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BOOK MARKETING: How to Best Use Mentors to Increase Your Author Success Interview with Jeff Barnes

Susan Friedmann: Welcome to Book Marketing Mentors, the weekly podcast where you learn proven strategies, tools, ideas, and tips from the masters. Every week I introduce you to a marketing master who will share their expertise to help you market and sell more books. Today, my special guest is a Disneyland expert. Jeff Barnes is an author, professional keynote speaker, high education administrator, university professor, and leadership success coach. He's the Dean of Student Success at California Baptist University and teaches the only accredited college course on the history of Disneyland. He's the author of the best selling book, *The Wisdom of Walt: Leadership Lessons from the Happiest Place on Earth*, which was published by Aviva Publishing. He's got a follow-up book that's coming out in just a few weeks, *Beyond the Wisdom of Walt: Life Lessons from the Most Magical Place on Earth*.

Jeff, what an honor it is to have you on the show. Welcome and thank you for being this week's guest expert and mentor.

Jeff Barnes: Well hello, Susan. It's an honor for me to be here with you today.

Susan Friedmann: Jeff, as you know, the reason I invited you to be a guest expert is that you've written a unique book. You've dedicated marketing that book in such a way that I'd love us to focus on that because out of all the authors that I've had you've really gone above and beyond. I just want you to share as much as you can with our listeners so they can learn from what someone else has done and hopefully imitate some of the more successful techniques. Let's first touch on why Walt Disney? What was it about Walt that you felt compelled to write this book?

Jeff Barnes: Well, I grew up in Florida, Susan, and went to Walt Disney World in 1974 when I was 10-years-old and just immediately fell in love with everything that happens at a Disney theme park. Ironically, did not get to Southern California and Disneyland until I was 25 in 1988 and actually hated my first trip to the original Magic Kingdom. It was too hot, it was too crowded, it was so much smaller than what I had grown up with in Florida. If you had told me that day, "Look, you're going to fall in love

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with this place. You're going to go on to teach a college course, you're going to write a best-selling book," I would have said, "You're absolutely crazy."

I stayed in California long enough to learn that that park means something to people. I'm insatiably curious. Walt Disney once said, "Hey, what's the secret to success?" He said, "Well, it comes down to four Cs; confidence, courage consistency, and then the fourth one, curiosity." Fortunately, I'm blessed with at least one of those four C's and so in my curiosity I started reading and learning about Walt Disney and that dream for a place called Disneyland. Here's what I discovered.

Walt Disney wasn't born successful, few of us are. He didn't have this wonderful childhood. He faced all sorts of adversity and all sorts of obstacles. He went bankrupt at age 21 and even after he was successful when he pitched his Mickey Mouse idea for an amusement park called Disneyland his wife was against it and his brother who was his financial partner and financial backer, he was against it as well. It's this sort of sense of I got this idea, I've got this vision, I've got this dream and I'm going to keep going after it no matter what that I have just fallen in love with.

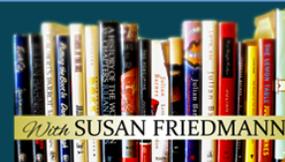
I work with people, especially students, every day. I believe we all have ideas and we all have visions and we all have dreams. What does it take to see those to fruition? Walt Disney is really the example. Yeah, he had gifts, and talents, and abilities but so do you. The real key was Walt was an unstoppable force and he didn't let the doubters and the obstacles and the naysayers stand in his way.

Susan Friedmann: You've said a couple of really poignant things there, well, probably more of them but I picked up on two of them. Adversity. We all face adversity in one shape or form as we're going through our journey. Then that whole idea of being unstoppable no matter what the adversity, that you're able to turn that around. I think that's I'm sure what Disney did so amazingly well and what you're doing too to emulate some of that. You've gone from being Jeff Barnes. Essentially, nobody had heard of Jeff Barnes. To somebody who's selling now a best-selling book and you're a somebody and you've built up this incredible following, even to the extent that you've now written this follow-up book. Take us on some of that journey. What did you do to go from A to B?

Jeff Barnes: Well, first of all I made a commitment to be all in on the book. What I mean by that, Susan, I go back to Walt's story. When he went bankrupt

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with Laughogram Studio in Kansas City in 1923 he had a really difficult decision. He could stay in Kansas City where it was safe and comfortable and he still had friends and he still had family around or he could come to California and make a real go at his dream of being a successful animator. He made the decision to go all in on that dream. What that looked like for Walt was boarding a train with \$40, a single suitcase, and a one-way ticket. He wasn't coming back, he was all in.

As I share in the Wisdom of Walt, when I made the commitment to turn this into something that could help others by way of teaching a university course on the history of Disneyland, the day after giving that very first lecture I was actually diagnosed with a brain tumor. As a result, I delayed, which was a life risking decision, I delayed the surgery that my neurosurgeon was demanding that we do. I delayed that by two and a half months because I was committed to teaching that class because I believe those stories and those connections can help all of us see our own dreams come true.

Well, once we made that decision and taught the class and had the surgery, and recovered and went back to work, I knew deep down that yeah, the class was great but the book idea had really been kicking around in my head for a couple of decades. My wife and I had a really critical conversation and she said, "Look, what would it take for us to do it? Oh by the way, if we do it we're going to be all in. I don't want to do this and sell a copy of copies and then five years later well, what would our lives have looked like if we had done it this way or we had done it that way."

We just committed, all in, \$40 single suitcase and a one way ticket. Over the last couple of years we have become an unstoppable force in terms of getting this book out there and getting this message out there. Truthfully, Susan, it's not really about me and it's not really about the book as much as it is. I want these stories to connect to you and your story so that you can then go out and live your own great story.

Susan Friedmann: I love that whole concept of being all in because you have to make that commitment. Marketing as you know is this ongoing journey. It isn't that you just do one thing and say, "Oh, I've done my marketing piece."

Jeff Barnes: "I've written my book. Why isn't anybody buying my book, I wrote my book. Yeah me, I finally wrote my book." Your mother will buy a copy, a few friends if they really like you will buy a copy. The rest of the world won't notice and won't care. You've got to figure out a way to get them

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to notice and you've got to figure out a way to get them to care. That's going to require passion and it's going to require commitment. It requires getting up early and it requires staying up late. The book does not sell itself, I don't care how great your book is. You've got to be committed to getting it out there in any and every way possible.

Susan Friedmann: You also bring up a point with regard to the book. I often get asked is, "Well, am I marketing the book? Am I marketing myself?" I think they go hand in glove. What's your thought on that?

Jeff Barnes: You're marketing both. It's really interesting because once you become an author people look at you a little differently. They see something in you that maybe they wish they could see in themselves. They've got a book idea, they've always wanted to do this thing. Here you are on the other side and you've done it and yet at the same time that doesn't necessarily sell books, per se. People like to be associated and surrounded by kind of these celebrity figures. I'm not going to sit here and tell you that I'm anybody special and I'm certainly not a celebrity but you've got to be willing to put yourself out there knowing again that it's not about you and not about your book, per se, as much as it is about your message and how that message can connect with people and make their lives and their story better.

I am completely unapologetic about what I think the Wisdom of Walt can do for people who are looking to make changes in their life.

Susan Friedmann: If you were in the same room, Jeff, I would give you a big hug so I'm sending you a virtual hug for what you're saying. It's just right on the button because I say this all the time to authors and yet somehow I'm not sure that it seems to stick. Hearing it from you, hopefully it will stick. Also, you went after a niche. We've not even mentioned that idea but this whole idea of Walt and getting involved in everything Disney is obviously a niche. Talk to us about how did you even start to penetrate that niche once you had written the book?

Jeff Barnes: Couple of strategies there. First of all, social media is amazing. The challenge with social media is it can be completely overwhelming at the same time. What you have to figure out is your book isn't for everybody, not everybody is going to read your book. You have to sort of sit down and say, "Okay, who is my ideal reader?" Then once you figure out your ideal reader, "Well, where do they hang out?" Chances are, wherever they hang out in social media platforms whether it's Facebook,

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Instagram, Twitter, whatever the case may be, they're hanging out with other similar sorts of folks who, by the way, are your readers as well.

I think one of the most important things that I did, and I know Facebook is becoming a little bit passe these days, but I've done phenomenally well using Facebook. I went through and found the people that I was already friends with who were in on Disney. Then I went through their contacts and started befriending them as well. I can remember there was a particular weekend where I went from about 300 Facebook friends to more than 4,000 Facebook friends. It was all very intentional in terms of these are people that I know who are into Disney and are connected to other Disney folks.

It was really about going into that niche but going as deep into that niche as possible. In addition, and I think this is really important, once you find that niche yes, social media marketing can be really, really helpful but so can podcasts. Almost anybody can do a podcast these days. You've got to be willing to talk to anybody and everybody within your niche about exactly what it is that you're doing. Some people they have an audience of five, and that's okay, they're just starting out, so are you.

Other people have these huge platforms. I think about it like trying to build a skyscraper. You don't start construction on a skyscraper on the 82nd floor, you start at ground level or more often than not even below. Every step you take it building just a little bit of scaffolding getting you higher and higher up. Susan, I've done podcasts at 3 o'clock in the morning with interviewers on the East Coast who probably didn't have more than a dozen or so listeners. The question that you have to ask yourself is how badly do you want it. If you're all in, \$40, single suitcase and a one way ticket, you're never going to mind doing an interview even if it's at 3 o'clock in the morning.

Susan Friedmann:

You also said a word that's very poignant too and that is intentional. Everything that you do has to be intentional so I like that. What do you feel has been the most successful marketing tool that you've used? Local service clubs. I don't know that a lot of other people are aware of these clubs or think about these groups but every town, every community, has an active rotary club or an active lions club or an active soroptimist club. Almost all of those meetings, they're looking for programming about 50 weeks out of the year.

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I know there's a temptation to think, "Well, they're not going to want me on the program," or, "Why would they want to hear from me?" Or, "They wouldn't be interested in me." Imagine for just a moment you're the programming director and you're trying to fill 50 slots over the next year. Again, you need readers, you need buyers. Find out who needs something that you have that you can meet their need. I went to these service clubs and said, "Look, everybody in Southern California loves Disney. Let me come and do a program about the Wisdom of Walt. Let me come and do a program about Disneyland. Let me come and do a program about Walt Disney."

They all loved it. For no other reason that was another week in their programming schedule that they didn't have to worry about. You keep showing up. We'll do two, three service clubs. At least when we were first starting out we would do two, three service clubs a week. Again, it takes a lot of time, takes a lot of energy, takes a lot of effort but it's a reflection of our willingness to be all in and to make sure that the book gets out there as much as possible. When you present in a service club it is really important that you save your pitch for the book at the very end and you make it a soft sell.

If you go in there and it's about your book, your book, your book and it's hard sell, hard sell, hard sell, you will not get invited back and word will spread very quickly that the last person that any other service club wants on their program as well. It's a little delicate there because again it's not about you and it's not about the book per se, it's about the message and how it can help people.

Jeff Barnes: It's so funny that you say that because I actually am the program chair for our local rotary club. I know exactly what you mean about finding somebody for 50 weeks of the year. If you're ever in Lake Placid you're on the program. Believe me, I'll change anybody just to get you on there. Yeah, you need to get out there and you need to sell books but here you've got this program director who's trying to figure out who are the 50 people that are going to fill these slots over the next year. That's a big job.

Susan Friedmann: It is.

Jeff Barnes: You just help them do their job, it's a win/win.

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- Susan Friedmann: People need to know that this is not paid but it's an opportunity for you to promote yourself and obviously your book but your message primarily.
- Jeff Barnes: Right.
- Susan Friedmann: That passion comes through and you never know who's in the audience in these places. One person knows another person who knows another person and the next thing you know you're being invited to some conference where you will get paid.
- Jeff Barnes: We have made thousands of dollars in the last couple of years by giving free speeches to service clubs.
- Susan Friedmann: Yeah, that gives me goosebumps so thank you. Let's turn the table around and say what was something that you did, what was a mistake you made that you know next time around you're not going to do?
- Jeff Barnes: We're in the second process because pre-orders for the new book actually went live today. They're going to ship out the last week of September and the book will be available to everyone in October. We are approaching it a little bit differently this time. First of all, I sent hard copies complimentary to just about anybody who asked to review it. Again, just sort of being honored of this idea that, "Oo, they want to review my book." Not realizing that just because someone has a website doesn't necessarily mean that they have an audience. Just because they say that they're going to do a review doesn't necessarily mean that they are or that they're going to do a good job with review.
- I'm not talking about whether it's a good review or a bad review, I'm just talking about writing it up in a literate, comprehensive fashion. One of the big differences for us is we're going to have 100 reviews out during release week but those are all going to be made as the result of sending electronic PDF copies. I would save the expense of sending out and mailing out your hard copy books, the meeting planners and folks who can get you booked to speak. When it comes to review copies send those out electronically and save the expense of the book, and save the expense of the shipping.
- I think another lesson that I learned is you're excited about your book and as soon as people get it they're going to read it and they said they were going to write a review and so as soon as they read it they're going to write this review. No, it's on their schedule, not yours unless you give

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them one. Rather than just sending this book and waiting, and waiting, and waiting, and waiting, and waiting, and there's nothing but crickets. Now I say, "Look, I'm going to send you a review copy and I need the review posted by this day." Then if you don't see the review now you feel a little better about going back and saying, "Hey, we had a commitment to have the review posted by this day. Can you let me know what's going on?"

If you leave it open ended you're never going to hear anything and you're going to feel uncomfortable, or at least I did, asking because, again, it was an open ended time table so when is the right time to ask? Again, go ahead and leverage other people. They need content just like program directors and rotary clubs need people to speak. Websites need content and reviewing your book makes for excellent content. You've got to put some parameters on it or otherwise you're going to just feel like you spent a lot of effort and a lot of money and you never have any idea of what you're going to get back from it.

Susan Friedmann: I'm pleased you mentioned that because so many authors say to me, "Oh, I'm going to send out 100 or 150 copies of these any which way, to the media, to this place and that place." It makes me cringe because I'm like I know the expense of sending a book so to send 100 books that's major money with you don't know what kind of return you're going to get on that investment.

Jeff Barnes: Yes, that's 100% true. Unless you've got a relationship with that media person you think you're going to get some direct payoff, I would caution the authors to just realize you need to get as many copies out there as efficiently and as effectively as possible. I genuinely believe the best way to do that is a PDF electronic version with an expectation of when the review will be posted. When I say review and this has sort of been another learning curve for me as well, not just a review on that individual's website but something on Amazon as well. When people go to Amazon and Amazon is where more often than not people are buying books they're looking for that social credibility by way of those reviews. An obscure review on an obscure website doesn't translate when buyers get to Amazon.

Susan Friedmann: Very much so. Jeff, how can our listeners get a copy of the book, either the new one, the existing one, both, where would you send them?

Jeff Barnes: I would send them to the website, thewisdomofwalt.com. There they can purchase a personally signed hard copy version of the wisdom of

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Walt and we'll send it out immediately. Then you can also get a pre-order on *Beyond the Wisdom of Walt*, that will be shipping in September. There's also a link to the Amazon page and Amazon has the soft cover of the e-book and the audio book version's available as well.

Susan Friedmann: Wow. You've done all the different versions.

Jeff Barnes: Yes.

Susan Friedmann: How have those paid off for you? What do you think about recommending doing an e-book, an audio? Talk to us about that.

Jeff Barnes: One of the best decisions that we made was to do the e-book and the audio book and then ultimately the soft cover version. Everybody's different. We live in this world where consumers want a lot of choices. People who listen to podcasts tend to listen to audio books. Some people are old school and want that hard copy version. Some people like to read when they're traveling and they prefer either the electronic version or the little lighter, easier, more mobility soft cover version. I would encourage readers to make the commitment if at all possible to have all four versions available.

That's one of the things we're doing differently the second time around. The hard copy was available first, the e-book came out a month after that, the audio five months after that, and then the soft cover close to a year later. For *Beyond the Wisdom of Walt*, we're doing all four versions available day one.

Susan Friedmann: Did you record the audio yourself?

Jeff Barnes: I did not. A gentleman by the name of Al Kessel who is a professional audio book narrator did it. The reason for that, and I'm especially sensitive about this, Susan. I think I've got a pretty good voice but I don't have the equipment necessary to produce I think a super quality audio book. I want to make sure that everything that is out for my readers reflects the commitment to quality that Walt Disney had and that we see in the parks that I'm writing about. I wanted to make sure that regardless of whether it was the e-book, the audio book or whatever, that it was done at the highest level of quality. I'm just not convinced that I could pull it off by myself.

Susan Friedmann: Okay, that's really interesting. If you were to leave our listeners with a golden nugget, Jeff, what would that be?

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Jeff Barnes:

Never stop dreaming and if your dream is to become a best selling author never stop marketing your book. You've got to go all in on getting your message out there, believing beyond a shadow of a doubt that your story can change someone else's story.

Susan Friedmann:

Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom and thank you all for taking time out of your precious day to listen to this interview. I sincerely hope that it sparked some ideas you can use to sell more books. Here's wishing you much book marketing success.