

Influence and Adventure with Jon Levy

[00:00:00] **Jon Levy:** if we allow ourselves to be in uncomfortable situations, whether that's socially, physically, and so on. We build up, uh, a new comfort with that.

And as we adjust, we become stronger at it. I really don't think there's anything special about me. I think it's just that I was willing to be uncomfortable and kind of embarrass myself and get things wrong and learn from them and so on

Debbie Sorensen: That was Jon Levy on psychologists off the clock.

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Debbie Sorensen: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high Denver, Colorado, and coauthor of ACT Daily Journal

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Yael Schonbrun: From coast to coast, I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston- based clinical [00:01:00] psychologist and assistant professor at Brown University.

Jill Stoddard: And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of Be Mighty and The Big Book of ACT Metaphors.

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Debbie Sorensen: Hello, everyone. I'm here bringing you a fun episode that I did with Jon Levy on his book, *You're Invited: the art and science of cultivating influence*. I think this episode will inspire you. If you're looking to get a little brave about building social connection with people that you admire, people you're interested in creating a sense of. Community and connection and belonging. Jill is here with me today to introduce the episode.

Jill, what did you think?

Jill Stoddard: I think fun and inspiring are the perfect words. Um, [00:03:00] this, when I was listening to this episode, I couldn't believe when it was over. It went by so fast for me. And there are just so many cool little nuggets in here, you know, I loved his take on trust and his take on adventure. Um, but the thing that I found myself feeling most curious about is he invited you to one of his networking dinners, but you guys didn't talk too much about what your experience was like.

So I think our listeners would love to hear a little more about what that was like for you.

Debbie Sorensen: okay. So I'm going to tell this story. So as you'll hear in the episode, you'll hear Jon's story, which is a really interesting one. And one of the things that he started doing years ago was just bringing these people together and it's, to me, it's just. Pretty amazing that he did what he did. I'm a little bit in disbelief that he did this and it worked so stay tuned to the episode for the story.

Um, but because of the pandemic it's he does these online events now instead of in-person [00:04:00] dinners. And I just got a random email. From him through the podcast. I think that's how he found me. Um, and invited me to one. And I'm going to be honest. I admit this in the conversation I, with Jon, I thought it might be a bit of a scam.

You know, you get all these emails and you never quite know, but I looked into him a little bit and then I, um, You know, I reached out and asked him a couple of questions and I was like, okay, well, you know, I'm going to try this thing. And so that's, and I, I was a little bit like why me? I'm definitely, you know, he calls him influencer events.

I don't really think of myself as an influencer. Although, you know, I have a podcast in psychology. I had a book now, but, um,

Jill Stoddard: what makes yes.

Debbie Sorensen: what made me say yes, I was just intrigued, you know, and I also sent out this email. Just to kind of feel it out to ask him a couple of questions. You've wrote me a really nice response back and, you know, answered my [00:05:00] questions, but

Jill Stoddard: Well, it seems like you taking this on is an example of adventure for you. You know, there's like this curiosity and adventure. So what was the event like?

Debbie Sorensen: it was an adventure because I think, let me just start by saying that leading up to it. I definitely was kind of like a little bit. Just intrigued, but also concerned,

like, am I getting into something I don't want to, you know, this is going to be like a timeshare

Jill Stoddard: Right.

Debbie Sorensen: but, um, yeah. And so, I mean, he, as he describes in the episode today, he just brings people together.

He helps them meet each other. So of course, in the zoom world that we live in, as some breakout groups with. Smaller groups of people where you can actually interact. And he usually throws out a little bit of a challenge or a question he brings in some thought leaders and has them talk about some really just current topics?

Actually, the very first one I went to was the day [00:06:00] after the U S presidential election. So as you will recall, we were still waiting, waiting for the results. And he actually purposely, he said, let's hang out. Let's, let's just. Distract ourselves and purposely didn't actually talk about politics, but usually there's some music, a performance there's a, you know, some sort of fun game or something like that.

So you never quite know what to expect, but it's a fun way to meet people and he hosts it.

Jill Stoddard: and it, sorry, it sounds, it sounds fun. And it sounds like you've been to more than one, so you must've had a good experience. If you keep going back.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, I've been to a few. I can't always make them because you know, it's time consuming and it's, it's pretty late in the evening, but it has been fun. And I mean, I think that it's, to me, it's been a reminder, first of all. Yes, adventure. Right. Sometimes we have to try something new and I think. To me, it's really inspiring that what he did, he kind of found a need, like people have this desire to come together, this desire to meet [00:07:00] people.

And I think that just what he has built is pretty remarkable to me. And as he tells in his story, it took a little bit of just, you know, doing something bold, but he also drew from the, the science of psychology to understand, you know, what might people be interested in? How can I make this a meaningful experience?

Jill Stoddard: And he talks a lot, uh, a couple of different times in the episode about discomfort and that, you know, discomfort is where growth happens. And that willingness to be uncomfortable is what, you know, you can't, he had a great quote and I can't remember what it was something about like the size of your life is directly proportional to the amount of discomfort you're willing to have.

I probably butchered it, but it was something along those

Debbie Sorensen: like that. Well, there's.

Jill Stoddard: a great example. Like I'm sure it was uncomfortable for you the first time. Maybe all the time, not knowing exactly what's going to happen and who's going to be there

and so good for you. I'm so glad you did it. I think this is such a [00:08:00] cool, such a cool experience.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, thank you, Jill. And thank you everyone for listening. I hope you enjoy the conversation.

Jon Levy, behavioral scientist, best known for his work in influence human connection. And decision-making Jon specializes in applying the latest research to transform the ways companies, approach, marketing sales, customer engagement, and culture. His clients include fortune 500 brands and startups.

More than a decade ago, Jon founded the influencers dinner, which I'm going to ask him to tell us about shortly. And it has developed into the largest community of its type worldwide. Jon chronicled, some of his many adventures in his first book, the 2:00 AM principle discover the science of adventure and his newest book, which is just out.

This may is called, you're invited the art and science of cultivating influence. It's about the importance of human connection, trust and community in accomplishing whatever's most important to us. Welcome Jon. Thank you so much for being here [00:09:00] today.

Jon Levy: Thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited about this. I think we're going to have a ton of fun.

Debbie Sorensen: I think so too, after reading your books, I'm pretty sure that's the case. And actually just having a little, a few interactions with you. I'm really I'm. I think this is going to be a fun one, a fun conversation. And I would actually love to start with your story and the story of these influencer dinners that you started.

So you were a self-described nerd before it was socially acceptable to be a

Jon Levy: I was so lame. Uh, it was, uh, so I was really into like tech and sci fi back in like the eighties and nineties. And that's before the, like the tech revolution took place before, like iPhones became cool right before, uh, there were.com billionaires. So nobody like I was relegated to those groups of like Dungeons and dragons players and, uh, I was not popular as you could imagine.

And eventually I kind of figured that if I could understand how people behaved, maybe I could make some friends. And [00:10:00] about 2008, I was, uh, sitting in a seminar and, you know, it was thought of myself as decently smart. And I really worked very hard, but I never really had the success that I was hoping for or the, uh, social circumstances.

Right. I was like overweight. I was very heavily in debt. Uh, college is expensive, as you know, and, uh, the seminar leader said something that was totally wild. Uh, I never thought about that. The fundamental element that defines the quality of our lives are the people we surround ourselves with and the conversations that we have with them. That means that if we want to change something in our life, maybe all we need to do is add some interesting people to our social circle. Or just start talking about something else. And, uh, at the time

there were these two researchers, Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler, they were looking at the obesity epidemic. They were curious, does obesity spread [00:11:00] from person to person like a cold or is it a percentage of the population? Like something like Alzheimer's, let's say. And, uh, what they ended up finding was completely wild. So if you have a friend who's obese, Your chances of obesity increases by 45%. Your friends who don't know them have a 20% increased chance and their friends have a 5% increase chance. Now here's, what's completely insane. This kind of stuff is also true for happiness, marriage and divorce rates, smoking habits, voting habits, all of it. And so I figured if I could connect with really successful, influential, interesting people. Then maybe they could have a positive impact on me, but more importantly, if I could connect them with each other, they would have a positive impact on each other's lives and everybody's lives improve. And so I set out to do it in the dumbest way possible.

Debbie Sorensen: which [00:12:00] is like the craziest story I've ever heard. I can't believe you did this. It's so unique.

Jon Levy: Thank you. It's uh, I figured, whereas every other company is trying to shower everyone with gifts and like, Oh, you're influential. Let us take you on a trip or take you out to dinner or something. I said, what I'm going to do is I'm going to invite people over to my house, have them cook me dinner, wash my dishes, clean my floors.

And I bet by the end of it, they'll thank me for it. And that's what I did. I created the secret dining experience. We invite 12 people at a time. We cook dinner together, right? So like people have to work for their meal. And when we sit down to eat, we play a game trying to guess and figure out what everybody does.

And then they find out that it's the editor in chief of a major magazine and eight time Olympic medalist and Nobel Laureate, uh, occasional princess. And I've hosted over 2000 people across 227 dinners intensities in three [00:13:00] countries. And here's my favorite part. We had a famous journalist and author come to one of these and she said, I was expecting a phenomenal meal and decent company.

I got the exact opposite.

Debbie Sorensen: phenomenal company and decent meal.

Jon Levy: Yeah. Like it's decent is stretching it. You have 12 people who don't know how to cook, cooking together. It's going to be fine, but like we often make burritos and, uh, And for like eight bucks, you could go to Chipotle and get a better meal. Right. It's not like a phenomenal meal, like you'd expect for fancy people. And so, uh, that's how I kind of got my start

Debbie Sorensen: I mean, okay. There's so much to ask you about this, but my first question is how, why do you think people said yes to this? I mean, It seems so funny that you would email someone who's been in the Olympics or someone who runs a company, this slightly absurd thing. And [00:14:00] they did it. How do you make sense of that?

Jon Levy: So I think there's kind of like three elements that really kick in here. The first is that everybody's when you're at that level, everybody's after something. So you get a message from somebody and you're like, Oh my God, what they want? I didn't have an angle. Right. It's I have no like traditional business opportunity to have with a Nobel Laureate or an Olympian.

Right. There's no, there's no angle that I would need something from them. Like great. You won the golden curling. I mean, that's awesome. But like, that's not my business. I have nothing to ask of you other than your friendship. So the first thing was, it was it's generous in the sense that it offers you an experience with no expectation of anything in return. The second is that the people who are active at kind of like the top levels of stuff are bored of all the stupid experiences they keep getting invited to. So [00:15:00] if people get invited to one more casino, themed fundraiser, you know, like they've done it, they don't need to attend that again. It's no longer novel. And what's interesting is that. Our brains are fundamentally wired for novelty. There's this great study, looking at a section of the brain called the SN VTA and it showed that this is the major novelty center of the brain, and it responds relative to how novel something is. So the more novel it is, the more it responds and it entices us to explore and understand those things. So if you can create something that stands out, that's remarkable, that's worth talking about that seems different or interesting. People will get curious about it and want to participate. And then I think the last thing is that everybody expects that the most influential people in our culture get to spend their time with other influential people. But the fact is they're mostly with their admins, assistants and staff. And [00:16:00] so if you can curate an environment with other interesting people, then. People go far out of their way for it, like, think about Ted cost, \$10,000 or Davos cost, like a quarter million dollars to go do, just to be around other people.

You could watch all the Ted talks online. So it's not the talks. So I think they're coming very clearly. Not for me. Right. I am not the draw. Uh, my big joke about me was that I hope to one day accomplished something worthy of an invitation to my own dinner. But I think that the reason they come is novelty, generosity and the curation aspect of it.

So it's really designed for them to enjoy themselves.

Debbie Sorensen: Well, I think what you're good at and what you've done, that's interesting is that you find interesting people and you bring them together in really thoughtful and creative ways. And you know, this is a psychology podcast. I feel like a lot of your ideas are [00:17:00] drawn from some ideas from psychology. You know, there's a reason you put people to work at your dinner.

Could you get used that as an example of how you use your knowledge? You know, you

Jon Levy: Oh, for sure. That's actually one of my favorite, like weird things about human behavior is that we keep expecting that if I do something nice for you, you'll like me. And there's an element of reciprocity that exists in human beings. But I don't think it comes close to this idea of what's called the Ikea effect.

Now the Ikea effect, this I believe was researched by Dan Arielli on a team of people. They found that people disproportionately care about their Ikea furniture because they had to assemble it. And so anything we invest effort into, we care about disproportionately. So my objective, when I designed the dinner was let's find a shared activity that people could put effort into.

So they care about it. And each other more. So now we're like, Timelock we have an hour to prepare this meal and we have a mission, right? Like [00:18:00] very clearly if people don't put effort into it, we're not eating. And so there's no like, Oh one person can do all the cooking by themselves. All everybody else has cocktails.

Everybody has to chip it or the meals not happening.

Debbie Sorensen: You know, it's interesting because, so they've moved online now because

Jon Levy: so the dinner haven't, but we also run a cultural experience called inspired culture and that, uh, kind of functions as a reunion. So after we had people come to the dinners, we realized that we wanted a way, like kind of function like an initiation into the community. And then to bring people back together, to explore ideas and meet each other and meet the people from the other dinners.

We created a salon series called inspired culture. It's usually about 60 to 100 people, uh, in person. And we'll surprise people with a speaker thought leaders. So it might be like bill Nye, the science [00:19:00] guy, and then one of the roots will perform and so on. And when COVID hit, we realized, okay, we need to bring the community together.

And so we started hosting these digital versions of the salon and that's how we met.

Debbie Sorensen: yeah, I met you. You invited me to want it. And it's, it's funny what you say about creating intrigued, because when I first got the invitation, I honestly thought I was like, who is this guy? This seems like a scam. And I kind of looked into it and I reached out to you and asked a couple of questions, but there was a part of me that was like, I dunno, I'm going to try this thing out, but I'm not so sure, but it was like, I think it was that intrigued factor and I was like, I'm going to go for it.

And it was super fun. And I think what was cool about it was that I've gone to a few what's. What's cool about it is that you do manage to take this, you know, we're all on zoom all day long lately, but you managed to take this platform and turn it into something. Fun and special and meaningful and a way to actually, you know, it's actually enjoyable.

It doesn't feel like yet. Another thing. What, what advice do you [00:20:00] have for people who want to create like a meaningful digital interaction?

Jon Levy: so it's interesting. Uh, the first thing that I, we had to kind of struggle with was that when sheltering at home started and everybody had to like, you know, do everything remotely companies took their in-person programming and put it online as it is. I generally call that a lift and shift. You're literally picking it up and shifting it to a different platform. Now that's the equivalent of me taking like a radio soap putting it on television, just having

people read it, right? Like that's not what the medium of television is designed for people just standing there, reading stuff. Similarly, the platform of zoom teams, whatever it is that you'd like to use. Is not just designed to be a worse version of YouTube, right?

It's not just about entertaining and [00:21:00] enlightening people. If they want that they can watch a Ted talk or they can watch Netflix, right. There'll be a much better experience and they can do it on their own time, rather than logging in, just to see this concert with 10,000 other people over WebEx. And the issue, I think comes down to two factors.

Mean probably more, but just for simplicity it's, uh, the first is human connection, which is I don't go to a concert or an event just to see the information or the performer. I go because being around people has an intrinsic value to it, even if I'm shy and I don't want to talk to people just being around that energy is more enjoyable. when you're on WebEx, You feel really isolated. There's no sense of belonging or connection. And so I really sought to include that. And the other factor is, and you probably know this from [00:22:00] research, is that when we feel helpless, when we feel like we have no impact or influence on a situation, we don't do well as people. And so most digital events are digital platforms. Limit the behaviors that the participants can share it. And I wanted the exact opposite. I wanted people to feel that they were the center of focus and that everything else was being done for them to engage around. And so when people arrive, usually I have like 150 people give or take and we have them, uh, we welcome them and then we immediately send people into breakout rooms.

With a queue so that they can start chatting. And when we bring them back, we might do talks, but we try to make it as interactive as possible. So we did a talk by a security expert, uh, who works in NTDs information. And instead of just having her speak, we started off with the game [00:23:00] using the poll feature and we showed pictures and we had people answer where do they know the photo of the person from.

Is it from a Netflix show, is it from an event that they attended to, they go to school then whatever it was. So now we have these interactive polls and it feels like you're playing a game rather than just somebody speaking at you. And eventually people found out that there were all actually faces of people created by machine learning algorithms.

And so you have these surprises and delights throughout. So one of our policies became how much time can I get you to enjoy. In breakout rooms. And then can I turn those experiences into games or activities where we have that Ikea effect where you put in joint effort? So we started doing like mini game shows and talks on like surprising topics and all that, making it as interactive as possible and providing as much human connect as possible.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, it makes it less, um, passive for people they connect and they also have a [00:24:00] little bit of a challenge built into there. So they're not just sitting there passively, you know, kind of multitasking while you're on this thing or something. Cause you're engaged

Jon Levy: W I wanted to avoid people.

Debbie Sorensen: pretty. Yeah.

Jon Levy: I wanted to avoid people, washing their dishes while doing like I didn't, as long as I keep make it interactive. And I give you actual human beings who can see you, then you're not just going to go type up an article that you're working on or answer emails while you're doing it.

And that's kind of my. My litmus test. Is, is this more interesting than your inbox or the paperwork that you've been avoiding filing? And if it's not, then I shouldn't be doing it, then go enjoy something more relaxing. You've earned it because people are zoomed out.

Debbie Sorensen: that's true. That's true. So there's something I want to actually just make clear for our listeners, because I think, you know, your book is about influence and when people hear the word influencer, You [00:25:00] know, they're they usually think probably either of networking in the old fashioned sense or, you know, these social media influencers who look good on Instagram and get all kinds of freebies and promote them and that kind of thing.

But that is really very different than what

Jon Levy: I do look amazing in a bikini and I do love avocado toast, so I should be a social media influencer. Uh, but I just never had the patience to take the photos.

Debbie Sorensen: Oh, I see a little untraditional there, Jon.

Jon Levy: Uh, very true. I, I really appreciate that you bring this up because. Uh, personally, I, I like, I think most human beings hate networking, uh, networking.

There's this great study by Francesca Gino and team. Uh, I think it's Harvard business school and they looked at the implicit association that we have to networking and people feel like they need to wash, like they're dirty from it. And that association doesn't exist when we're making friends. And [00:26:00] so.

That traditional concept of influence is like the very kind of old school version is definitely not what I care about. And I also, you know, I have a lot of respect for people who can take great photos and, and create a following on social media. It's just not what I mean by influence. I unfortunately got stuck with the term, uh, not got stuck.

I chose the term before social media existed. So in the two thousands and. Uh, influence is fundamentally just our ability to have an impact on a person or an outcome. And so when we really look at most of the things we care about having influence on it's, can I help get my child into the school that they want to get into like a local high school or something like that?

Can I have the influence, uh, to, and the trust with my customers so that they want to sign on another year contract? And that's what we care about. Not so much. Like if I post a [00:27:00] lot of people like it. Um, and when we look at the kind of influence I'm talking about, it really seems to break down to one who we're connected to, because if we're not connected to somebody, that's going to be very hard to influence them to how much they

trust us, because if they don't trust us, then they're not going to opt in for influence or being influenced.

And the third is. Do we have a sense of belonging or community between us, because you'll notice that when you have a shared sense of community influence seems to flow much more. And so the book really breaks down the stories and ideas, and it's kind of funny much like how everybody tries. Like there's a whole collection of counter-intuitive, but true ideas, kind of like this idea of winning people over with.

Gifts versus the Ikea effect. It's counterintuitive to think, Oh, if they put an effort, they'll like me more, but it's actually how we behave.

[00:28:00] **Debbie Sorensen:** you know? Yeah. You have, so your, um, equation for influence is connection by tr times trust, right. And yeah. And on this podcast, we talk a lot about connection and why community and social support and connection is really important. I know that's, that's something that you go into a lot in your book. I was really interested in the trust piece and.

How crucial trust is. And part one of my question here is, can you tell us a little bit about, um, some of the factors that are important to build that sense of trust with people?

Jon Levy: Yeah, it's interesting. When I started researching the book, I thought I had like a pretty decent grasp on trust. And then somebody asked me, what is trust made out of? I had no idea. It was Zack Kent, who was at a university of Kellogg. He runs, I think it's called the trust project, where he brings researchers and experts, [00:29:00] uh, from across different fields to really examine this.

And one of the things he pointed out is that for the most part, researchers agree that trust is made out of three things it's made out of competence, your ability to do something. Honesty or integrity or truthfulness and benevolence, if you have people's best interests at heart and he'd go, or he went on to, to point out something super interesting it seems to be made of those things, but they're not all equally valued.

So. If let's say you went in one day and had just like, you were exhausted, maybe you got your second vaccine shot. Right. And you were totally worn out. And the session with your client didn't go that well, they wouldn't be say, Oh, I can't trust her. She's incompetent. They would say, Oh, she had a bad day.

I'm happy that she's still made time for me. Right. So [00:30:00] breach and competence, isn't a huge issue. If you were to find out somebody lied to you, that would probably be a big deal. Like if they, uh, would probably lead you to doubt things they've said in the past. And also things they say they moving forward, but there is this like kind of weird loophole there and it works like this.

So if the two of us were walking down the street and I say, Hey, do you mind if we stopped by a friend's house really quick? And you say, yeah, yeah, absolutely. No problem. And when we enter 40 of your closest friends, jump out and scream, surprise, it would be super weird. If you turned to me and said, Jon, you lied to me.

We can't be friends anymore. And the question is, how is it that if one person lies to you, it's not okay. But if another person lies to you, it is. [00:31:00] And the reason most likely is benevolence. But I did it because it was in your best interest and I knew you would see it that way. And so human beings tend to value benevolence above tra uh, sorry. Human beings tend to value benevolence above honesty and honesty above competence. And that's really interesting because most of the time, when a customer is getting support or something like that. We tried to lead with competence. Oh, we can handle this. Let us show you how well we can do this. But it turns out that we should probably lead with benevolence. We really want you to do well. What's important to you. How can we help you? What would your ideal outcome in this situation? Because that's. Where trust is fundamentally built. [00:32:00] And I found that absolutely fascinating. And I think can, uh, I think, uh, Grayson's work is brilliant.

Debbie Sorensen: I love that. I think it's interesting because we talk on the podcast a lot about values and I think sometimes people really value honesty. But people can almost get a little rigid about that. Like I have to be honest, no matter what. And it's like, I have to tell you how I really feel about everything or I can never, and I think it misses that like flexibility around the benevolence piece.

Like there are times when we don't have to tell everyone every opinion that we have about everything more benevolent not to, and just caring about the relationship sometimes means you hold your tongue or yeah.

Jon Levy: I think it's really interesting that you say this, uh, for a whole collection of reasons and, and please. Uh, chime in with your experience or knowledge, because I'm sure you've, you've a wealth of life experience that I'm considering your field that I just [00:33:00] don't. But in general, the research I've come across is that human beings are really great at providing a narrative for their behavior.

Even if they don't understand it or. No the real reason. So like, if I get into an argument with my wife, it might be because the temperature was too high in the room and I was just agitated. And that was like the nearest release right. For my first. And so my clinician to think in the example that you just gave about saying everything that's on your mind, I feel like I might, you have an opinion as a justified narrative, but that actually isn't my opinion. In the sense that like, I have plenty of thoughts, they're not necessarily like worth sharing, interesting or even accurate just because I don't actually know what the source of the way that I feel is.

Debbie Sorensen: yeah. I think you're right on, you know, we do. And these narratives that we get into can be problematic if we're missing an important piece of the [00:34:00] puzzle, if we're really locked into them and we miss the bigger point of view. Yeah.

Jon Levy: I just generally assume that in every situation I'm probably wrong to some scenario, like to some, like sure. I, I just don't really need to be right about most things. Um, and so, uh, I think my wife wins every argument we've ever had

Debbie Sorensen: You know, I have seen people's desire to be right. Literally. And marriages caused all kinds of problems. I think that's probably why it's Jon. Yeah. Okay. So here's another thing about trust. I was just, this isn't even really a question it's just more like something I was thinking about and I'm curious.

Okay. So. I don't know you super well. I've had, I feel like I do, cause I've read your two books and I've had some interactions with you and we've had a couple of conversations. I, I it's a little one-sided right. But I'm getting to know you. But what I realized is I feel a sense of trust with you. And I was kind of pondering, like, why do I don't know, Jon that, well, why do I feel this?

And [00:35:00] here's what I think one, you feel pretty authentic and open to me. You're not trying to. Be something that you're not, you're just pretty, you know, you tell your story about how you were so nerdy and socially awkward, and you're just, you're just you, I think I get that vibe. Um, so that's one thing. And then also in the, you know, the digital salon experience that I've had, you actually set some pretty good boundaries.

And just as an example, sometimes. You do open up conversation. Sometimes someone will go on a tangent, which always happens right. In meetings and groups. And I sit there and after a while, I start to feel a little bit of stress like, Oh no, what's happening here. This seems like it's, you know, time is up here and it's going off the rails and you.

Just when I start to feel uncomfortable, you very kindly and gently set a boundary. You say, you know, Oh, I love you, but I have to interrupt you to keep you. I mean, I've seen you do this actually with some pretty high profile people like you set good boundaries and you're also just [00:36:00] very open and kind. I don't know.

I'm just curious, like

Jon Levy: Wow. So first of all, thank you very much. Um, I'm incredibly flattered that you notice and, uh, I, I will tell you, I feel just as uncomfortable when things start going off the rails, I, uh, I don't know the research on this, but my hunch is that there's quite a bit around people's general orientations. And in the sense that like I'm very oriented to hearing things or trying to hear things from the perspective of other people, right.

It might be kind of like an extreme version of, uh, of, uh, Like what they always say mirror neurons do, although we're not really sure mirror neurons exist anymore in the way that we thought they did. Uh, and I, I started like getting a visceral response when I realized that this could be landing really [00:37:00] bad or, uh, and the issue is that are the reason I feel comfortable.

Interrupting is twofold. One is I know that the speaker. Doesn't want to be viewed poorly. And then the second is that I've a greater commitment for the guests to get the point and the idea than I do to be liked, uh, because the, the interesting thing is, and I'm sure you've probably come across this at some point.

Uh, our perception of who likes us versus the actual liking of us. Are drastically off, uh, both from the perspective of, if I go talk to a complete stranger, my perception will be that they

won't like me. And they often like me more than I think they will. And the flip side of it is that the people that I think like me probably don't really care about me, or even think about me in any way, shape or form.

So [00:38:00] it's kind of become an irrelevancy of, I obviously do care to have deep and meaningful relationships, but. I have to be really aware of what my commitment is at the time. And my commitment is that you, as the guest, get to hear knowledge or information that can really enlighten you or entertain you.

And, uh, and so I don't know if that answers or speaks to this idea of.

Debbie Sorensen: it does. I think actually here's my interpretation of that is you're able to kind of see outside of your own point of view and also to be a little bit less self-conscious around what do people think of me and my upsetting someone. And instead to just kind of. That's a narrative, right? So you kind of step outside of that and, and have a mission.

That's more important than that. But it does, I think, as someone who's attended something like this and it just creates the sense of, he's kind of, he's got this situation, you know,

Jon Levy: and I'm going to land the plane. It's going to be okay. Uh, I will [00:39:00] say though, I think you may have attended one where we had a very high profile. Older attendee who kept interrupting. Were you there for

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah.

Jon Levy: And that was, I'll be honest. Uh, so this, this person is often seen in the media multiple generations of people know who this person is and, uh, because of their age, they don't know technology that well.

So we couldn't mute them on zoom. And as a by-product, every time a speaker spoke, they would chime in as if they were the hosts. And it created this incredibly uncomfortable situation where I both, uh, wanted to respect them and the speakers. And the other thing is that they're just so charming that like, even when they interrupt, it's delightful.

Uh, and I'll be honest. I never know how to handle those things. Um, but what I think is interesting is that somebody with that type of personality is usually self-aware enough that they are like that, that if you [00:40:00] do stop them, they get it. They're like, yeah, I know I can be a handful. And so, uh, I think it all worked out great.

She was scheduled to come to the next event, so I don't think she was insulted.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. And you were very kind about it and that matters a lot, right? You're not, you're not being rude or anything like that. You're just being very gentle. So, um, okay. So there's a lot of information about your books, about how to, you know, build these connections and start relationships. And I just wanna.

I'm just curious if you have an advice, people have been generally socializing. The last a lot of people are isolated and as the pandemic hopefully continues to, you know, fingers crossed

to kind of wind down. I think people are maybe feeling a little anxious about getting back out there, whether it's dating or meeting new friends or reconnecting.

Do you have any words of wisdom for people who just want to get back in the groove?

Jon Levy: Yeah, I think the biggest thing that I've realized when I talk to people is that [00:41:00] we feel like our muscle for social interaction is atrophied. So regardless of if you're introverted, extroverted, shy, outgoing, whatever it is, um, some of us are like bursting at the seams to get a hug. And some of us are scared that we know won't know how to make small talk or, or, uh, if we'll keep the right distance from people or how many people we should bring together.

And because we don't want to be viewed as inconsiderate or, and so I think that the thing I'm leaning into most is saying I'm so excited to see you, but I want you to know. I have not hung out with another human being in a year, and I'm a little concerned I'm going to be awkward. And if you fully own it, my hunches, somebody else will raise or the other person will respond in the same way.

I'd be like, Oh my God, I'm in the same boat. Don't worry about it. If there's an awkward silence, that'll be [00:42:00] fun. So, uh, in general, uh, people's anxieties and concerns about social situations tend to be much greater than the actual issue. So researchers asking people to talk to strangers, the apprehension can be very high, but the actual rating of the experience is very positive.

Um, and so my first suggestion is, uh, if you are feeling uncomfortable, kind of like lean into it and joke around about it because I think everybody does. The second is a little bit more on. The issue that people who tend to be isolated or feel lonely, then begin to feel like they're deserving of being isolated and lonely. And so in the U S according to, I think it's university of Chicago study, uh, in 1985, the average American had about three friends by 2004. They [00:43:00] were down to about two. Now that's losing 50% of our close social ties besides family in. 19 years that's before social media, before anything. And a lot of it most likely has to do with moving away from home to go to school and for jobs.

So you're resetting your social circles each time. Right now, people are likely more isolated than we've ever been. And so there's kind of two invitations I have for people. One is if you have a friend who leans on kind of like the more introverted side, reach out. Because it could mean the difference between them feeling an experience of belonging or not.

Uh, the second is that if you congregate in small groups safely, if you're that kind of organizer, or if you just feel comfortable with one other person going to take a hike, that's an incredible thing to do and a really healthy habit. And [00:44:00] the reason that this is so important is that when you look at research on human longevity, the greatest predictors aren't.

Clean air and exercise. Number two is strong, social ties and number one is social integration. So what I'm really concerned about is that the things that actually let us live the longest are the things that we've been most isolated from, uh, during the pandemic. And,

uh, I, I know I'm not going to convince you to throw a a hundred person ranger, but if you can bring together four or five people for dinner or even two.

That's a really great step in the right direction.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. Sometimes it takes some effort to get out there, but I loved what you said about just being, just owning it. If you're feeling awkward, just that goes back to the openness and authenticity. And if you say it, people are probably feeling the same way and it just, it allows you to be more real about it.

You know, you don't have to be perfect. What matters more is that you get out there and then you [00:45:00] can have that camaraderie with someone.

Jon Levy: it's interesting. I, you know, I started all of this when I was about 28, 29. I don't kind of don't remember at this point it's been so long. I'm 40 now. And. I think the main reason that it's, I've been successful at bringing people together is because I'm, I'm just willing to be comfortable with screwing up along the way.

Debbie Sorensen: Yes, you're courageous. Totally.

Jon Levy: I'm not sure if I'm, if it's being courageous stupid, like, you know, that's, I will accept courageous just because like the super, the, my desire to be a superhero is, is supported. Uh, but the. The interesting thing is that I always expected everybody else not to be awkward and uncomfortable. And I figured that I was always the uncomfortable, awkward one being the geek and the more, uh, the older I get, the more I realized [00:46:00] that all of us are really awkward and uncomfortable and think everybody else is somehow normal. And, uh, eventually I, I had to accept that like, The things that I actually care about and notice about myself. Nobody actually really pays attention to they're too busy thinking about themselves. And there's that, uh, have you ever come across that ridiculous t-shirt study that was done called the spotlight effect?

Debbie Sorensen: I don't think so.

Jon Levy: It's a, it's a funny one. Essentially, my hunch is this was done in the nineties based on the way that the study was done. Uh, but students were brought in to do a collaborative project. I think they were like told that they were studying teamwork, but they had one student come in early and they had to put on a t-shirt and the t-shirt was the most embarrassing t-shirt that the, the, the, um, researchers could find at the time it was [00:47:00] Barry Manilow

Debbie Sorensen: Oh, that's

Jon Levy: everybody had to work together. And then, uh, afterwards these test subjects were interviewed and the person with the t-shirt was asked, what percentage of people noticed your really embarrassing t-shirt? And he said like probably half of every month. And then when people were interviewed only 25% noticed, and I doubt.

Anybody actually cared, then the experiment was repeated, but with a really cool t-shirt and back then, it was like either biggie smalls, the rapper, or Jerry Seinfeld, the comedian. And

once again, people thought that half of the entire group noticed, but only a quarter did. And so this idea that people care.

Or notice anything that we're doing with our lives is like marginal at best. So I figure I might as well. Uh, if I'm willing to deal with my own feelings of embarrassment and discomfort, then I shouldn't worry about anything else.

Debbie Sorensen: I love that. Yeah. [00:48:00] People don't, aren't paying as much attention as you think. So you don't maybe need to worry quite so much about some of that. Yeah. Well, you know, I want to actually kind of. Move toward, toward the end of our conversation here toward your earlier work on adventure. Cause that's the other area.

Jon Levy: some fun.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. Cause your, your other area of interest here is adventure and you tell some pretty fun stories in your first book. What is adventure? I mean, I know that people probably have an association with that word, but you kind of break it down and why.

Jon Levy: Indiana Jones usually, or

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah, right, right. There's a, there's some, I don't know you, you have the sense of it, but like you have, you have taken the time to really figure this thing out.

And why do you think is why is adventure important in life?

Jon Levy: So, uh, I'll start with the definition. I define adventures. Having three parts and experience that is exciting and remarkable. And the reason it needs to be remarkable is that as a species, we pass on our [00:49:00] knowledge generally through our stories through, uh, oral history. And so if it's something we're talking about, it's not culturally relevant.

The second, is it possesses, adversity and or risk preferably perceived risk. Meaning if there's nothing at stake, then you haven't really done anything. And key differentiators. You don't have to be in peril. Like I've put myself in situations where I almost died a few times. That's not necessary. You can experience just as much, let's say fear, uh, doing public speaking as you can, you know, jumping out of, or climbing Everest or jumping out of an airplane or whatever it is.

And then the third characteristic is it brings about growth. The person you are at the end is distinct from the person who started. And the reason that this is important is if you look at any great journey, right, the weather that's a hero's journey, or you watch a movie, the characters are fundamentally change [00:50:00] by the experience it is in the growth that the adventure is completed, regardless of if the mission is successful or not, or their goals were.

And so why? I think it's important is that in general, when we look at, uh, at our experience in life, human beings seem to do best when we're engaged in something, when we're doing something just outside of our skillset, where there's, where it's a new enough, that it's interesting, but not so safe that it's boring. Right? We weren't. Fully engaged and active in it, but it is not so hard that we are failing constantly and become self-conscious. And I believe

that adventure really fulfills that in the sense that when you go out of your home and you want to go do some kind of, it could be a physical adventure, like whitewater rafting, or it could be [00:51:00] a social adventure, like.

Talking to strangers or interacting at an event or doing a, I don't know, a, uh, improv comedy those things can be done just at the edge of your capability. And it fundamentally forces you to be uncomfortable and grow, which means that it's, uh, a great safe catalyst for personal development. And frankly, what's really nice about it is that long past the time you've forgotten most of your stories and experiences, you still get to retain the growth that you've got from them, the person that you became in the process. And that's one of the reasons I really loved adventure. Plus the stories can be insane and people love hearing them.

Debbie Sorensen: they're pretty fun in your book. Yeah. Um, you know, I'm, I'm really fascinated by that connection with discomfort because we often think like, Oh, we don't [00:52:00] want discomfort. We want to avoid it or not have it, but really getting out of your comfort zone and into discomfort is key. It's a big piece of this.

What's. Can you talk about the relationship between the two.

Jon Levy: So I, um, one of the things I say in the book is that the size of our life is in proportion to how uncomfortable we're willing to be. Uh, discomfort is where the growth happens. In fact, I'm doing something right now, that is one of the most uncomfortable things I've ever done. Um, doing Wim Hoff training, have you heard of this?

The Iceman?

Debbie Sorensen: A breathing thing. Okay. Tell us about that.

Jon Levy: So, uh, essentially this Dutch guy named Wim, uh, developed a breathing technique that causes the body to kind of cold proof. It teaches the body to produce additional heat so that you can go, you know, he climbs mountains and in shorts and sandals and, you know, set the like Arctic swim record and all this kind of crazy stuff. And in order to do [00:53:00] it, you kind of have to push your breathing to the limit. And what I've been doing is, uh, is exercising with a, um, mask that limits the amount of air that can come in. So you experienced something called kind of like air thirst, right? It feels like you, you know, when you have a really, really tough workout and you can't get enough air into your lungs, now imagine you do that, but it's twice as hard to breathe.

Debbie Sorensen: yeah, that sounds unpleasant

Jon Levy: Oh my God, it's, it's miserable. Uh, but I do, I work out four or five times a week with this mask and it is incredibly uncomfortable. And then when I take the mask off, I can run laps around people. And that's because human beings are anti-fragile meaning things that are fragile. If I take a glass and drop it, it'll break things that are ND fragile or things that when you apply pressure to them, get stronger.

So our muscles, for example, my breathing, because my diaphragm [00:54:00] is now significantly stronger, I can inhale a lot more. My lung capacity has increased. Similarly, if we

allow ourselves to be in uncomfortable situations, whether that's socially, physically, and so on. We build up, uh, a new comfort with that.

And as we adjust, we become stronger at it. I grew up as awkward, a child as one could expect. Right? I did not have the social skills that you would ever think that, Oh, this person would be running a community of very influential people. You think of this person was going to become a computer programmer and spent his life typing in front of a computer.

No. Although I spend a lot of time typing, I do now spend a significant portion interacting with people and that's simply, I think because I was willing to be uncomfortable. I don't think there's, I really don't think there's anything special about me. I think it's just that I was willing to be uncomfortable and kind of embarrass myself and get things [00:55:00] wrong and learn from them and so on

Debbie Sorensen: well, I really admire that about you. You know, I was thinking about how, um, you know, My end initial thought about adventure was like, well, it's so hard to have adventures right now in the pandemic because, you know, Jon, we share a love of travel. I've always wanted to travel and you've been some really interesting places running with the bulls, Antarctic, all these things.

But I was thinking if, to find adventure a bit more broadly, there are so many ways. I mean, even right now, it's like the podcast is an adventure for me, always. Just having these conversations with people and it's, I always feel a little nervous and uncomfortable, and yet it feels like an adventure. And I think if you think outside the box and you define it in this way, there's potential for adventure.

Even without being able to, you know, jet off to climb mountains.

Jon Levy: I'm in total agreement, listen, it's harder. Right? It's fundamentally more difficult, but there are tons of opportunities. And the other thing that we, we can also look at is [00:56:00] how do we create experiences for people we really care about. Because that can be really exciting in itself, right? When you reach kind of that next stage, where I have a nephew who's 19 right now at NYU and getting to kind of show him the world in many ways is incredibly gratifying.

So he'll say, Oh, I've never tried this kind of cuisine. And listen, I may have eaten it 10 times or, you know, I've, I've eaten scorpions and snakes and all grub worms and anything you could imagine, but getting to relive it with somebody. Who's doing it for their first time is incredibly exciting and fun.

And so it doesn't necessarily, if we include the social aspect of these things, uh, it really opens up the experience.

Debbie Sorensen: Absolutely. Well, and this wonderful note to end on, I hope people are inspired by some of the adventures you've had in some of the unique things that you've done to create meaning and connection in your, your life and the [00:57:00] lives of the people that you're connected with. And, um, I would definitely recommend that people check out your book, which has some.

Very practical ideas for ways to do this. Um, so check it out. Um, again, it's called You're Invited: the art and science of cultivating influence. It's wonderful. It's really a fun book to read,

Jon Levy: Thank you.

Debbie Sorensen: Jon. Thank you so much for joining us.

Jon Levy: This has been a real pleasure and I, if any of your audience wants to reach out and super easy to get ahold of, uh, Jon Levy, uh, J O N L E V Y T L B. T like Thomas L like lion B, like boy across all the social platforms and my website. And there's actually plenty of fun games that I. Uh, that we've played at the digital salons that I give people, uh, on my website.

So if they want to download it and do it with their family and friends and coworkers, then

Debbie Sorensen: Excellent on your webpage, you have some talks and some, you know, that you've given Ted talks and that kind of thing. So there's a lot of really fun stuff there. So definitely check it [00:58:00] out. And Jon, thank you again.

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