

Episode 47

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Credibility through authorship, Forbes Books, Advantage Media, Adam Witty, book publishing, print-on-demand, thought leadership, building authority, personal branding, Charleston South Carolina, Clemson, Ticket Advantage startup, business partnerships gone wrong, CEO versus entrepreneur, brand partnerships, Extreme Entrepreneurship Tour

SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Adam Witty, Ethan DeLeon

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- A Adam Witty** 00:00
to really scale a business, you've got to put on the CEO hat more than the entrepreneur. And really, the CEO hat is facilitating an environment of people working together, supporting each other, collaborating and communicating with each other, you know, dare I say, loving each other. To achieve a common goal that people are unified and clear about.
- E Ethan DeLeon** 00:35
Hey everyone, my name is Ethan DeLeon and I'm here with our founder and CEO of Small Nation, Jason Duff. Joining us on the show today, we have the founder and CEO of Forrest Books, Adam Woody. 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, the listener, and create a space to learn, talk about what's trending, and inspire others.
- J Jason Duff** 01:06
Thank you, Ethan. Adam, welcome to the show.
- A Adam Witty** 01:09
Jason, it's great to be with you.
- J Jason Duff** 01:11
You are coming to us from where, Adam?
- A Adam Witty** 01:14
I am in beautiful Charleston, South Carolina, the holy city, the Lowcountry of South Carolina, one of the oldest cities in American history. And the friendliest city in America 15 years in a row.

J**Jason Duff** 01:30

Wow. And I just have to say, and I compliment Adam because he is the de facto tourism bureau for Charleston, South Carolina. And a lot of our listeners, you know, work in roles where they have to promote their business, their town, their community. And Adam does a really great job. And, and why, why for you has that become part of your, your language and the way you communicate about your town?

A**Adam Witty** 01:56

Well, I love it. I think it's, I think it's beautiful. I think it's charming. And I think that, you know, when you really take ownership of where you live, when you have pride in where you live, I think it makes you a happier person too. I agree. One of our authors is writing a book right now about a sense of belonging and how to create belonging. And, you know, there's kind of this belonging crisis in America where people are disconnected, they're depressed. And, you know, when you have a place— and we'll define this as your community, right? Whether it's Bellefontaine or whether it's Charleston— when you have a place that you love, that you're proud of, that you enjoy being a part of the fabric of the community, man, it just makes you a happier person. So I do think it's beautiful. I do think it's charming. I love our friends and our neighbors. But I also want to be happy too.

J**Jason Duff** 02:53

I first met Adam, and I was thinking about this today. It has probably now been almost 20 years.

A**Adam Witty** 03:02

I know, and I'm only 29.

J**Jason Duff** 03:04

Well, we know that's not true. No, we, we met right out of college. And, you know, the way he speaks about Charleston, South Carolina, the first day that I met him, and I think you just recently moved to that city, that is not your home state.

A**Adam Witty** 03:18

That's right.

J**Jason Duff** 03:19

And, you know, I, I think coming right out of school, uh, we've got to get this because I know there's a lot of OSU Buckeye fans that are listening right now. Where did you go to school for college, Adam?

A**Adam Witty** 03:29

The 2016-2018 National Football Championship Clemson Tigers.

J**Jason Duff** 03:36

Oh man, I think we just got, you know, I can see the social media comments on this post right now. We are in trouble. We are in trouble. No, a proud Clemson grad.

A**Adam Witty** 03:48

Yeah. And, you know, same thing. I love my alma mater like I love the city I live in now. Had a great experience there. I learned, I grew, I developed as a person, as a human. Probably most of the people that love Ohio State had the exact same experience there, which is why they love it so much. And, you know, that's really what brought me to the state of South Carolina. Because I, I grew up as a kid outside of Orlando in Central Florida. I had a great childhood. I loved growing up in Central Florida. But when I went off to Clemson, you know, I developed friends, I developed relationships, I started a business out of my dorm room. And when I graduated, I was a starving entrepreneur and I had a choice of where to starve. And I thought, yeah, I guess I'll do it at the beach.

J**Jason Duff** 04:40

Charleston's a good choice. Well, in those early days of being a starving entrepreneur, I think that's when we knew each other. And, uh, I think, Adam, besides your wife, do I still hold the record of sharing a hotel room with you more than anyone else?

A**Adam Witty** 04:57

That very well could be. Jason and I were, uh, staples. Jason and I were staples on the Extreme Entrepreneurship Tour. A dear friend of ours, Michael Simmons, and his wife Sheena had created this tour going to colleges all across the country where they would bring in student entrepreneurs and recent graduates who are entrepreneurs trying to inspire and encourage and motivate college students to pursue a path of entrepreneurship. And I guess Jason and I were the cheapest dates. Or maybe we just didn't have a whole lot more on our calendar and so we were always available. But Jason and I visited many, many college campuses together. And because like any entrepreneurial endeavor in startup mode, you are on a tight budget. We were roommates as well.

J**Jason Duff** 05:53

Nice. The benefit of being roommates is that we could be, I mean, you're comfortable enough to share This is what's working in our businesses. This is, you know, what's not working. Do you have advice about this problem? And you start to build deep, meaningful relationships. And I know many of the guests that we've had on the podcast, Adam, are mutual friends that we have met over the years and watched them achieve success, but also, uh, watch them experience hardship and challenges and in some cases failure. And I think for a lot of listeners, Hearing the lineage and the DNA of that, knowing that business at times is messy, is really helpful. And you mentioned you started a business when money wasn't plentiful, but ideas were. Tell us how— what was that first business and how has it kind of taken you to where you're at being in the publishing industry today?

A

Adam Witty 06:50

Yeah, my first business was called TicketAdvantage.com. It was a marketplace to buy and sell unused sports tickets. For all of you that have ever heard of StubHub.

J

Jason Duff 07:03

Yep.

A

Adam Witty 07:04

Yeah, that's right. That, that wasn't us, but it was the exact same business model. And we started the same time that StubHub started. The only difference was StubHub had raised \$30 million in VC capital.

J

Jason Duff 07:21

And just pause on that \$30 million. That's a lot of money.

A

Adam Witty 07:26

Yeah. I had probably \$30,000 in startup capital, which is maybe me rounding up. And, you know, they were Stanford MBAs and they had a management team and, you know, all of that. And I was just an undergraduate student at Clemson, like, with this really cool idea, trying to figure out how in the world am I going to make this happen. And I learned so much. You know, I feel like I graduated like not just with an undergrad, but a graduate degree too, like a master's in business because I started a business from scratch in my dorm room and you just have to figure it out. And not everything do you figure out, does it work? A lot of things don't work, but just being in the process of doing it and trying and failing fast and then trying something new. I mean, there's no better learning, I think, especially for business than just like doing it, right? And man, I'm so grateful that even though Ticket Advantage was not a big success, there was not an exit and sale that put lots of money in my pocket. You know, in fact, it, you know, it had a little bit of success, but ultimately just really didn't go anywhere. What I learned from that has been worth probably millions and millions and millions of dollars from the experience that I got from it.

J

Jason Duff 08:57

Very nice. So talk us through what, how did, what was the life cycle of the business? How did it end up closing up shop? And then what would you do after that?

A

Adam Witty 09:06

Yeah, so I started Ticket Advantage in 19— no, no, 2001. I enrolled at Clemson in 1999.

J

Jason Duff 09:16

So basically—

A

Adam Witty 09:16

when I was born, I just want to—

J**Jason Duff** 09:18

oh, thanks, Ethan. That makes us feel real good.

A**Adam Witty** 09:22

Always does this. This interview is over. So 1999, you're in diapers. I'm enrolling as a freshman at Clemson. 2001, I started the business, closed it down in 2005. And the challenge I had is that, that Ticket Advantage, like StubHub, was a marketplace. So sales were double hard because you had to go find a bunch of sellers that had tickets that they wanted to sell, and then you had to go find a bunch of buyers that wanted to buy the other people's tickets, right? So marketing was, was 2x the effort because you had two customer groups. You had buyers, you had sellers. That was the first problem. The second problem for me is that it was mass marketing, right? Mass marketing, meaning B2C. A company like Ticket Advantage would only be successful with lots of volume. I don't mean thousands. I mean tens of thousands of transactions every month. And, you know, at most I was in the low hundreds of transactions a month because I just couldn't get the word out to enough people. And I didn't have the money to do any mass marketing, whether it be radio, whether it be TV, or, you know, certainly in those days there was a little bit of online advertising, but there was no social media at that time. So, so there were no social channels to market through. And that was tough. We got to a point where the business just really wasn't going to scale, at least not with me as the leader. And it wasn't big enough where it was an asset that somebody really wanted to buy. And so I made the decision that, you know, I had to face reality and I closed the doors. What I knew at that time is that I didn't really want to go get a job. I really didn't want to go work for somebody if I could help it. And I had spent 2 summers when I was in high school working for a publishing house. Now stop right there, because nobody, not even a dork like me, grows up wanting to be a publisher.

J**Jason Duff** 11:40

Well, at the time, I mean, Barnes Noble was the big Goliath, the independent bookstores were really challenged by the mass merchandisers. And I think Amazon was just starting to be real, right? Yeah. So you were seeing massive exodus of closures of bookstores in general and publishing businesses going out of business. That's when you decided to get into—

A**Adam Witty** 12:07

Great time to get into publishing, right? Now, there was one thing that was happening in publishing that was a game changer. And it was the advent of print-on-demand technology, which was this higher-level digital printing where you could literally print one book at a time instead of 5,000 books.

J**Jason Duff** 12:30

Wow.

A**Adam Witty** 12:31

Yeah. At a time. And with print-on-demand, it truly democratized publishing and made it much more accessible to far greater people. So I had spent 2 summers in high school working for a publishing company. What I thought I would hate, I ended up finding really, really interesting. I graduate from Clemson, I'm running Ticket Advantage. I ultimately decide that Ticket Advantage just is not going to really go anywhere. So I'm in Orlando and I'm having lunch with a mentor. The mentor's name is Pat Williams. And he is the founder of the Orlando Magic basketball team. That's cool. Now, besides being a sports executive, he was also an author. He had written a number of business books. And my dream as a kid was to run a professional basketball team. You know, first I wanted to play for the Orlando Magic. Then I realized that was never going to happen. Yeah. So then I said, well, what if I could be the general manager? Of the Orlando Magic? What if I could run the team? That's, that's what I wanted to do. And truly, when I went off to school at Clemson, that would have been my dream job. Like, you know, what do you dream? I dreamed to be the general manager of a professional basketball team. So I had read, I had read one of Pat Williams' books. I befriended him by writing him a letter, thanking him for writing the book, asking a few questions. And then most important, at the age of, I don't know, 20 years old, 18, maybe 19 years old, I asked him if I could take him to lunch. And he agreed and said that I could take him to lunch. So, uh, wow. I'm in high school, right about to graduate, but I'm in high school and I remember my mom drives me, um, Yeah, my mom drove me to his office, uh, because I didn't have a car, uh, so I could take him out to lunch. Wow. And fortunately, there was a restaurant like within the parking lot of the stadium, so I didn't have to have my mom drive both of us to lunch. But I took him to lunch, and this fast friendship and mentorship begins. So I'm having lunch with him a year or two later. I had just graduated from Clemson. I had this fledgling business which was Ticket Advantage and it wasn't going well and he knew that. And he said, Adam, you need to start a publishing company for business leaders. He said, every CEO needs to be the author of a book because when they write the book on the topic, they're seen as the expert. 'And every CEO should be an author and you're the guy that can help them do it.' And that was his encouragement. And that was really the motivation of, well, I don't really have a better idea of what I'm going to do post-Ticket Advantage. So sure, why not? What the heck? Let's do it. So in 2004, I started a publishing company, which at the time was called Advantage Books. And this story doesn't get told often, but it's instructive. So if you're willing, I'll indulge your audience.

J**Jason Duff** 16:04

Exclusive story here on the Small Nation Podcast.

A**Adam Witty** 16:08

Breaking news. Right, right. My— another mentor of mine I had worked with at this publishing company. And this mentor of mine who really took me under his wing and taught me a lot about the publishing business, he and I had built a great friendship and he called me and said, hey, I'm leaving the company and I'm starting my own publishing company and I'd like for you to join me. I'd like for you to be a partner and I'd like for you to help me grow this business. And I just had great respect for him and I said, all right, I'm in, you know, whatever the terms, whatever the price, it doesn't matter. I'm I'm in. So, I jump into this publishing business in 2004 and a year into it, it didn't even take that long. It was very clear that my dream and my vision of what this business could be was not the same dream and vision that he had. I wanted to build this massive enterprise and, you know, he wanted probably to build a lifestyle business. And so it became very clear that we were not seeing eye to eye and we were going to have to go our separate ways. So naively, I say to him, well, okay, you know, let's just split everything in half and I'll take my piece and go my way and you take your piece and you go your way. Except he owned 51% of the company and I owned 49% of the company.

J**Jason Duff** 17:41

Oh, no.

A**Adam Witty** 17:43

I would have been happy with a 51-49 split. But as I learned the hard way, when you're 49 and a split happens, you're really zero. So, he decides he's going to officially fire me.

J**Jason Duff** 18:03

Wow.

A**Adam Witty** 18:03

Ouch. And I said, well, what about the 49% of the stock that I own. And he essentially said, well, come and get it. And my father was kind enough to introduce me to an attorney. And the attorney said, your hands are pretty tied and the time and effort that you would spend probably isn't going to get you anything. So, I think you need to learn from this and you need to move on. Wow. And so a year in after starting this business and getting a little bit of momentum, I'm kind of kicked to the curb and have to start all over again from scratch. Fortunately, at the time, I think I was maybe 23. And so I had a lot of energy. I didn't have any commitments where, you know, I had a, a, a spouse or children. That, you know, I needed to care for so I could take some risk. And I said, all right, well, let's start it again from scratch, but this time I'm going to learn from my mistake. And so that was 2005. I started Advantage Media in 2005. In 2016, we formed a joint venture with Forbes and we created Forbes Books. So Forbes Books is the name and the brand that we go to market with, but the company Advantage Media still lives on today and we have a large book of business for customers through our Advantage Media brand and a pretty large amount of business through our Forbes Books brand as well. And since that time, that's been now almost 18 years, it's of course been a journey and it's not been a straight path up. There's been a lot of mistakes, a lot of lessons learned, but I'm amazed to say that I'm 18 years into the same business. Wow.

J**Jason Duff** 20:04

Well, congratulations. That's— yeah, it's an awesome story. One thing, if we could kind of circle back to it, you just casually mentioned Forbes. Forbes is a big name. How did you— how did you— big name— enter into that? Relationship with Forbes?

A**Adam Witty** 20:21

Yeah. So, I was introduced to an executive at Forbes kind of by happenstance. Let's call it luck. Okay. And I'm a great believer in luck. The harder you work, the luckier you get. And so, I meet this executive from Forbes and I said, "You guys are the biggest business media brand in the world. You publish the biggest business magazine in the world. Why don't you publish business books? And they laughed. And this individual said to me, selling magazines is hard enough. The last thing that I want to do is sell books too. And our business model is a bit different from traditional book publishing. We like to call our model independent publishing where we really support CEOs and entrepreneurs and leaders and we help them build their authority. We help them create thought leadership and publishing a book is a really great way to build thought leadership. And those authors, they will pay us to help them accomplish those goals. Which means that we make money on every single book we publish, whether it sells 5 copies or whether it sells 5 million copies. Our business model is different. And because of that, Forbes found it extremely interesting and intriguing. And the pitch that I made is that if you combined the Forbes brand with the Advantage Media business model and put them right on top of each other, you know, 1 + 1 could equal 10.

J**Jason Duff** 22:12

Sure. Yeah.

A**Adam Witty** 22:13

Thank you.

J**Jason Duff** 22:14

You know, for many of the small business owners that are listening right now, do you think there are opportunities for more of that reaching out to brands? If it's not Forbes, are there other opportunities to build that credibility in those relationships, licensing and using someone else's brand?

A**Adam Witty** 22:31

You know, Jason, I have come to believe very strongly that brand is not a luxury, brand is a necessity. And I believe that as, as many products or services or industries get more commoditized, meaning there's just so many people that seem to offer the same thing, brand becomes far, far more important. And, you know, brand trust and brand loyalty is actually going up. It's not going down. And especially younger people, whether that's millennials or whether it's Gen Z, they have very strong brand affinity and brand preferences. And brand drives purchase decision. So I really believe that, you know, if you're a smaller business that doesn't have a brand that is as well known that perhaps finding a bigger company that has a brand that is respected and people know and finding an opportunity where you could create something with that brand that otherwise would not have existed before and look for that 1 1 10 type of situation, I think is a really smart idea.

J**Jason Duff** 23:53

And I think you've seen that since you moved from Advantage Media and have expanded to add on Forbes Books. How has that translated to the growth of your company?

A**Adam Witty** 24:05

Yeah, it's been significant. And the business that we're in is not easy, meaning writing and publishing books for people, it's not an easy business. I think a lot of people look at it from the outside in and say, "Oh, that seems pretty easy." But you really—

J**Jason Duff** 24:23

Doesn't that every industry? I feel like that's the thing. It's like every industry, "You must just print money over there." It must be so easy.

A**Adam Witty** 24:31

Yeah. And, you know, we're dealing with people's, you know, emotional being, right? This is the book they always wanted to write. It's very personal to them. Sometimes they don't exactly know what it is that they want to write, but they kind of have this feeling inside of them. And so it's our job to try to figure out what that is and distill it and then turn it into a book that they're really excited about. Well, that's not easy. And then once you have this beautiful, wonderful book that's been created, well, now you've got to promote it and you've got to get people to buy it. Well, that's not easy either, right? And so growing a business like ours isn't easy. And, you know, in many ways, if I knew then what I know now, I would certainly think about it differently. Because it's not an easy business to be in. But when you're able to add a brand like Forbes on top of it, it does make a lot of hard things much easier.

J**Jason Duff** 25:38

And can you give us some scale and scope in the number of employees that work in your firm and just kind of the growth that you have been seeing in your industry and your company?

A**Adam Witty** 25:48

Yeah, exactly. So, we're a significant 8-figure business. We have 75 full-time team members. Most of the ghostwriters are freelance. So, they're 1099 and the reason is books are so different in topic and genre, you know, finding one writer that you could have on payroll as a full-time employee that could do the wide variety of books, it's really difficult. Yeah, I imagine. And so that's why at least for the ghostwriters, freelancers are the bulk of the people that we employ for the book writing. But outside of that, we have 75 team members that are doing everything from marketing to sales to editing to design to printing to packaging to promotion to media services. Because once you have the book, what are you gonna do with it? And, you know, how do you really use it to build your authority and build your thought leadership? And that's where public relations and digital media and, you know, even doing things like what we're doing now, a podcast, really make a big, big difference. So 75 team members, we're in the process of continuing to grow. Most of our growth over our 17-year history has been largely organic. And, you know, right now our growth plan. We have a strategic plan. It's called Double Double. And we want to 4x the size of our business, which we think we can do over the next 5 years. So, man, I mean, you know, as long as you're in the game, keep climbing.

J**Jason Duff** 27:29

Well, and you just launched a new book. Tell us about that.

A**Adam Witty** 27:33

Yeah. Well, I've got to represent what I advocate to our Authors. And, you know, it's kind of like the Hair Club for Men. I'm not only the president, I'm also a customer.

J**Jason Duff** 27:46

I love that. And your hair looks great, by the way.

A**Adam Witty** 27:49

Oh, thank you. Yeah. So yeah, I, I, I write and publish books because I believe in the power of authorship. I believe that you can't spell authority without the word author. And this is now the 5th book that I've done. So, I'm going to brag like any parent, meaning parent of a book, *The Authority Advantage: Building Thought Leadership Focused on Impact, Not Ego*. And, you know, Jason, it's actually a really simple idea. And the idea is this, that when you become a thought leader with something to teach rather than an operator with something to sell, people become far more receptive to your message. You know, when you're trying to sell somebody something, the first reaction is for people to get defensive and to put up their guard because, oh, Jason's trying to take money out of my pocket, right? And that's what advertising and most marketing is. I'm trying to convince you to buy my thing. And, you know, look, most people are skeptical and most people assume that, oh, you're trying to take my money. You may not have my best interest at heart. So I need to be very cautious when I'm listening to what you have to say. Now, on the other side of the coin, it's like, hey, I'm not trying to sell you anything. I'm just trying to share with you what I know. I'm trying to teach you based on my experiences and my insights, and I'm trying to give. And if there is something in my message that I share with you that can be helpful to you, God bless. When you take that tact, people immediately trust. There's no barrier whatsoever that goes up, and people assume rightly that you have their best interests at heart. And so in this case, I've written a book which teaches leaders how to build themselves into being that authority, that thought leader with lots of specific practical tactics that they can execute that will get them results. Now, look, I'll be honest. My hope is that people will read my book and they'll say, this is so cool. Man, I would love to have the help of Forbes Books. Sure, Adam, can, can you help me? Right? Yeah, that would be great. And what I know through experience is that will happen. But, but my goal with this book isn't to say, Jason, you got to do a book and you got to do it with me. My goal is to teach you, to help you, and then you'll shoot— you'll choose for yourself if you decide to go down this path. Hey, the guy that wrote that book, he seemed pretty smart. Like, we should call him.

J**Jason Duff** 30:55

If you were to give the quick advice in the Cliff Notes for that person that is thinking about writing the book, kind of the first place to get started, what would that be?

A**Adam Witty** 31:06

Well, the first place to get started is this, uh, what is keeping your target audience awake at night? So, if you're gonna write a book, then it's gotta be valuable to some segment of people. If you're creating a book to build your authority and to grow your business, then it would probably be helpful if that book provided advice and insight to help your target customer. Yeah. So, the target customer of your business, What's keeping them awake at night? What problems are they running into? And, you know, what solution does the product or service that your company offers, what does that solve for them? And so using a book as a vehicle to answer the questions that are keeping your target customer up at night, And then where appropriate, kind of threading how what you and your business do can help solve some of those problems. That's probably the place to start. A lot of people I meet, Jason, they say, oh man, I have been dying and dreaming of writing this book my whole life and that's what I'm going to do. And my question is, who cares? Besides you, right? Now, if you don't care if you sell any books or not, not a problem, then, then go at it. But if you actually want to have a book that teaches, that makes a difference, that has an impact, it's gotta solve or answer to a problem that people have. And that's why I say the big question is, what's keeping your target customer up at night?

J**Jason Duff** 33:00

Love that. And Adam, I've heard you say before when you speak to audience that one of the best and most valuable business cards that you can have is a book. Can you share what are some ways you've seen people leverage their book to build their business and to make more money or get more credibility?

A**Adam Witty** 33:21

Yeah, lots of ways. So, number one, publicity, right? PR. Earned media. When you are the author of a book, you are not seen as a salesperson trying to promote yourself. You're seen as a thought leader trying to teach something. And the media care about what authors think because they're seen as experts. So when you have a book, it's a lot easier to get PR. That's one thing. Second would be speaking. If you speak, if you want to speak, when you write the book on the topic, you're the person that they're gonna call to come and speak. And then after you speak, now you have a book that everybody in the audience can take home with them. You mentioned business cards. I don't really like giving out business cards if I can help it because it's like a tiny little advertisement.. But I love giving out copies of my book to help educate people on topics that they're interested in. Feels like a gift. Yeah. And it feels like a gift. Why does it feel like a gift? Because last time I checked, when I go to Amazon and I want to buy a book, I have to pay for it. I've never met anybody that pays for other people's business cards. Yeah. So, that's a great way, you know, in your book, and in this book in particular, I've got 250 pages of content. So I can recycle and reuse and repurpose some of that content on my blog in white papers and articles that I then publish online. I can use the chapters of my book as topics for a podcast. So if you're ever thinking like, well, gee, what am I gonna say? Your book gives you a lifetime of things to say and a lifetime of things to talk about. I could go on, but I won't. Suffice it to say, if you're strategic, yes, a book is a very powerful business building tool.

J**Jason Duff** 35:31

Adam, we talked to a number of entrepreneurs and a number of CEOs the two types of brain types can be very different. You're someone that I've really admired that has been both, but what do you identify as?

A**Adam Witty** 35:50

So, I would tell you today, I think my identification has morphed. I would identify more today as a CEO than an entrepreneur. Now, entrepreneurship is my roots. I started something from scratch with no guarantee of success. I don't say that as a badge of honor because then anybody, if they want that bad enough, they can do that. But I'm grateful for having to do something with no script, with no game plan, with no blueprint, with very few resources. The resourcefulness, the ingenuity, the creativity that it forces you to have to bring to the table, it's a powerful, it's a powerful journey that a person goes through. That being said, to really scale a business, you've got to put on the CEO hat more than the entrepreneur. And really, the CEO hat is facilitating an environment of people working together, supporting each other, collaborating and communicating with each other, dare I say, loving each other. To achieve a common goal that people are unified and clear about and being that motivating force and that facilitating force. And I actually have found that I really like it.

J**Jason Duff** 37:39

Sounds easy enough.

A**Adam Witty** 37:43

And so now, you know, we're 100% focused on, okay, you know, we're a significant 8-figure business. But how do we become a 9-figure business or greater? Yeah, well, that's much more about probably wearing much more of a CEO hat than an entrepreneur hat. Now, you've got to continue to be resourceful. You've got to continue to be creative. You've got to continue to have your ear to what is the market and what is the customer telling you they want. And those are some really innate entrepreneurial traits, which is one reason why founder-led companies that have scaled, right? And I can think of Apple, I can think of Chick-fil-A, I can think of Southwest Airlines, right? These are iconic companies that grew to be multi-billion-dollar companies with the founder still in charge as the CEO, I think that if you can combine the trait of the CEO who's the facilitator with the trait of the entrepreneur who is the creative, resourceful, kind of ingenious, like, okay, how do we pivot? How do we change to continue to stay ahead of the curve? When you can combine those two things, man, that can be pretty powerful. And if you don't have the other trait, then you probably have to either hire somebody or have a business partner that's pretty good at the opposite.

J**Jason Duff** 39:17

Yeah, great advice. Adam, you've been to Bellefontaine and we've been friends for a number of years. You were here in the early days and you have also been back to visit incrementally over the last, you know, 15 years. From your perception, what has changed and what are ways that we have worked together and learned by masterminding and sharing between each other that have made our businesses stronger.

A**Adam Witty** 39:43

I've been to Bellefontaine many times, and the biggest thing that I would say is when you look over a period of, call it, 15 years, the transformation is incredible. When you look at it in days or weeks or even months, it doesn't seem like a whole lot's changed. And so, for entrepreneurs, I think that, and it's not very entrepreneurial to be patient. Patience is not a natural trait for entrepreneurs. And in many ways, that's a good thing, right? In many ways, that's a good thing. But as you get bigger, patience does become important. And if you can have that long-term vision, which, you know, Jason, you've had with Bellefontaine to transform a community, to transform a city, it is not going to happen overnight. It's not going to happen over a year. And candidly, it's probably not going to happen over 5 or maybe even 10 years. You've got to be a bigger, longer-range thinker than that.. And you have been. And now, you know, you're 20-plus years into Bellefontaine. The transformation, it's 180 degrees from what it was 20 years ago. But most people would've given up because they wouldn't have been patient enough to see all of that through. So, that's what I have learned and appreciated and admire so much about you. And I think it is a trait that entrepreneurs need to keep in mind and need to remember. What I have learned together with you is, one, the power of relationships, the power of relationships to truly be life enhancers. And secondly, you know, what you learn from others. Jason and I are in a peer group. Some people call it a mastermind group. And Jason and I and 5 other entrepreneur CEO friends have come together and met twice a year for 12 or 13 years now. And it's amazing when you have other people to get feedback from, to get help, and to really just get clarity of thought from, it's amazing the impact that can make for yourself and for your business.

J**Jason Duff** 42:25

I love that. I know we're wrapping up or heading towards the end of the episode. Thank you, Adam. Just really great nuggets and advice today. And particularly for those that are listening that maybe have been on the sidelines around, you know, I've always wanted to publish the book, you providing some really practical steps and ideas of how to get started and how to really identify that audience that has that—what keeps them up at night. I love that statement that you shared. And then also with sharing the book today, *The Authority Advantage*, that's available on Amazon. And, you know, it probably has a website associated with that too. Is that right?

A**Adam Witty** 43:02

It does. If you go to books.forbes.com, you will see lots of information about *The Authority Advantage*.

J

Jason Duff 43:10

Awesome. I appreciate it so much. Great pitch.

A

Adam Witty 43:13

Yeah.

J

Jason Duff 43:13

You know, I appreciate your perspective on engaging with mentors and how to approach the bigger brands and breaking through the noise. Honestly, I mean, establishing credibility is getting increasingly more difficult, in my opinion, because there's just so much more out there. Social media, so much digital noise, you know. But the way you, you talked about it and providing value to people first, and then if they decide to do business with you, that's great. But if not, have a good day, you know. Um, I, you know, I love that. I appreciate that. And I think that's gonna be valuable for a lot of people. Um, if you had to call out one professional development resource that was impactful for you, what would it be?

A

Adam Witty 43:51

One? Oh my gosh. So, um, I'm not gonna give just one. I can't.

J

Jason Duff 43:59

It's not possible.

A

Adam Witty 44:00

But I will share a couple of books that have really had a dramatic impact on my life. They're business books. The first one is a book called Scaling Up. If you're trying to scale or grow your business, Scaling Up is a fabulous book. Another book called Who, W-H-O, by Jeffrey Smart. If you want to hire the very best people, this book gives such a clear and concise blueprint on how you do it. That has changed my life. Many, many years ago, I read this book, The Discipline of Market Leaders. The Discipline of Market Leaders. Sounds like a boring topic. It was written by a really smart person. But here's what he said. He said there's 3 types of companies in the world. There's product innovators, there's customer intimate businesses, and there's operationally efficient businesses. Operationally efficient, think Walmart. Product innovator, think Target or Target. Customer intimate, think about Nordstrom where they still have salespeople that truly have a book of business with clients. You can only be one. You can't be all three. The mistake that companies make is they try to be good at all of them. It is absolutely impossible. You pick one and then you say to hell with the rest of it. And that book really dramatically changed my thinking from a strategy perspective of how I see business. So, those are a couple of books, man. I'm a big Audible guy. I try to go to the gym every morning and I could be listening to Hard Rock and AC/DC. But instead I'm listening to biographies, the Small Nation Podcast, and the Small Nation Podcast. All of these things are making me better. And man, anytime you have downtime at the gym or in a car or on a train or on a plane, like whether it's Audible or anything else, like learn, use that time to learn. Because, you know, until they put me in the ground, I'll never stop learning because there's still so much I got to figure out.

J

Jason Duff 46:22

I love that. Thanks for sharing that. And normally I just ask our guests to plug, you know, their business and things, but specifically, if you are, uh, someone looking to get a book written, one, or two, you are someone interested in copywriting, where are those avenues that people can get connected with you?

A

Adam Witty 46:40

Yeah, so, uh, you can visit our company at books.forbes.com. Uh, you can visit me online at adamwitty.com. It's A-D-A-M witty, W-I-T-T-Y, .com. And my social media platform is LinkedIn. Got it.

J

Jason Duff 46:59

I give him a rough time about that. He's so busy in life and all of these book tours that he's not the most frequent poster. Well, you probably are the most avid Facebook person out there. I make up for it, don't I, Adam?

A

Adam Witty 47:13

You do. You do. You, you handle it for both of us.

J

Jason Duff 47:16

Yeah, seriously. Cool.

A

Adam Witty 47:19

So, uh, any of those places, I'd love to connect and, uh, engage with anybody listening.

J

Jason Duff 47:24

Perfect. Thanks so much for your time, man. We really appreciate it. Adam, just thanks for being a great friend. Great content today. Uh, just appreciate you being on. And for those that are heading to Charleston, South Carolina, what's the big thing that— one thing that they've got to see that you just think is one of the coolest things in town?

A

Adam Witty 47:44

Well, the first thing I'll say as an entrepreneur, because I am still an entrepreneur, uh, I and two business partners own two boutique hotels in downtown Charleston. So the first thing they need to do is they need to make sure they come see our hotels and stay with us as our guests.

J

Jason Duff 48:00

Give us the names.

A

Adam Witty 48:01

Uh, the Ashley.

J

Jason Duff 48:03

Ashley.

A**Adam Witty** 48:03

Okay, the Ashley. And not opening until November of 2023, the Nicholas.

J**Jason Duff** 48:09

The Nicholas. And in the flip side, you're coming to Rainbow Row Bell Fountain, which was the inspiration of a visit to Charleston, South Carolina. And now we have 7 luxury Airbnbs that just came online last week. So again, for the listeners, you see how we're masterminding between learning with each other.

A**Adam Witty** 48:29

So, so if there's one thing that you're going to come see in Charleston Charleston. There's so many things to see, but I will say the Angel Oak Tree. Now, the Angel Oak Tree is technically on Johns Island, which is just right outside of downtown Charleston. It's an oak tree that is estimated to be 400+ years of age. It's ginormous, and, and the legend has it is that it's the oldest oak tree still like in good shape today, maybe in the country. Why I would recommend visiting it is because when you see this tree that is 400 years old, it puts into perspective our own lives. And the perspective that it gives me is that the things that we worry about, the things that we agonize over, in the grand scheme of time and the grand scheme of life, are no bigger than a pebble or a speck of sand. And so why should we, with this small amount of time we have on Earth, why should we get so worked up about things that in the grand scheme of things are so inconsequential? When you see this magnificent tree that has, that has outlived humans, you know, 5, 6, 7, 8 generations ago, it helps you appreciate that we shouldn't sweat the small stuff.

J**Jason Duff** 50:06

Yeah, great way to end the show. A little bit of philosophy. Thank you, Adam. All right, well,

E**Ethan DeLeon** 50:10

thank you 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 podcast and even the Small Nation YouTube channel. I hope you're able to pull some value from that conversation, and we 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. Stay tuned to Small Nation on social media to keep up with all the cool projects that are happening here. And until next time, this is Ethan with the Small Nation podcast signing off. Thanks everyone.