. I distinctly remember flying to Columbus, um, had my little backpack. It was a one-day trip. I walked all over Columbus, shot footage of everything. Went back to the airport, flew home, and then I started selling Columbus, Ohio footage. And so did that for a year and had quite a nice collection of content. And that's when I took it off eBay, started a company at the time called Footage Firm, that morphed into Videoblocks, which, you know, at first I was selling actual— sending actual tapes, right, physical tapes. Videoblocks was then the upgrade to digital downloads, um, and that turned into a subscription-based company that, that today is now quite large, right? Now it's a big provider of stock media, but that was the beginning. It was just a product that I enjoyed making, and luckily other people found a reason to buy.

**J****Jason Duff** 14:42

You broke it down in a very simple way. I'm sure a lot of people that go to the Videoblocks website today think that oh, this had to be, you know, some whole large company and team. But literally starting as a young person traveling to other cities with your own camera, you built a company that is a multi-million, \$100 million plus venture. Like, pretty surreal. Just started with an idea, right?

**J****Joel Holland** 15:13

Yeah. No, it is. It is surreal, right? And I think that's one of those It's funny if you like from the outside looking in, it would, it would look impossible or overwhelming. And it did. Obviously it took me like 15 years and a lot of work, right? But it was just incremental. It was just incremental. And it all started with creating the product myself because I believed in it. I've never— I've always built businesses that cash flow. I, I just never understood any other way. And you can't do that with every business, right? I, I get that some are very capital intensive and it takes fundraising, this and that. I've always just done things where I can make a product, sell it for more than I put into it, and then take the profits and try to sell more of those products, right? And just scale. And I think that, you know, today VideoBlocks is Storyblocks, and that was just an example of scaling, uh, starting from something very small and just letting it snowball.

**J****Jason Duff** 16:08

Which, if you're any familiar with photography, videography, or graphic design, even now, like, you know what Storyblocks is. And like, now they're sponsoring, you know, big YouTubers. And, uh, so like, they're, they're, you know, a huge deal. So I was almost a little in disbelief when I heard that you were the guy. Yeah, when I mentioned like, hey, Joel's gonna be on the show, and he's like, well, tell me about Joel. And he's like, oh, he was the, the founder of Storyblocks, like Ethan, because we were a little age difference here. Ethan, you're how old? I am 23. So like, he, he knew of it. He's like, I'm gonna meet the founder. And I'm like, yeah, it's just Joel. Yeah. Meanwhile, these crazy people that I look up to are, you know, they're sponsored by Storyblocks doing these awesome things, you know, which is, which is cool to see. Um, but you know what, you were like way ahead of the curve here a little bit. Like, uh, doing stock video and footage and things like that, what you were doing is still a viable like business, you know, plan today to even like diversify income and something I want to get into more. But it's just crazy that you're doing it way back when. So, Joe, can you speak as you were scaling and growing, what was it that was some of the secret sauce to your marketing efforts and to getting on the radar to scale? Because I think a lot of entrepreneurs, they have the goal to scale, but they, they're either they don't want to deploy the extra capital with the marketing or advertising or they don't have the systems or technology behind them. Like, what's your advice for someone like that?

**J****Joel Holland** 17:36

Yeah, it's interesting. Like, now that I've been through a few kind of successful ventures, what I've realized— and this oversimplifies it, but it's kind of like Warren Buffett says, you have to make one good decision every 5 years, right? It's really not about the daily grind so much. As it is about finding the unlocks that help you get from one level to the next level to the next level. And so, you know, it started with the confidence to take my, you know, savings and buy some equipment, right? And that could have failed and I could have lost that money and that instead I could have bought video games, popcorn, and candy, right? Like those, that was my trade-off. So it always takes trade-offs, but once I did that and we started it started working. Then the second decision was, well, now that I'm making money, is that good enough, or do I want to reinvest that and try to make this bigger? And that's an ongoing decision, right? And it's personal to every person. What's big enough for one person is not for another. And from where I sit, there is a level of, like, this is big enough. I don't need it to be billion dollars. I'm super happy with what we have, right? But when I was making I'll use a software as an example, \$2,000 a month to a kid. That's more money than you'd think you'd ever need. I could have bought every toy in the world, but I had a bigger plan than that, uh, which even at that age, I always had this goal of I wanted to work hard in my teens and 20s so that I'd have the freedom to do whatever I wanted in my 30s and 40s. And, and I knew that even in 8th grade, I had like a dream board, um, and, and on that dream board were some really big things that I wanted, like wanted to live at a ski resort and ski all the time, right? Things that I'm doing now because luckily, like, younger me did the work. Um, but so, so, so going back to the unlocks, um, reinvesting to keep growing was an obvious unlock that had to happen. Uh, the, the really big one, like really big, was going from when it was just me as a business to hiring other people. If I had continued trying to do everything myself, I would have plateaued because it's impossible. Like, one person cannot do it all, right?

**J****Jason Duff** 19:54

Right.

**J****Joel Holland** 19:54

And all of us probably try to do more than we should, especially Jason. Yeah, I've relaxed a little in my, in my old age. Jason seems to be firing up.

**J****Jason Duff** 20:03

He's just getting started. Just getting started over here, Joel.

**J****Joel Holland** 20:07

But I remember how hard that was, and that was the year after college. So through college, I kept growing VideoBlocks. You know, I'll never forget the end of college. I had it. I was doing \$100,000 in revenue, which was a lot to a college kid. And I had this decision. Do I take a real job or do I keep going with this? And I was like, no, you know what? This is my opportunity to keep doing what I love doing. Taking a real job is a cop-out. And I might never come back to the entrepreneurial dream. If it's working, let's go with it. Because if I fail, guess what? I'm still college educated. I can always get a job. And that's a big message I try to tell kids. It's like, um, your prospects are pretty darn good, right? Like, like, you've probably gotten a good education. You probably have a home that if you were, you know, if your entrepreneurial situation doesn't work out, you move back in with mom and dad. Like, that's great. You've got a safety net. And if you were employable at one point, you're employable later. That's just how it works. So take the shot, right? So, so finished college, moved into my parents' house, was working out of the basement and kind of hit this point where I was either going to plateau. I actually got the business up to \$1 million in revenue with no employees. And again, this was two decisions. One was, am I— is that good enough for me? Because there was a lot of cash coming out of that, so I could have lived happily forever. Or do I want something to do something bigger? And I did want to go bigger. And then the second was, am I willing to hire a team? And that was horrifying as a 22-year-old. Like, I like the idea of other people relying on me was very scary. I'm like, these people have like their own obligations and maybe families and things they got to pay for. What if I screw this up? Right. And now they don't get it. That part was super scary. So, so getting that unlock of hiring the first employee was one of the hardest things I did, especially at that age. And then as soon as I did it, it was like buying a cell phone for the first time and, and not understanding how you ever lived without it. Like immediately. Yeah. Right. Like, like, and so I hired an employee, uh, she was helpful from day one, started handling customer service, which I shouldn't have been doing anyway. Um, She started handling order fulfillment, which I shouldn't have been doing anyway, and I was able to start focusing on like acquiring more content. And then once I had her, I was like, whoa, that's, that was actually way easier than I thought. This person's adding value. Neat. And, and I hired the next person and next person, and that was a massive unlock. Like hiring a team was a massive unlock. And I see this with some people that get, some people are fine being small business owners that are doing it themselves. That's cool. Like there's no judgment there. But I also know some people running businesses where they're frustrated 'cause they're tapping out and it's because they won't let things go. And you gotta just like let some things go and hire some people. Like don't be like, some people don't wanna let go because they're afraid like I was. Some people don't wanna let go 'cause they're cheap and they think like, oh, why would I hire this person for \$60,000 to do something?

**J****Jason Duff** 23:09

I did do that myself. Yeah, very, it's very common.

**J****Joel Holland** 23:12

Which is very common.

J

**Jason Duff** 23:13

It takes a lot of courage though to look in the mirror and confront yourself to know that, you know, someone might be better at something than you too. You know, it is, sometimes it's taking that ownership of saying, I want to do all the jobs because no one could be better. And then you realize someone's better. You're like, well, maybe, maybe that, that thinking is not, not rooted, you know, rooted in what it should be.

J

**Joel Holland** 23:36

So. No, you're right. It's funny. Like, You got to check your ego at the door. That's easier said than done. Yeah, for everybody, probably.

J

**Jason Duff** 23:43

Well, you need enough ego to like to just to start something or to have confidence to share your beliefs. Like, we kind of— we run into this. We've had other guests on the show that have mentioned that it takes quite a bit of ego and courage just to punch through. But then you got— you do have to, like you said, check it at the door. And sometimes you have those moments in life that humble you and we need those to like realize what our gift really is.

J

**Joel Holland** 24:07

Yeah. Yeah. It's funny. I sometimes I say to me that the difference between confidence and cockiness— confidence is knowing you're the best in the world at something. Cockiness is telling everybody else.

J

**Jason Duff** 24:18

I love that. Yeah, it's a good line.

J

**Joel Holland** 24:22

So you have to have the confidence. You have to have the confidence for sure.

J

**Jason Duff** 24:25

So you ended up selling this business. I don't want to get too far ahead of you here, but can you walk us through that? Like how that deal came about and just what was your thought process going through that? Because I think a lot of times we hear from business owners who are successfully running their business, but like selling your business is selling something that you built. So like talk us through your experience.

J

**Joel Holland** 24:47

Yeah, definitely. So, you know, so that gets us to the next unlock, right? So hired employees started doing things faster, better. We kept growing because of that. The ceiling was lifted. And that got us to like, we were doing, we got to like \$4 million revenue, \$2 million profit, like a pretty great little business. And I realized we, if we want to go to the next level, the next unlock is gonna be doing a fundraise. And it was not necessarily to take money and put it onto the balance sheet. It was actually to sell part of the business and take money out because what I realized the limiter was becoming was my emotional state, right? All of my life was tied up in this business, all of my money, all of my wealth, and that was causing me to make bad decisions. It was causing me to make emotional decisions where I wanted to make more academic decisions. And I realized if I can sell part of this company, take some money off and be set, then I can— and this is all my theory, it played out. My theory was I will be a little more relaxed. I won't take everything so personally. I won't be so wound up.

J

**Jason Duff** 26:00

Wow.

J

**Joel Holland** 26:01

And I'll be willing to, like, do the things that need to be done to grow this even bigger. So I did a raise. I went to market. And when you've got a business that's cash flowing, it's really easy to raise money, right? Then that's like a little known secret, right? Like, tell your friends, if you want to raise funds, do it when you're making money.

J

**Jason Duff** 26:19

Like, the percentage of businesses that actually are into the kind kind of cash flow that you were. It is kind of surprising out in the venture capital world how rare that is.

J

**Joel Holland** 26:30

Yeah, no, it is. And, and again, I get not every business can be in that position. Like, some are really capital intensive. Some people are creating spaceships and Starlinks. That was not what I was doing, right?

J

**Jason Duff** 26:41

So, and we appreciate this, right?

**J****Joel Holland** 26:42

Yeah, I know this recipe is not for everybody, but I was in a position— well, I guess the way the advice I give people is if you can create a product get product market fit and actually get revenue in the door without having to raise funding. If you can do that first, you have so much more sway at the table when it comes to those talks to raise funds. Otherwise, ball's in their court and you don't want that if you can avoid it. So I ended up selling part of the company and taking \$10 million out and it did exactly what I hoped it would. And at this point, I'm like mid-20s. So I'm young. The money did not corrupt me, right? I did not go out and buy a Lamborghini and start clubbing till 3 in the morning.

**J****Jason Duff** 27:24

Can I pause on that? Because, you know, Joe, I've known you for a long while now. And I have also known friends that have been through an exit. And once they get that check, and again, it's just a philosophy choice, like they, they go out and spend pretty big. The thing that I have always admired about you, Joel, is that it is not drastically changed your lifestyle. You live just pretty much the same way that I met you. I mean, you've made some decisions with improving your personal residence and things that you have earned and deserve, but I just want to shout, that's something I really admire about you.

**J****Joel Holland** 27:59

Yeah, thanks, man. Look, I live in an RV. I know, I know. I love it down by the river. I love that. No, I, I appreciate that. And, and I think that, um, Yeah, I mean, I, so I was confident that I wouldn't let the money corrupt me. Um, and that it would unlock even more confidence to just keep growing the business. And that's what happened. And so that was the next unlock, took the funding, grew the business from \$4 million to \$8 million to \$12 million to \$20 to \$30, like we just kept growing it. And, um, that was because of the ability to now be like, okay, I'm set financially. I don't have to, like, I can sleep at night. Now all my attention goes into making the best decisions for both the business now and my partner. And I look at when you take funds, like I said, partner, I wanted the partner to succeed just as much as I did because they believed in me. And that was kind of a cool new motivating factor. It brought with it its own stress because I didn't want to let them down. But it really, it manifested for me as like motivation and it was great. And so that kind of carried us through to ultimately we sold, you know, the business in the 9 figures. And so it was a great outcome for the investor, great outcome for me, great outcome for all of our employees. Every single one of our employees had equity. I made that decision early on to give everybody in the company some equity. So literally every employee, and we had over 100 at the time of the sale, got a check from it. And so it felt good. It was like, it was literally like a group celebration. Yeah. Wow.

**J****Jason Duff** 29:32

That's awesome. It's pretty inspiring, like hearing, you know, that adventure. And when you sold it, what was the emotions like for you? Like, walk us through kind of that. Was it excitement? Was it, what am I going to do next? Like, was it— walk us through those feelings.

**J****Joel Holland** 29:52

Yeah. So, yeah, I love that question because when I did the first partial sale, really it was a raise, right? It was a Series A, which meant I was trying to take the company to the next level. That was stressful. So I took the money out, but I looked at it as now I owe someone, right? I owe them payback. And so that, I remember that was like, it was a cool feeling, like I felt good, but I couldn't, it didn't feel like I was free at all. It was not relaxing. Now for the ultimate sale, when it was a total cash-out walk away, I felt totally free and I was ready. So you hear some entrepreneurs say, oh, it was my baby, it was my child, it was bittersweet. I feel like I was giving it. I didn't have any of those emotions. For me, it was kind of like the end of college. 4 great years and I was ready to move on to the next chapter. And that's how I felt. And it was wonderful. I mean, that day I was— I went camping when I saw the money hit the bank. I got in my truck, took a tent out to the woods and went partying in the woods. It was awesome.

**J****Jason Duff** 30:57

Love that. That's the way to do it. Jeez. And now your attention's on Harvest Hosts. So tell us a little bit about that. And I understand Small Nation had a small part in that. So I'm curious to hear that, that as well. Tell us about our mastermind group. Like, I— we have had the pleasure of being a part of a mastermind group, which we've had I think some other guests. I know Adam Witty is going to be on the show here in a few weeks, but Anderson Schoenrock was a previous guest on the show. And that group, I think there's 6 guys that, you know, we have committed to meet twice a year. And in the beginning, it kind of was sharing the best hacks with different technology tools and, you know, the, the, the best ways to optimize our schedule or the books that we were reading. But a lot of those conversations have moved very personal. And it's been when we've had life events, whether it's in our business or life, and like being kind of a sounding board for each other. And Joel has been a very dear friend and special part of that group. But I remember kind of celebrating with you the sale, and then you kind of taking that time off to kind of retool and think about what's next. And there were like you were, you were brainstorming with, with the mastermind group about these things.

J

**Joel Holland** 32:15

Yeah. I mean, man, first, the first thing I'll say is the mastermind group has been like an instrumental part of my life and it's my, it is, it's my favorite. It's my favorite thing. It's my favorite group of people. Like, truly, it's like we're all best friends who get to meet, talk about business and then party together. I can't think of a more fun setup. It's honestly like my favorite thing in the world. But what's really neat about— it's been like 10 years we've been getting together. It's something like that, like a really long time. You get this level of comfort and you can be vulnerable. And I remember after selling, you know, Videoblocks, Storyblocks, got in the RV, bought an RV, got an RV, traveled all over the country, ended up moving to Vail, Colorado. I was really kind of excited, did the ski bum thing. Skied a bunch, hiked a bunch. And then one day it was like a punch in the face where I was just kind of like, I had no, I had no purpose. It was weird. Like I went from one day being like super pumped on like, let's go do this and just hike. And then I'm like, what's the point? Like without purpose, without doing something, I was starting to feel kind of melancholy. And that was interesting, unexpected. So then I kind of turned it around and got excited. I was like, well, let's find the next thing, right? Like fun, right? So, so, so for, for a year I was like searching for the next thing, which at first was super exciting. Everywhere I go, I'd like be, what's the business opportunity? How can I do this? That. And after a year, I still hadn't found the next thing. That then like took me into a phase of kind of like, it was scary. I mean, that was in a weird way, that was a, there was like two low points in my life. One was I burned out during the Storyblocks days where I was just doing too much and I was tired of it. And the second was not knowing what I was gonna do in the future after selling the company. And I realized that all play with no work was actually what made John Maynard a dull boy. So I got kind of like, I got kind of scared. The question started entering my mind of like, was I a one-trick pony? Did I get lucky with this whole Storyblocks thing? Am I really not a good entrepreneur? I can't even figure out what to do next. Like, like the confidence started dropping by the day and I got to a pretty low point. And 10X was amazing. Mastermind is amazing because we were in, I think, Dallas and I was like one of the lowest points for me. Like I was just trying to figure out what I wanted to do next. That's funny. Got a little emotional there. Didn't expect that.

J

**Jason Duff** 34:42

It's real. That's what I love about it.

J

**Joel Holland** 34:45

It is real. Like that's like, it's real stuff. Whew. One second, I'll get a water.

J**Jason Duff** 34:52

Good. Well, I remember, you know, we sat around and a lot of times in our group, like we check in to like ask like on a scale of 1 to 10, you know, how are you with your business? How are you with your personal life? And in these conversations, like the real stuff does pop up because sometimes when you're a leader, everyone expects you to have all the answers and we kind of have to serve that in our, in our communities and our companies. But what's really awesome in this group is that we can be real and honest with people, because it's, it can be lonely at times when you, you're processing all these decisions, but you, you, you, you can't maybe stuff you can't share with your spouse, you can't share with your family, you need other people around you can be like, this is what, this is what I'm feeling. And I need, I need your advice, I need your help.

J**Joel Holland** 35:38

Totally. And so I remember we were all sitting around in the hotel room in Dallas on like a rainy day. And one of the things I had done, that's actually a great exercise I recommend everybody do. I do personal 30-day challenges every month, both personal and business. And I'll set some goal that I want, like something I want to do, like meditate every day would be a personal challenge. And I will actually like track it. And on business, this particular month I had set a goal of, find a way to run a business in the RV industry. Every day I need to do something towards that goal. And I, and I set like a little, you know, spreadsheet 1 to 30, and every day I had to like put the date and, and the item I did towards that goal. Um, and by the time I had actually gotten to this meeting, one of the days, it's funny, it was like a Saturday, I was kind of hungover, and I was like, I don't feel like doing this, but I'd set the goal, so I'm gonna do it. And I had heard about this little company, Harvest Hosts, through people in the industry, pulled up their website. It was this little WordPress website, nothing fancy, super cool concept membership, you know, for RVers that lets you stay at wineries and farms. Like, this is awesome. And so I shot them a message and just said, hey, this— I know it's out of the blue. I love your business. Would you ever consider selling it for the right price? And that last part's very important because everyone's going to respond to that. You could have no intentions of selling anything, but you want to know what the right price means. What does that mean? And sure enough, they responded and said, well, we hadn't thought about selling, but we might. What are you willing to pay? And so this brings us back to this mastermind in Dallas. I was sitting there giving the guys the update and I said, no, I think I've got this, maybe this opportunity to by the Sarvi company. And I told him all about it and I got all fired up just like I did just there. I was like really excited about it and I was like, should I do it? And I think I'm 100% sure it was Jason. Jason always has really good, succinct advice. He's like, Joel, it sounds like you're really passionate about this. I think you absolutely have to do it. And right, like, that's great. That's great advice. And you can only give that kind of advice with certainty for really close friends. And he was absolutely right. And so I went home and I started the process and I—

**J****Jason Duff** 37:57

right away he left that meeting and I think within like 3 or maybe a week, it was quick that he's like sending us an update, guys. Like, we're in contract to buy this company. Wow. And you know, when you think about his history, like you've heard his origin story with what he was doing in terms of the collection the curating of things, selling things with lists and understanding internet marketing from the original days of the internet to then licensing with Storyblocks. Like, to me, in the real estate industry, 'cause that's kind of, it is a, it's a membership business, but it's a membership business that's putting an accent on physical properties, RV parks and wineries and golf courses and breweries. And so like, in my, like, world, I'm like, dude, that I see win-win-win. And look at the lifestyle, like where he was at with it, like being able to travel. That was a big word. He mentioned travel. So like it sometimes is, you need people, like a group of people around you that will listen to you talk, listen to you emote, and then just remind you, helping you connect the dots. And I think that that's what was like happening. That was really, it was magical for me to see, but I think The difference, Joel, that you have, and I think it's something we want listeners to know, is that you digested it but then went and immediately put those plans into action. Action-oriented steps.

**J****Joel Holland** 39:23

Yeah, yeah, definitely. And that, you know, and that was the next unlock for me. It was like I set an intention to try to find a business. I found one. I got advice. I asked for advice. I was given very direct advice. It would have been counter to my whole goal, right, to not follow through. And so at that point I was like, let's just follow through, right? You know, the follow-through is important. And yeah, and like bought the business and we've grown it 100x in 5 years.

**J****Jason Duff** 39:54

Let's put a button on that. 100x.

**J****Joel Holland** 39:59

Yeah. In 5 years. Yeah, that's 5 years. Uh-huh. And the cool thing there, so I'd never purchased a business before. I was nervous about that, right? I didn't know what it's like to buy a business and it was kind of like hiring the first employee or getting the first cell phone. As soon as I did it, if you buy the right business, it's like, whoa, this is awesome because I got to skip all the zero to one stuff that I really didn't enjoy trying to find product market fit, blah, blah, blah. Instead, I got a product that already had fit and just didn't have scale. And I love the scale phase. So I was able to take it and expand it from 600 locations to 9,000 and from 6,000 members to 250,000. And so like, that was the part I love doing. And so now I'm like, oh yeah, buying businesses is pretty cool. And I've since purchased two more. And that — yeah, that was the unlock.

**J****Jason Duff** 40:53

Tell us, what does Harvest Hosts do and what is it doing today?

**J****Joel Holland** 40:59

Yeah, so Harvest Hosts, uh, it's a membership club for RVers. If you own an RV, you join Harvest Hosts, very inexpensive, \$100 a year. You can then stay overnight for free at, um, 8,000, I mean, almost 9,000 locations all over North America. So Canada, U.S., all 50 states, and they're really cool locations. So it's like instead of parking in a parking lot or 5 feet away from your neighbor. You're at a winery, right, with no one else around. You're at a brewery where you can go taste and then go back to the rig. You're at a farm. You're at a— I was at a horse rescue last week. You can go to cool museums and stay overnight. So it basically just completely elevates your experience as an RVer, which is why the RV members love it. And then on the other end are these host businesses that benefit from our members coming and patronizing them. And it's really cool. Like our members on average spend \$50 per night with the hosts they visit. That turn— this year that'll be over \$50 million directly back to these businesses. We don't take any of that. We don't charge the businesses to be in the program. Like literally they pay us nothing. So it's all upside. And what comes out of that are some really neat heartwarming stories of small businesses that I mean, during COVID it was— you literally saved the farm. Like, we were going to have to shut down.

**J****Jason Duff** 42:23

Wow.

**J****Joel Holland** 42:23

And because your members kept showing up and buying stuff, we saved the farm. Today it's, man, you know, we made an extra \$20,000 this year and that helped us cover these increased costs, cost of inputs. Like, at the horse rescue, cost of hay is like way up. What a weird thing. You don't even think about that. But the cost of hay was making it really hard to feed these horses they're rescuing. And our members donate to this place and it's kept them going. So it feels really good because members love it, hosts love it. We just sit in the middle, right? We're just the platform. We sit in the middle with a really wonderful team of employees. So everybody wins, right? It's like it's the first business I've run and I love it where everybody that kind of orbits the Harvest Hosts ecosystem comes out ahead. Like we're not stealing from anybody. And I love that.

**J****Jason Duff** 43:09

And I know firsthand we have a winery that is nearby about 25 minutes away from here called Dalton Union. And the owners, when I shared a recent interview that Joel did, I think with Fox Business, and my friends just commented on it saying, oh my gosh, Harvest Host has been incredible for our winery. We have met all these amazing out-of-town guests. It's exactly what you, what your brand promise and pledges It's working.

**J****Joel Holland** 43:42

It's working and it's so cool. And so it's just been like, I'm so happy that I found, you know, another business doing what I love. I love shooting video. I love RVing. I think it's really— it's a neat way to, like, you know, prosper while doing something you love that also has byproduct of good stuff for other people. You know, it's fortunate. I wish everyone could experience that. I think it's a really— it's a great way to live.

**J****Jason Duff** 44:08

Yeah, really allows for the lifestyle that you want to live too. Like, you can be on the road wherever, so that's great. I think that's great for anyone to be thinking about as they're starting a business is to— what life is that going to create for yourself, and are you going to enjoy that? Because I don't know, sometimes it's easy to— the other thing I like about the industry, and I, I think for a lot of folks, they— the, the, the idea of what RVing was and is today has changed significantly. Can you maybe speak a little bit to that? Because I We have a lot of folks that listen that are doing economic development and investing in real estate and their towns, and they maybe had that RV park that was outside of town. It's been run down. It's not really been innovating and investing in the park. But why should they be looking at who the profile is for an RVer today?

**J****Joel Holland** 44:58

Yeah, I mean, you know, this is one of the things that really surprised me when I got into the industry was just how big it is and the economic impact that it has. You know, there are 11— actually almost 12 million RV owners now in the US. 1 in 10 American households owns an RV. It's huge. Wow. The economic impact is like \$148 billion a year. It's just big numbers. And I think, you know, when you look at the profile of an RVer, it's interesting. These days it's growing at both ends. You have our parents retiring and they want the freedom of the open road. So you got the older demographic. Who, by the way, has money. So it's a, it's a pretty wealthy demographic. They're traveling, so they're excited. They love supporting small businesses. They love Main Street America. So they, like, they're— the purse strings are open. Then you have the younger people who are getting into this for the first time. And it's neat, like, the younger generations are starting to prioritize experiences over stuff. And RVing is a wonderful experience. And when they go out, they love going to the local diner and the local farm and buying the stuff because it's an experience. And so it's neat that both ends of the spectrum are growing in RVing. Both are great people and both are willing to spend. So, you know, if you're thinking about economic development as a town, RV, you know, anything you can do to bring RVers in is beneficial. And it's interesting, we actually have some towns that entire— like they're like the town, the mayor's office or the town tourism office is where they host our RVers and then the The town's open for Harvest Hosts. It's kind of neat. And the town says, "We shoot these out of counters." Can I ask a question with that?

**J****Jason Duff** 46:34

Let's just say someone wants to do that. What, what do they need to do in terms of amenities or to be a host to actually get certified as a Harvest Host?

**J****Joel Holland** 46:44

Yeah, great question. I mean, honestly, it's as simple as you need to have a place that is safe and easy for an RVer to park overnight. You need to have some sort of product. That they can purchase, right? So that's the social contract. Our members are going to stay for free, but they're going to support you. So some way to either donate if it's a nonprofit or buy something if you're a business. You don't need to provide any hookups, no electricity, no water, no sewer. Our RV members are required to be fully self-contained. So they're going to show up and all they need to do is park overnight. That's it. And so, you know, if you're a town, I think, Pontiac, Illinois was one of the first towns, and their— I think it was their city tourism office, like, they just let— they let members park outside. The mayor would come by with a little welcome bag for the town, giving them things to do. And then you'd see, you know, all these out-of-towners walking Main Street buying stuff because they got off the highways and onto the main streets of the small towns.

**J****Jason Duff** 47:45

That's great. Wow. Which brings to me, like, I just— I mean, again, I'm learning on this podcast too. Like, we need do this here in Bellefontaine. I know, I know you visited, Joel, and have a chance to check out a lot of things that are happening here. But just seeing the, the economic impact that, that you and your company has and how easy that is to create those spaces, I would think every town in the country would want to plug in some of their really cool museums and parks and, and wineries and breweries into that network.

**J****Joel Holland** 48:17

I would think so, you know, and we're, you know, the doors are open, right? And then again, it's totally free. So anyone can go to [harvesthost.com](https://harvesthost.com), click on For Hosts tab and learn more about it, apply right there, never costs a dime. And if it works for you, keep doing it. If it doesn't, no worries.

**J****Jason Duff** 48:36

That's great. Awesome. Thanks so much for sharing all that. That's really encouraging to hear. But what was one professional development resource that was impactful for you along the way, if you can call out one?

J

**Joel Holland** 48:48

Well, I mean, I, you know, the mastermind group has been easily the most valuable resource. And, you know, everyone I think should in some way or another find a group that, whether it's called mastermind or whatever, there's a million different groups. The neat thing here is we didn't pay for some group, right? There's a lot of groups you can pay for. We just created our own organically. Well, Jason and team created and invited me, so I was fortunate. And it has some structure to it. So, so like Jason said, you know, meets a couple times a year. We ask very specific questions, you know, so I would encourage anyone to try to find a group of people and it doesn't have to be the same industry. Everyone has common, like commonalities across business are massive, right? There's more alike than this than not. So that's what I would say, try to find a group. Of, of peers that you can learn from, share with, be vulnerable with, and, and stick with it long enough that you get a trust factor where, where you really, like, you know, listen, um, and, and, you know, and, and do what you're told.

J

**Jason Duff** 49:55

Joel, do you have a favorite book that, as you think back, that just really shifted the way that I'm thinking in it for the better?

J

**Joel Holland** 50:04

Yeah, um, you know, yes. So, so the book that really shifted— so I I've always wanted to be an entrepreneur, but as a little kid I read Rich Dad Poor Dad. And when I say little kid, I was probably— that's probably our—

J

**Jason Duff** 50:16

that's probably out of our guest is that maybe not one of the most popular books.

J

**Joel Holland** 50:20

Yeah. And that was— it was— it was like it was revolutionary to me because he basically was like, you can basically always be grinding and just, you know, or you can like create assets that work for you. Right. And that was just a really cool concept. Right. And so anyway, that book was probably— I haven't read it since I was a little kid, but it was so impactful. Later in life, the book that was really impactful was Influence by Robert Cialdini. And, and that book is great because then it kicks you into this whole world of, of consumer psychology studies and books. But his book is one of the best summaries of why people buy. And what you realize is that we all think we're unique and independent. We are in some ways, but en masse, we all behave very similarly and have similar, like, Triggers. And he talks about them. He talks about the ways that we do things and buy things that are actually easy to manipulate, right? So a lot of the book is kind of a warning on like, don't be manipulated. There's some tactics, but some of them are good marketing lessons on how you can, you know, in a good way, use these psychological marketing tactics to sell. So that was a book that really got me into the world of consumer psychology, which is fascinating.

**J****Jason Duff** 51:34

Yeah, love that. Thanks for sharing all that, Joel. Thank you for being a guest on the show today. Um, I— you gave— you unlocked so many different— oh yeah, pieces. It's hard to pick out which one's my favorite, but I think through the shifts that you have had in building a company— I mean, literally when you were in, in middle school. Yeah, I'm 12 years old, thinking back to little Joel. But then, um, understanding the emotional connections that we have to business versus the academic. And I think that shows that maturity in your thought, that as you scaled and have grown your latest ventures, how important that it is that we do that. Because I think for a lot of the entrepreneurs that have been the show, and I found this in my background and career, is that we do treat our businesses like our children. But there's a, there's a drawback to that. Like, there, when you become that emotionally connected, it does cloud your judgment and your decisions. And so I just really appreciated you sharing and also kind of being vulnerable, um, today about, you know, when we have those shifts, it's okay to— we're human beings, we have feelings, and thank goodness there are people that are around us that will lift us up and support us. And when we need when we need some constructive criticism or feedback, they can give us that too. But just thanks for being a guest on our show today. Thanks for being a great friend. I, I'm inspired. Like, I know I've heard your story a few times, but I'm just really energized and inspired and just excited to see the continued growth and success for Harvest Hosts and your ventures.

**J****Joel Holland** 53:13

No, thank you. I appreciate this. It's an honor to be on here, and it's always really fun to talk about this stuff, right? And, and we forget, you know, we forget, you know, life's a long journey, but there's a lot of the journey. It's cool to talk about the chapters every once in a while.

**E****Ethan DeLeon** 53:28

Yeah, I love that. All right, well, thank you for everyone for tuning in and checking out the Small Nation Podcast. You can find us anywhere that you listen to your podcast, including Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and even the Small Nation YouTube channel. I hope you're able to pull some value from that conversation, and I hope to see you in the next one. If you enjoyed it, be sure to leave a like, comment, or a 5-star review to help more people to discover this podcast. And stay tuned to Small Nation on social media to keep up with all the cool projects that are happening here. Until next time, this is Ethan with the Small Nation Podcast signing off.