

## MASTERS Podcast Club, September 2020

**John DiJulius**

Chief Revolution Officer



**John DiJulius** is an authority on world-class customer experience, international consultant, keynote speaker, and best-selling author of five books. As a successful entrepreneur and the founder of three businesses, John is a mentor with credibility. In this interview, **Winn Claybaugh** and John had a blast going back and forth on a variety of topics related to relationship building. Their banter is fast-moving and fun!

**Winn:** Hey everybody, Winn Claybaugh here and welcome to another wonderful issue of MASTERS. I'm so, so grateful that, after this many years, I'm still having the opportunity to sit down with some wonderful, talented, smart, smart people. And I love smart people because I've never considered myself to be the smartest person in a room and guess what? I don't have to be because I have friends like John DiJulius, who is joining us today. And we're doing this virtually, which is different for me because for 22 years I've always been doing MASTERS face to face. But at least I get to see your face and we're doing this through our computers. You're at home in, where, in Cleveland?

**John:** Yeah, Cleveland, Ohio.

**Winn:** Okay, and I looked it up. John, the first time that I sat down to interview you was in the year 2000, so 20 years ago. How did you become so smart 20 years ago?

**John:** I don't know. I think you made me sound smart. I can't imagine what I could have shared with anyone 20 years ago. Man, I—

**Winn:** You got to—

**John:** I apologize when people tell me they heard me speak last year. I'm like, "Oh my God." Like I always feel like I'm smarter today than I was a year ago and hopefully I will feel like that a year from today.

**Winn:** Yeah. My gosh, if we're not getting better then we just need to hang it up and say good-bye, let somebody else take over, right?

**John:** Absolutely. Absolutely.

**Winn:** Yeah but, at least at this point in my career, there are 20-year-olds that can't keep up with me. I'm 61 and they, "Oh, I'm so tired." I'm like, "You're tired? You're brand new. Why are you so tired? I'm 61; I'm still ready to go." So

thank goodness, John, that we still have that momentum, that we're excited to be able to share information with people. And the fact that you are not only a successful business owner, but you're out sharing your ideas. And I know speakers who are brilliant, brilliant on stage and they talk about things like leadership and customer service and culture, and yet they don't have a business. They don't have one employee but they're talking about leadership. I'm like, "That was great in theory but how can you back that up?" How important is it for you to maintain your successful businesses? Because if they're not successful then you're going to lose credibility.

John: Yeah, over 30 years I've built three companies, all built on world-class customer service, 150 employees, and I call them my living laboratories and fail a lot but it does give me the credibility to understand that you have to balance efficiency, productivity, cash flow, and delivering an exceptional experience that can make price irrelevant. So it's not just, "Well, why aren't you doing this? You know, just do this." So one of the examples I use is anytime we implement something for someone else, it has to meet four criteria. It has to be no cost. It has to have a very simple to-do because everybody's job, from frontline to anyone, is very complicated so we don't want to make it more complicated. The third thing, it has to have zero impact on productivity, meaning this can't add 10 seconds to a phone call, a meeting, an interaction, whatever that may be. And then the fourth thing, it has to be a wow to the customer, where the customer's like, "Wow, that's unusual. I don't get that anywhere else." So that's important. And so when I can come from that, people immediately know I have a business because that's important to me. If all of a sudden you're slowing everyone down and it's costing a ton of things to do, we're not going to be profitable.

Winn: So you're not asking members of your audience to do something that you, yourself, aren't already practicing and trying to implement yourself?

John: No, no, no; not at all. That would be hypocritical and not the best way to point them.

Winn: Well. I need to share with our listeners a bit more information about who you are, so obviously I'm going to read here. John is the authority on world-class customer experience. He is an international consultant, keynote speaker, bestselling author of five customer-service books; I could barely come up with one book, how did you do five? I'm excited to talk about—

John: What else do you do between midnight and 4 am?

Winn: Oh my gosh.

John: I mean— *[Laughs]*

Winn: Sleep to try to get enough energy to be wide awake and ready to go for an eight-year-old at six in the morning; that's what I'm doing.

John: Ahh.

Winn: You're going to have grandchildren soon so just remember, you're going to be a grandpa soon. *The Relationship Economy: Building Stronger Customer Connections in the Digital Age*, which I can't wait to talk about. Some of the companies that you have worked for or done presentations for are the Ritz Carlton, Lexus, Starbucks, Nordstrom, Nestle, Marriott Hotels, Celebrity Cruises, Anytime Fitness, Harley Davidson. I mean, it doesn't get better than that. Do you have all of those companies—

John: And MASTERS.

Winn: Oh, and MASTERS! And MASTERS.

John: Yeah, let's not leave them off the list.

Winn: Do you have all of those companies tattooed on your body? You need all those logos. I know there's a Harley Davidson—

John: Yeah.

Winn: —logo, yeah. Okay. You are the founder of three businesses: The DiJulius Group, which is an international customer-service consulting firm; John Roberts Spa, a chain of upscale salons in northeast Ohio, which has repeatedly been named one of the top 20 salons in America. That's quite a lot right there. And then also your nonprofit, Believe in Dreams, which I'm absolutely going to ask you about. So let's just jump into this because you heavily believe on the importance of relationships and the fact that you have the word *relationship* in the title of your new book, *The Relationship Economy*; talk to us about why relationships in the world of customer service are so important, especially when the world nowadays is very, very focused on digital and on social media marketing and seems like it's pulling away from the value of relationships.

John: Yeah, listen, today's illiterate are those who have an inability to make a meaningful connection with others and that's the sad truth. There's a seismic shift that's been happening in the last 10 to 15 years, and with all the technology that's coming and changing our lives and the benefits and conveniences, it's come at a significant cost. And that cost is human interactions, which is most meaningful to customer satisfaction, employee experience, and just overall personal happiness.

Winn: But you were talking about this long before there was the so-called digital age; long before there was social media, which we're going to get into the benefits of that, but absolutely the pitfalls of social media. You were talking about the importance of relationships with customer service, again, over 20 years ago. So what's changed in the last 20 years?

John: That I've become irrelevant [laughs]. I don't know. I'm one of those guys, I stay in style so eventually when it comes back in I look like I'm ahead of the curve. No, really, I mean when we opened our first business almost 30 years ago we had the three no's, right? No money, no customers, no employees.

Winn: [Laughs]

John: And how do we compete with everyone? We couldn't out-build a fancier building, we couldn't out-advertise, we couldn't out-spend but I knew we could just provide an experience that was exceptional. And we didn't want to be known—back then my business is and was the salon experience. And the goal wasn't to be the best salon experience you could have, because that's kind of irrelevant, because if you're coming to our salon, you're then not going to my nearest competitor and comparing. So we wanted to be the best experience you had in your day. So when you went to the doctor's office or met your friend for lunch or wherever you were going, we wanted you to be like Dorothy on *The Wizard of Oz*, clicking your heels wishing, you know, why can't they treat you like John Roberts just treated you? That was it back then, and then as we grew and got deeper pockets we realized that was still the best investment, is the experience, and that did more marketing for us than any marketing campaign ever could. So that grew. And then what started happening in the mid-90s and where our paths crossed is people started asking me to speak and I just took it as flattery but it eventually, every time I spoke, it led to three or four new speaking opportunities. And then it took me outside the salon industry and then I wrote my first book, which really took me from being a salon owner that spoke to a speaker that owns salons, and that kind of is what took me out of the salon industry day-to-day.

Winn: Well, the majority of the people that are listening to this right now are not from the salon industry. And I love that you have a life outside the salon industry we're all grateful for, because that was the platform that we all used to learn how to be successful people in life; it was the beauty industry, and so we are always grateful for that. But anybody listening to this, so that nobody thinks that they can check out right now, everybody is in business for themselves. Even if you work for somebody else—if you're an employee at a salon, you're an employee at a company—you have a brand, you have one employee, and that employee is you. And for people to approach it that way, even if you work for a company or a store or a business that does not have successful systems for brilliant customer service, the fact that you could be the person, to our listeners now, that you could be the person that implements that and instills that in your company, in your store, in your business, absolutely is going to serve you well. But I like what you said, John, that your customers in your salon aren't comparing you to another salon because they don't go to another salon but they do go to restaurants, they do go to retail stores, they do go to the doctor's offices, and so they're comparing their customer service experience in all those other businesses with your business. So can you just, before we jump into this, send a strong message out to the individuals

listening to this, why it's so important that they take on your advice and your information and your systems to build their own brand?

John: Well, how good any company, as a customer service, comes down to one thing and one thing only: your service aptitude. From the CEO, founder, president, to the newest employee that's going to start interacting with your customers next week, maybe in the warehouse, internal, external; it doesn't matter. And the real paradigm shift is where service aptitude comes from. Most people, most leaders, think it's innate, that you're born with it: you just grow up. And that's the farthest thing from the truth. Service aptitude comes from three places. One, our previous life experiences. And I don't know about you, Winn, but I didn't grow up driving a Mercedes Benz when I got my license. I wasn't flying first class and I wasn't staying at five-star resorts. Yet the first job, the first 10, 20 jobs I got, I was expected to give that type of experience to customers, patients, clients, tenants, and I didn't know what world class looked like. I mean, I dined at Taco Bell and McDonalds, right? The second place service aptitude gets shaped is previous work experiences and unless we have a direct pipeline to former Ritz-Carlton, Disney, and Chick-fil-A employees, which none of us do, that means our employees have worked somewhere else that wasn't world class and they might have been brainwashed to not trust the customer, not let customers take advantage of them. Well, those first two things, previous life experiences and previous work experiences, we can't control, right? I mean, we have no control. The only thing we control is the third place and that's what we do with our new employees after we hire them. And most businesses, I love to ask this question: "If you were to hire my son tomorrow to be in a customer-facing position—phones, customer-service rep, whatever it may be—how much training are you going to give him?" And people say, "Two days, two weeks, two months." Great. That's not the answer I'm looking for. The answer I'm looking for is, of those 48 hours, 400 hours, 2,000 hours, how much of it is product knowledge, operational stuff versus soft skill: building relationships, showing compassion and empathy, making a brilliant comeback when we drop the ball. And in most cases it's 98 percent operational and processes and less than 2 percent "Hey, young Winn, see that sign in the back? It says 'Exceed Customers Expectations'? Yeah, go do that." And, you know, you tell 100 people that, yeah, 100 different interpretations are made.

Winn: It's that stock photo poster that you can buy. It has a picture of an eagle soaring, right?

John: *[Laughs]* Right.

Winn: There's our customer-service training right there. Go look at that poster *[laughs]*.

- John: Right. And so the way to put a bow on that is, it's not your employee's responsibility to have high-service aptitude, it's yours, the company, the leader, to make sure you train them to have high-service aptitude.
- Winn: Right, right. I remember a very successful salon owner saying that in hiring a new team member for his company he would take them on a very fancy dinner. Pick them up in a limousine and take them to a fine-dining restaurant so that they could experience that. "And how do you feel right now?" "Oh I feel amazing!" "Well, how you feel right now is how we want all of our customers to feel after they've had an experience in our company, in our store." So we expose them, because you're right: some of us don't have that exposure or we didn't have that exposure. We're trying to deliver customer service but we haven't felt that or experienced it ourselves. We weren't staying at the Ritz-Carlton. I quote you in my book and I think that you said—I should probably go back and read my own book—I think in that quote you talked about how Disney, the company Disney, is absolutely known for impeccable customer service and clean environments and the happiest place on earth, but you believe that maybe only 5 percent of those employees that work at Disney already come with that skillset. Can you talk about that?
- John: Yeah, I love to ask this question. I say, "If you're going to build a world-class customer-service organization, be it a professional service firm, be it a restaurant, be it a hot dog stand on the corner of Fifth and Main, what is more important: (a) the hiring of new employees or (b) the training and culture you would put them in at?" And I would always say, "Well, before you answer, let me share with you the obvious answer is both, right? Without a doubt, you can't achieve this unless you do both, but I'm going to force you to put one extra percent on one of them: 51 percent." And typically the majority of the audience will go with (b) training and culture, and I agree. And I say, "Now those of you that select hiring, don't get mad at me. You absolutely have to have an unbelievable, rigorous screening process. I call that the 30-foot-high fence with barbed wire on it: we don't want to be for just anyone. But do we really think the Disneys of the world found 50,000 cast members born to serve? No, I don't think that there's 500 human beings walking the planet. But here's what Walt said, that I love, that I think everyone should plagiarize and change to their name, their company name. He says, "We don't put our people in Disney, we put Disney in our people." I love that.
- Winn: Oh, that's brilliant.
- John: Right?
- Winn: That's brilliant.
- John: You put your brand in people and then they become the guardians of your brand, the guardians of your experience. And they call each other out and say, "Hey, Winn, new employee, no, no we don't do that here; no, no, no. You

don't point and tell someone where the bath—you take her to the restroom. You don't say, 'No problem,' you say, 'Certainly, my pleasure.'”

Winn: So there's absolutely a system of scripts, of behaviors, and you want to hire the right people. And I love that analogy that you gave of you put a 30-foot—what did you call it? A 30-foot-high fence—

John: A 30-foot-high fence—

Winn: —with barbed wire?

John: With barbed wire, yeah.

Winn: Yeah, it's difficult to get in here. You want to work—

John: We're not for everyone, nor do we want to be.

Winn: —in my company? At my salon? It's difficult to get in and we make it difficult; you know, train, hire slow. But the importance of that training process and—you and a lot of other people, maybe not you; a lot of people call them soft skills and in my company we're trying to abandon that; we're trying to abandon calling them soft skills and instead adopting the term *essential skills*. Because when you get fired from a company it's usually because you screwed up with soft skills. There's nothing soft about being fired because you showed up to work as a jerk today. They call that a soft skill. Your attitude is a soft skill but you lost your job because of it. Nothing's soft about that.

John: I love that and I agree with it because it's not soft. Soft sounds like common sense and they're the least common thing that we could have. They're hard skills and they need to be taught and trained, just like you'd train your chefs on how to prepare the meal and your financial advisors on how to do the books.

Winn: Okay, I'm going to quote you, “As convenient as technological advances make our lives, they also have changed the way we communicate, behave, and think and have led to a dramatic decline in our people skills. As a society, we are now relationship disadvantaged.” You know, you walk into a restaurant, there's five people at dinner, and what are they all doing? They're all on their phones. Like the table is glowing underneath because they're all staring at a device. I was at dinner a while ago with this guy and he was on his phone a lot. I'm like, “What are you doing?” He's like, “Well, I'm posting to let people know that I'm at dinner with you.” So you're having this experience with a whole bunch of virtual people but you're not having it with me. And by the way, I took a shower to have dinner with you tonight. I left my family and drove 20 minutes to have an experience with you but you're not available to have an experience with me.

John: “Must be present to win.” That’s one of my favorite quotes. “Must be present to win.” Right? I’m so focused on the person I’m with, that you should be able to blow a firecracker off and I’m not going to realize it because eye contact, whatever it is—face to face, over the phone, via email—I am so engrossed in the person in front of me.

Winn: Well, how difficult is that for you personally? Not just in work, but in your personal life as well? You have kids, you’re a dad. You have hundreds of employees. How difficult is that for you to—I know you believe it but to actually really practice that? And I’ll tell you, we struggle. I have an eight-year-old little girl and I want to stay away from my device. I don’t want to be staring at a device when she is present. There’s no way I’m anywhere near that, but I want to work in that direction. And I look at that report that I get every single day that shows my screen time and I want that to go lower and lower and so you don’t hear any buzzes or what do they call those—notifications? What do they call those?

John: Notifications?

Winn: Yeah, there are no notifications set up so nothing is pinging or beeping on my phone. I turn all of those off so that that doesn’t draw my attention and tempt me. But how difficult is that for you personally, to practice that?

John: Oh, it’s so difficult and I’ve really had to put some rules and parameters in, even for me. One of my favorite quotes is, “The greatest gift we can give anyone is the gift of our attention.” And so that might look like when I’m driving—whether it’s at work or at home—I might drive, had a rough day at work or got beat up on the phone by a customer or whatever it may be, and I’ll pull into the garage and I may realize I can’t give the gift to my three boys right now so I’ll stay in the car for another 10 minutes with the car turned off, of course, but I want to come in and give them that gift. And so putting some rules in that there’s absolutely no phones allowed at the dinner table or no phones allowed in the restaurant. When they were young enough that I used to drive them to school or drive them anywhere, it was a less than 20-minute drive, Dad couldn’t get on the phone and make a phone call and they couldn’t be on the phone playing games or watching it. We actually had to have a conversation. So putting rules and not using it the last half hour of the night and the first hour of the morning just really helps making sure that we’re present. And when we’re making them breakfast or getting them off on their day, we’re not only asking the question, “How was school? How was your day?” but we’re really listening. It’s not just to ask just to ask.

Winn: Well, I’m 61. How old are you?

John: Fifty-six.



Winn: Okay. So now you have employees now that you hire that are twenty-something, correct?

John: Yeah. Yes.

Winn: So a lot of them, they grew up with social media, they grew up with some type of a device in their hands. What are you implementing in your own business and with your own employees in terms of guidelines and boundaries of when they're allowed to look at their device? Do you say, "Sorry, you can't bring your device into the building," or "You have to keep it in your locker"? What guidelines do you have?

John: I mean, we have *nevers* and *always*, and never is, never have your phone with you if you're with a client, a face to face. But the biggest thing is we're living in the touchscreen age and that's not generational specific. Old guys like me and you are using devices more than we ever have. And then obviously we have millennials, zoomers, and children using them and they've only grown up knowing those. But it's affected all our people skills and we have a whole generation that is relationship disadvantaged because they've only known the digital age: high-tech, no-touch experiences. Forty percent of employees are working for a boss that's younger than them, so all these things at no fault of their own. So make no mistake about it: the lack of people skills our society has today is the problem of business leaders to solve. And so the way you solve it is we have to train them on relationship-building techniques because they didn't get it at home, there's no class teaching it, and so if we want to be that outlier, that top 3 percent, we have to teach them what relationship building is. So it's a rigorous training program and we have five things that go with it. Four of them can be taught. One of them, all the training in the world isn't going to move it. So here's the five. Teaching how to be authentic. That is something that you have to teach because people have great BS detectors today. I know if someone's calling up and they have a hidden agenda, if your interest in others is genuine. The second one is having insatiable curiosity. The third one is having incredible empathy. The fourth one is must genuinely love people, and the fifth one is being a great listener. And again, if you can find employees with those, some of those, any of those; you're farther along. But I know for a fact that four of them can be taught, but all the training in the world isn't going to change—if you don't love others, I can't put you through any training course that could get you to love. That's the one thing your interview process has to catch and recognize.

Winn: So what you just shared, that's a really good road map, even for somebody who's looking for a job. You're looking to go work for a company, for them to use these five things, too. I want to look for a company, I want to find a boss who is authentic, who is curious, who is empathetic, who loves people and is also a great listener. So it's not just great training for team members but to be able to say that that's a great mantra for any kind of a business.

John: Spouse, significant other, right? Friend? I mean like—

Winn: There you go.

John: —do we want to hang out together if someone is void in any of those areas? Think about curiosity. If you never ask me about me, but every time we talk or go out for beers or whatever, it's all about Winn, Winn, Winn, right? All those things are just general human skillsets that we have to bring back and make important. I did a TED Talk called "Meet as Strangers, Leave as Friends."

Winn: Right.

John: And basically the whole premise was about—other than breathing in oxygen, I don't believe there's any greater skill we can work at, teach, teach our kids, teach our employees, than the ability to build an instant rapport with others, whether that be an acquaintance, friend, coworker, client, stranger in an elevator. Again, the problem is that this skillset is not taught anywhere. It's not a class, it's not anything, so how do we do that? Because we're all genetically coded to be preoccupied. It's my flight that got delayed, it's my client that's threatening to fire us, it's my sales guy that's asking for a raise, and it's my son that got in trouble at school. That's hard to turn off when you're talking to someone else and so that's why first we just have to realize everyone we come in contact with has an invisible sign above their head that says "Make me feel important." Right? Everyone does.

Winn: I love that one. Make me feel important.

John: And so I always say—there's Stephen Covey, I'm sure you've heard this quote, has said, "People don't listen with the intent of understanding; they listen with the intent of responding." Right? So true. So if you don't mind me going off a little here, scientists studied the human brain and they found that it takes the human brain a minimum of .6 seconds to formulate a response to something said to it. Then they studied hundreds and thousands of conversations and found the average gap between people talking was .2 seconds. So how am I—

Winn: Meaning so they weren't listening.

John: No, right? I mean one-third the time our brain—I had my answer ready minutes ago, I'm just waiting for you to come up for breath and *[claps his hands]* bam!

Winn: *[Laughs]*

John: I have no idea what you just said but I got what I want to tell you ready. So our system and what we teach our clients and my employees and my three boys is anytime you talk to someone, if you want to demonstrate that you've built a relationship, you have to know two or more things in their **FORD**. If you

know two or more things in the other person's FORD, F-O-R-D, if you know two or more things in the other person's FORD, you not only built a relationship, you own the relationship because to each and every one of us, our own FORD is our hot button; it's what gets us talking.

Winn: Okay, I want to get into what F-O-R-D stands for but I don't want to always come off as being someone who is bashing devices and iPhones because I've realized that there is a huge, big purpose. We all have them and we absolutely need them; can't operate, can't do business, can't send my daughter off to school, can't do a lot of things without having that, but all these things that you mentioned—being authentic, curiosity, empathy, loving people, great listener—all of those things are compromised if we're staring at a device.

John: Yeah, I love devices. I'm the biggest geek. I have everything: iPads and computers and iPhones and you name it. But whether I'm using it or it's face to face, you can still build relationships with it. And technology is not the enemy; using it to eliminate the human experience is.

Winn: Got it.

John: There's a company in Canada: Fido Wireless. And they are forcing their customers to use their self-service channels. Go on the website, use all those, to the point that if you want to call up and speak to them about a bill on your statement or you're having a problem with your phone and you need to talk to someone in support, they charge your account \$10. I mean, that's where you're taking it too far, where—

Winn: Wow!

John: —you're eliminating the human experience. There's a whole generation that just doesn't know or want to adapt to those self-service channels. Or what if I've just exhausted them and I just want my phone to work? I should be able to call a human being and get that for me.

Winn: Wow. So, FORD, F-O-R-D, what does that stand for?

John: Family: are they married, do they have kids, how old are their kids, what activity are their kids into? O: occupation. What's he or she do for a living, what's their title, how long have they been doing it, what's the name of their company? R is a lot of people's hottest buttons: recreation. What do you like to do with your free time: fitness, runner, hot yoga, teach little league soccer, dance, whatever it is. And then D: dreams. What's on their bucket list, what's their dream vacation, what's their charity that they love to give their time and money, and what's their encore career performance that they're working toward?

Winn: So F-O-R-D. Family, occupation—

John: Recreation.

Winn: Recreation and D, dreams. So you said that you train this to your kids, to your sons?

John: Yeah, if I see my son talking to you at an event or wherever, he knows that when he comes over, he better give me all the down-low on you because, like anything, adults like to say to kids, “Oh, how old are you, what do you do, blah, blah, blah?” and I want to make sure he’s not just taking that and he’s turning it back on to you so he’s not just throwing up on you or anyone. We have it and our clients have it—they put it in the CRM system so when they hear these things they can update it. Winn’s daughter just turned eight; she’s getting into soccer, dance, or ballet. Those are the hot buttons. You love talking about—we’ve communicated four or five times, once on the phone, couple times electronically, and you’ve sent me pictures of your drop-dead gorgeous daughter, right? And so those are things. And not making someone feel like a transaction: asking the fifth time you’ve talked to them, “I’m sorry, Winn, do you have kids?” I mean, how bad is that?

Winn: You could be offering the best service, the best product, and you ask that question, “Do you have kids?” and they’ve been there four or five times. “Is this your first time in?” “I’ve been here about 20 times.”

John: Right.

Winn: And I’m never coming back, by the way.

John: Right, or you come up and you say, “Hi John, I’m Winn,” and you hand out your—I’m like, “Why are you introducing yourself? I’ve worked with you like 16 times.” Listen, I don’t expect any of us to have—you know, I have a lousy memory but I can cheat and say, “Oh, Winn is from California and he’s been here five times and, oh, now I remember Winn.” But just walking up and acting like, “Winn? Winn? Which one of you is Winn?” is not a great experience.

Winn: You know, I’m the same way. I mean, I’m not going to release the video of this but, John, this my planner and everybody laughs at me: I still write everything down.

John: That’s hilarious.

Winn: I don’t do it digitally but what’s also written in here is information like that. People are like, “Winn, how did you remember that?” I’m like, “I didn’t remember a thing. I don’t even remember your birthday. I don’t remember anything but I called you on your birthday, right? I remembered that about you. Why? Because I wrote it down.” And so if you and I had a conversation today and it was something about something you’re struggling with or something you’re going through, guess what? I made a note to myself: “In a

week from now follow up with John to ask him about how that's going." Like I make notes about it because I know that that really, truly matters.

John: And you're right. You might be running your first marathon at the end of May. How cool would that be to circle back or send you an article about how to hydrate or whatever the night before or follow up the day after and say, "Winn, how was it?" "What was your time?" "Did you finish?" And Winn doesn't even remember telling someone about that.

Winn: Right. So I was wondering, because when you were talking about—what did you call them, the five things?

John: The art of building relationships.

Winn: The art of building relationships. It was authentic, curiosity, empathy, you have to love people, and be a great listener. I was wondering—

John: Yes.

Winn: Okay, well, how do you train or implement a system for your team members to be authentic, for them to be a great listener? But then you just gave us the tool: F-O-R-D. So this obviously is not just for your sons in building rapport—

John: No, no this is part of the training.

Winn: It's for the team.

John: Like I said—

Winn: Yeah, beautiful.

John: —we do a FORD audit and we'll look and see how many appointments you had, how many calls you had, how many meetings you had, and then we could pull up in Salesforce to see if you updated their FORD. Now, we'd have to go to your chisel and slate but most people are using computers today so we could just look up and see who your eleven o'clock call was and if you updated the FORD in their CRM system. That's the biggest one for curiosity: that if you're focused on people's FORD you're being curious, genuinely curious.

Winn: You talked about conversations: nevers and always. Nevers conversations, always conversations. What is that list all about?

John: Yeah, this was the most painful part of the research: just finding out the gap I was between my listening skills, probably what I thought my listening skills was, what they actually were, and what being a great listener was. I did everything wrong. Even recently as a few years ago and I still do things wrong but this really helped. So being a great listener first is—Tom Peters called it

having *fierce attention*. I love that word. So when you have fierce attention what that looks like is if you ask a question to someone and don't ask two to three follow-up questions, odds are you weren't listening. So what you want to have is a four-to-one ratio of questions asked versus answers.

Winn: I like that because a long time ago—here I'm name dropping right now—a long time ago some magazine called me, because I'd been doing podcasts in the beauty industry for 22 years, somebody called me the Larry King of the beauty industry and—

John: Wow!

Winn: —Larry read that and called me and said, "Hey, I need to teach you how to be Larry King." And so I went to his house and he said, "Okay, this is how you become Larry King." He said, "Never assume that you got the full answer from your one question." He says, "All you have to do is start the interview. It could be an hourlong interview and all you need is one question because that one question is going to guide you into another question, into another question, because in their answer they said a word or they said a story or they mentioned something and then you can build upon that word or that story or whatever and just keep on going from there; just build this whole branch, this whole tree, based on one question. So that's kind of what you're talking about there.

John: Larry King—

Winn: Don't assume that, yeah—

John: —the Godfather. Wow, that's cool!

Winn: I know.

John: That is so cool. Are you familiar with Chris Voss?

Winn: No.

John: I'm like just consuming everything this guy says, so it's the exact same thing. He was the chief FBI negotiator for terrorism.

Winn: Wow!

John: And so it's like what can he teach me about business? And it's a lot. Just like you said, he said, "All you have to do is ask one question and then you mirror." And so meaning, "What do you like to do with your time, Winn?" And you go, "Oh I love playing with my eight-year-old. We like to ... and it gives me such a high," and then he says there is just repeat, like kind of couple words of the last sentence. "Gives you such a high?" "Oh my God, like when I do this with her I'm in my—" Again, you never have to ask another question.

You're just mirroring a couple words and it just sends them off. And so to my point of being a great listener, there's a myth that being a sponge means you're a great listener, and they said that's the opposite. So being a sponge, what we probably think of is shut up and just let the other person talk and every so often say, "Uh-huh. Oh, uh-huh."

Winn: [Laughs]

John: And they're saying that's not a great listener. They're saying you don't want to be a sponge, you want to be a trampoline. And you kind of said it so yourself. Being a trampoline means I'm taking what you're saying and I'm helping you heighten your energy and depth by saying clarifying questions. "Winn, what made you even discover that?" And all of a sudden it just opens up the floodgates of Winn's excitement and passion. So being a trampoline instead of being a sponge.

Winn: I love that. So go back to fierce attention.

John: Nevers and always?

Winn: Oh yeah, nevers and always. And you mentioned—

John: I'm sorry.

Winn: —fierce attention. We're all over the place. How do we—

John: Yeah.

Winn: —keep up with ourselves?

John: Two ADD guys.

Winn: [Laughs] Great.

John: There's a squirrel!

Winn: It has served me well. ADD has served me well.

John: I agree, I agree.

Winn: [Laughs] I can keep up.

John: So here's some quick nevers and always. Never multitask; that's hard. Easier said than done. Never ask a question because you're dying to answer it. Like, "Hey, Winn, how was your weekend? Really? Let me tell you what I did!"

Winn: So these are all the nevers.

John: Right. Never finish the other person's sentence. I've always been so bad at that because I might know where you're going and I'm like you're painfully giving me too much detail. Never steal someone's thunder. Now this is one I was always guilty of but I thought it was for good intentions because I was showing that we had something in common but reading the research I could see. So let's say you have a young employee, 22 years old, and you know she was on vacation last week and you say, "Hey, where did you guys go on your ..." "Yeah, me and my husband took our four-year-old to Disneyland." And she's so excited and you're like, "Oh my God, we own a condo at Disneyland." Well, all of a sudden that just—what can she tell you about Disneyland, right? You spend three months a year there. So I would do things like that, thinking that would show that we had something in common. Shut up and just say, "Tell me about Disneyland. Where did you stay? Where did you go?" It's these painful things. Never share your accolades unless they are asked. So conversation always: Always remove any distractions. I'll give you a good example I've learned to do. If an employee comes into my office and says, "John, do you have a second? I'd like to ask you—" Or one of my sons says, "Dad, can I talk to you?" What I'll do is something counterintuitive. I'll say, "Yeah, Winn, hold on," and then I take my cell phone out of my pocket, which sounds like wait, what are you doing? And I'll say, "Hold on Winn," and I'll sit there and I'll turn my phone off and then I'll put it in my drawer. How do you feel as an employee, right?

Winn: Wow!

John: Wow, nothing's more important and it makes them feel really good. Listen with your eyes; always listen with your eyes. Instead of looking over their shoulder, looking at your screen, looking at your phone, just listen with your eyes. Always ask probing questions, clarifying questions: why, tell me more, can you give me an example, what does that look like? Show empathy and support in a nonjudgmental way. Always wait two seconds before responding because they might not be done and you should probably process the last thing they said. Always collect FORD and document it for future use, and always to commit to a follow-up when it's called for: an action plan in a specific amount of time. And that Chris Voss again, something I learned from him. When he was negotiating with terrorists and he was really working with the parents. So God forbid your child is in a foreign country and he's captured. They would say that the anxiety of the parent is worse than probably the anxiety of the captive because of the unknown. He said that when you provide predictability to someone, be it a customer or a parent that has a child being captive, it reduces their anxiety so much. And the example he said was, "Alright, Mr. Smith, here's what I'm going to do. When I hang up, I'm going to do A, B, C. I'm going to find out this and I'm going to call you back tomorrow at 10:00 am." He said when he did that or when his negotiators would do that, the parents were fine; like they were better. But anytime they weren't specific and gave them a specific time, the people would start freaking out; they'd go off the deep end. They would think, *Oh my God*,



*maybe they're negotiating 10 different people and I'm not a priority, and they would just lose their mind like we all would. And so it's so true with clients and employees of giving them predictability and following up and saying, "You know, I will let you know by the end of tomorrow. I'll have an answer for you by the end of tomorrow." And even if I don't have an answer, call them with an answer that, "Winn, I'm still checking. I don't want you to think I forgot; waiting for HR, waiting for whatever." So just little things like that.*

Winn: You know, as you're talking about this, there are several leaders that are popping into my head that I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh, so-and-so is brilliant at exactly what John is talking about right now." Luke Jacobellis, who is the president of Paul Mitchell, this man is brilliant with everything that you just said. Can I ask you something? I mean—

John: Anything.

Winn: Just the last 10 minutes of you talking is going to make this whole interview incredible. So these conversations, the nevers—

John: So should we cut the first 30 minutes?

Winn: No! No, but I want to know where does this live? Nevers and always, where can we find that list? What book is that in?

John: *The Relationship Economy*. Everything that I've been sharing with you is from *The Relationship Economy*.

Winn: So it's all from your brand-new book.

John: The newest book, yeah.

Winn: You talk about what you call "Are you in your client's foxhole?" metaphor. What is that about?

John: So I had a client of mine years ago, I went out to dinner with him, and he said, "I hope I die before my banker." I'm like, "What? Who says that?" Like, sadly, if my banker died, I wouldn't even send a sympathy card. I'm like, "What do you mean?" And this is what he said to me. He said, "He's such a trusted advisor that if I was thinking about painting my walls orange, corporate office, I would call him first." And then he says, "I'm pretty sure he doesn't know squat about paint or interior design but I know he knows someone that does." And man, when he said that, that hit me like, "That's what I want to be for my clients." I'm a one-trick pony. I know customer experience and if you want sales, motivation, leadership, I'll refer you out; that's just not me. But I do want them to think of me first when they need stuff and trust that I will be that resource. So we came up with this "Are you in your client—the CEO of your client—bomb shelter?" And so we all have a metaphoric bomb shelter. We have a personal bomb shelter where, if we were under attack, we'd take our

significant other, and most days, all three of my boys I would take. But the CEO bomb shelter only has room for two vendor partners. How confident are you that they will reserve a spot in their bomb shelter? So we talk about what it takes to be a partner that they can't live without. And first you'd better genuinely care about their business as much as they do. They should never meet anyone smarter at what you do than you, walking the planet. This is a big one. Love what you do and make it obvious. Okay? Like you wear your emotions on a sleeve. Like I love when I talk to you or even text you because the energy you exude. But I know a lot of people that, like, I'm like, "Do you like what you do?" "Oh, I love what I do." But they don't show it. Make it obvious, like—

Winn: Tell your face because I can't see it.

John: Right, right. Go ugly early. I think you said this earlier: "If it's bad news, open with it." Come out, be transparent, tell me what the situation is, and tell me how we're going to work to fix it.

Winn: As you're talking through all of this, it just is making me think that all this stuff, this is not soft stuff. These are the essential skills and what you're doing is you are laying it out for individuals who want to be successful in their own right. They want to be entrepreneurs or they want to be successful for the company that they work for; they want to move up that ladder quickly. This is exactly the training, the information that they need. But you're also laying out for us, any business owner or leader or manager, who's listening to this, you're giving them the training manual. This is how you train your people. This is how you're going to gain more customers. This is how you're going to retain your customers. Brilliant!

John: Yeah. Yeah, and the best part is, because I get to present it all the time, it's reinforcing with me because it's stuff that we've got to do, too, on a daily basis.

Winn: Well, I'm reminded of that. I have a little eight-year-old who reminds me of that all the time.

John: Yeah, she'll call you out.

Winn: She uses my own material against me. It's like, dang it!

John: *[Laughs]*

Winn: *[Laughs]* I tell this story about bitter or better, bitter or better, and she used that on me the other day: "Daddy, are you being bitter right now?" I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I'm not going to let you listen in on my conversations anymore."

John: So here's the deal: if Winn is booked, hire his daughter.

Winn: [Laughs] There you—

John: She could probably do the presentation as good.

Winn: That's great. That's great. Actually, her principal at her school said that. In front of a school assembly he said, "When I call in sick, Sofia will run the school." He said that in front of everybody.

John: Ahh, that's awesome!

Winn: I love it. Okay, I'm going to start to kind of wrap things up here. One of the things that I love about what you share is about making price irrelevant because some people think, *How I'm going to earn loyalty from my customer is I have to compete on price only. If I'm the cheapest, if my customer's charging \$20, I'll charge \$18 and that will win the loyalty. They'll switch to my company, to my brand, to my product, and I'll keep them for life.* Talk about that.

John: Yeah, what we do, when I say the DiJulius Group does, what my businesses bank on, is we make price irrelevant. Now this is what making price irrelevant doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that we can double our prices or even raise them 30 percent and not lose existing or potential customers. What it does mean is based on the experience your brand consistently delivers at every touch point—and that's not dependent on if I get Winn or Lance or Nancy—no matter who I get, at every touchpoint. I have no idea what their competition charges. If you think about that, we're all price sensitive, personally and professionally. And if you've been like me, I've driven three extra miles to save 50 cents on something, not realizing I just lost in that exchange. But I also have a few people I love to do business, I've been doing business with them 25, 30 years, that I'll recommend. "Oh you got to use this, you got to that," and sometimes people say, "Well, how much do they charge, because my guy charges—" And that's where I'm embarrassed; I have no idea, right? I can call my assistant, she can pull out his last—but I don't care because he is so good. Peace of mind, does it right, everything. Does what he says, comes when he says he's going to come, and that's it. So I choose to operate my three businesses and my clients not to compete in price wars; I want to compete in experience wars. A lot less players that know how to do it. And then the last thing I'll share that is I do believe in price-match guarantee, which, if you're paying attention, I should sound like the biggest hypocrite and I just contradicted everything I said, but this is what I mean by that. I want everyone listening, watching, everyone that works for me to have this mindset and to be able to articulate this. We are the ultimate experience experts at what we do and there is no one better. And in fact, we will not be oversold. If you can find it higher somewhere else, we will raise our prices and match it.

Winn: [Laughs]

John: Right? Total paradigm shift.

Winn: Oh my gosh, that's great.

John: And here's the thing. We get into a—this is an important question to ask your employees because they are getting it asked every day. “Hey Winn, how much do we charge for this?” And then Winn says the price. And then what they get next is, “Whoa, I could get it somewhere else for less,” and it's what Winn says next is so critical and so often most of the time people start shrinking and backpedaling and say, “Oh. well, I'll throw in this and free this.” No! Like I want somebody to ask me about my price because you're giving me an opportunity to brag and invisibly sell, and by the time I'm done explaining to you what comes with, you're going to walk away saying, “Holy cow, I can't afford to go cheaper,” and that's the key to it. My favorite quote to that is “Discounting is a tax you pay for being average.”

Winn: Oh, that's a good one. To properly wrap this up—well, two things. I keep on saying that I'm going to wrap it up and then I keep on asking more.

John: That's okay.

Winn: We're talking about the customer but let's talk about the internal customer, meaning our team members. And I like what you say, I've heard you say this: that we want to run jerk-free businesses. Because I know a lot of business leaders and owners and managers who are demanding, rightfully so, that their team delivers wonderful customer service but then they're jerks to their employees. So I'm going to be a jerk to you but when you leave my office you're going to go out there and be really authentic, curious, empathetic, a great listener to the customer.

John: Right. And you know, that's it. We're more worried about what you're like to work with. I have found some people that were great to the customer but lousy to work with. And that is the unauthentic part—that you might be doing that to get a bigger tip, a higher commission, a better sale. But I've never found someone that wasn't a world-class team member that didn't just intuitively take care of the customer. So that's what we're more worried about. Right? Someone who's a world-class team member, that just means they're a world-class person. And so that's why the best things you can do for your hiring is make your hiring process ungameable, right? And what I mean by that is, I know, Winn, if you're interviewing me today, there's a good chance you're going to ask me a question like, “Well, John, tell me two drawbacks about you.” I'm ready for that. “Well, I'm a workaholic and a perfectionist.” Bam! I nailed that one. You know there are certain things that most companies ask, so learning from the best, how to make your interview process ungameable, to find if these people genuinely love others or if they're just putting on an act. So, one thing is an interview process. The first interview, a lot of great companies will do group interviews and there's

several good reasons for this. Number one, so I don't spend six hours interviewing six people; that's not good. I could spend one hour interviewing six people and then we just have to go around the room and I'm asking everyone the same question. "Tell me a time when you went above and beyond. Tell me a time when you—" whatever. And so what the candidate is thinking is what they're being judged on is who has the best answer. So I'm going to crush it here. Well, what they're really looking at is not what Winn is saying when it's his turn; what Winn is *doing* when the other five people are answering. Is Winn peaking at his Apple watch and is he checked out and staring at his toes or he's laughing at what the other candidate said because it was funny; he's smiling and nodding. That's who I want working for me.

Winn: Got it.

John: Right? So it's those stick out. Charles Schwab, the CEO of Charles Schwab, when it's an executive hire, he takes them to a local diner and he'll take you to that local diner and the diner already knows to do this. Everything you order, you being the candidate, they screw up. You want scrambled eggs, they bring you pancakes. You want ketchup, they bring you Tabasco sauce to see how you handle—

Winn: Wow!

John: —that situation: how you treat them, how well you're engaging with him. And so those are little things about making it ungameable, because you have no idea, and seeing how you react under pressure and how you treat people.

Winn: I actually had the inside scoop of a very successful airline, and the CEO of that airline told me firsthand, she said, "There have been people who have moved here to our city, we put them up in a hotel for eight weeks while they are going through our training, and at the end of the eight weeks we didn't offer them a job. Why? Because when they were checking out of the hotel, they were rude to the front desk lady at the hotel, and therefore we said, 'Sorry you're not going to be employed here.'"

John: Yep, yeah.

Winn: Okay, well, my final question. So, your two favorite words are *give more*. Why?

John: Well, I think you're the poster child for this. Winn, give more—I wish I could get it tattooed on my forehead if it wouldn't look too silly. If you want to build long-term sustainable relationships with anyone—at home, neighbors, employees, you name it—we have to find a way to give more. And I think we live in a very cynical society today and meaning that our agreements, our contracts, our arrangement says you have to do A, B, and C and I'm supposed to do X, Y, and Z but too often we wait to make sure the other person does what they say and then we do what we say. So what I try to

teach myself, my staff, my three boys is do X, Y, and Z first and throw in W, even though W wasn't expected, even though it wasn't part of the contract. Always give them more than what's expected and what that means is don't wait, don't keep score, and don't have a good memory. Meaning don't remember three years ago when someone didn't do; don't let that ruin it for you. Giving more is one of the most rewarding things you can do. That means if you borrow someone's pickup truck to move furniture, you give them that truck cleaner and with more gas than how they gave it to you. That's giving more.

Winn: That's great. I have to tell you, while I'm interviewing you and I'm thinking that the listeners are picking up on this, every time I asked you a question, in answering the question, you somehow massaged me. You somehow threw a compliment back at me before you answered the question. Do realize that you're doing that?

John: Winn, listen, I don't know if I've ever told you but you have always been a great mentor of mine, an inspiration. Back when we were starting off in the early 90s listening to MASTERS tapes, getting—I don't know what it was back then, a call or an email and being asked to be on it was like, oh my God, being on Larry King. I've listened to these every month in my—back then it might have been the Beta drive and then the cassette and then the CD and it was amazing. And we've been friends ever since and you've always been generous and always been motivating and inspiring so our relationship has meant a lot to me.

Winn: Thanks, John. I feel the exact same way. I knew it would turn out this way. Even though we can't physically be face-to-face, which is how I always love to do these interviews, I just knew it would be this easy and this magical. Congratulations on what you're doing and these messages that you're sending out. Gosh, it's so relevant today. They become more relevant to me because I have a little girl. Everything's more relevant when you become—

John: Sofia.

Winn: —a dad. So I always think in those terms now, but knowing that you're a dad too and you have the credibility of being a successful speaker and a successful business owner and you take care of your people and you have that staff or that team and that customer loyalty; all of that just adds to the overall message that you deliver. So John, thank you so, so much.

John: Thank you, Winn; my pleasure.

Winn: Everybody, enjoy this interview. Thanks, John, you're the best.