

Episode 7

SCALING CULTURE AND COMMUNITY WITH JOANNA LEE



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Michael: Joanna Lee, welcome to the Business for Unicorns' podcast.

Joanna: Hello. Thank you for having me.

Michael: Oh my gosh! Thank you so much for doing this. We're in a beautiful WeWork space here in Chelsea which is gorgeous. What a fancy podcast studio. It's the first time that I've been in a fancy studio. So, thanks for making this happen for me.

Joanna: No problem at all. You have a podcast studio. You have to use it for podcast, right?

Michael: Seriously, seriously, I want to live in this studio. So, we actually met through Mark Fisher Fitness. I think you've been a ninja, correct me if I'm wrong, since late 2015. Is that right?

Joanna: You're correct, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Michael: Wow! So, we've known each other for a while but sadly, we haven't really spent that much time together.

Joanna: No.

Michael: But this will sound creepy but I promise it's not.

Joanna: *laughs*

Michael: I've been kind of just an admirer of yours from afar, from afar just like -.

Joanna: *laughs*

Michael: And the thing is you can tell a lot about a person by how they interact with other people. You can tell a lot about a person by how they interact with other people. I've always noticed from afar that whenever Joanna walks into a room, everyone seems really excited to see her. That's a pretty magical quality. It's a pretty great attribute to have. That when you walk into most rooms I've seen you in, people are pretty stoked to see you. I just love that as a quality.

I also know just from knowing you a little bit on your work that that warmth you have is also kind of paired with a savage work ethic. So, that's kind of where I want to start today. I just want to talk about you and how both those things exist in Joanna Lee. Is that okay?

Joanna: Sure. Magical and savage, I'll take it.

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Michael: Great! *laughs*

So many guests I've talked to so far, and really so many business leaders I know, your resume spans a bunch of industries and a bunch of roles. So, how did you become such a kind of Jill of all trades.

Joanna: Sure. It's so funny. I feel like a bit of a schizophrenic but there's clarity in hindsight. I think it really started with my parents. And it's kind of we have family dinner every night growing up. And my mom went to FIT here in the city and studied textile design. My dad was always in finance. So, there was always this tension between pursuing the creative or having a more "business-like job."

Coming out of college, I think you have no idea what you want to do when you're 21 and that's okay. I went right to a big bank in New York and worked on the trading floor and knew I could pay my rent. I think I signed my job offer in September of senior year and kind of liked the stability of that, but very, very quickly learned I'd be tragic at it if I stuck with it for the long term.

Michael: *laughs*

Joanna: So, left and went to design school at Parsons. I was kind of reliving what my parents had kind of already fostered. Then after Parsons, I was in retail for a pretty long time but settled on the business side. I went to Parsons to study design specifically wedding dress design. And after a very short internship at Vera Wang, I realized there were far more talented designers in New York beyond me. So, I landed kind of part business, part creative in marketing, in retail.

Michael: Wow! That seems to be a whole another podcast to talk about wedding dress design.

Joanna: *laughs*

Michael: It's like Silicon, it's so fascinating.

Joanna: *laughs* Tough clients and one time clients at that.

Michael: Yes, seriously, tough business. Well, I think Vera has got a lockdown.

Joanna: She does.

Michael: She does.

Joanna: She does.

Michael: So, I mean it's such a fascinating background with your mom kind of being, she was a textile designer and your dad kind of working in finance. I know when we're talking before this, you mentioned that you think you're kind of both, a marriage of the two, just kind of right brain and left brain thinking. So, just tell me more about how you have such a balanced approach to your work. How do you balance both being super right brain and super left brain in the work that you do?

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Joanna: Yeah. I think I feel lucky in that, to have had that training because I think for marketing specifically in this day and age, it's never more important to be rooted in the data and the analytics especially with our digital channels, super sexy topic where you can be very measured, very targeted. But with how oversaturated marketing is and the number of messages, we're all hit with those customers every day. You equally have to make sure that the creative is spot on. You're serving up the right imagery and words to your customers to really get them to pay attention. So, the fusion of the two has served me well.

Michael: Yeah, that's great. That's so great. I think it's something we all strive for is to be able to be both very creative and think outside the box and whatever that means. I hate that phrase but I can't think of a replacement so I keep saying it. And also just be a data geek and really appreciate the analytics and the numbers. It's a really great skillset. So, you wrote the word marketing. So, I know we're going to talk about it at some point. So, let's just dive in.

Joanna: Sure.

Michael: I know something you said to me before was that your customers will always be your strongest marketing channel. So, just say more about that for me.

Joanna: Yeah. I think in what you do in the fitness space and what we do in the office space business, I think we're both, we'd argue in the experience business, there's never a more powerful endorsement than a happy customer. We get most of our leads organically through satisfied customers. I think what's even cooler in the last couple of months since I've joined WeWork, there's very much a dedication to treating their employees as customers because employees of WeWork are really the closest on the frontlines interacting with our customers. So, if your employees are happy and dedicated to the mission and really invested, they're going to expose that to customers and everybody wins.

Michael: Yeah, yeah, that makes sense. So just thinking about your non-employee customers for a second, how do you guys think about turning satisfied customers into real evangelists? How do those customers who are having a good time at WeWork for example, how do they become really raving fans that bring you more business? Even more importantly than that, I'm layering questions here so feel free to stop me, how do you do it consistently? Because I think a lot of businesses that I talked to and that I worked with in Business for Unicorns, I think it's easy for the best customers, the ones that are like the most fanatical, and love you the most [0:06:16] forever, it's easy to get them to talk to your friends. But how do you consistently get satisfied customers to bring you business, and bring you referrals, and leave you great reviews? And what are your thoughts?

Joanna: So, we're at a real turning point on that friend. Here at WeWork, as we think about marketing, as we think about customer experience, we've been around for seven years, so about the same amount of time as MFF.

Michael: Yeah, that's so funny.

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Joanna: And for the last few years as a growing startup, we've been in mega acquisition mode which is such a nerdy marketing word to use but we've been opening buildings, getting customers in the door. And acquisition and growth has been our priority that we in marketing have been kind of jumping up and down being like, "But wait!" You can't only focus on acquisition because then as our business matures, you start to see, I won't even – I've already gone there – use the word turn-ons, podcast. *laughs*

Michael: *laughs*

Joanna: But retention comes, it comes into play. And it's a really important topic that we've been sweating every day is how do we keep our existing customers loyal and happy. For us, it's trying as much as we can to really, really engineer the community and the culture that we're known for. We nerd out about workplace statistics and I read in the last week or so, someone is seven times more engaged at work if they have friends at the office. So that creation of community and people that expect you to show up, that work alongside you definitely contributes to your experience and kind of keeps you here longer.

Michael: Yeah. Do you guys have any - a lot of our listeners really love systems and processes. Do you guys have any systems or processes related to this, related to turning kind of customers into – bringing referrals to you? Is there anything that really works for you consistently?

Joanna: Yes, we actually have a pretty formalized member referral program where there is compensation involved if you bring a friend in. So, we started as a co-working business. Most of our growth has come from kind of the network effect of our community, and businesses working with each other to form partnerships, bringing in friends to work alongside them. That's kind of grown very organically to date.

Michael: So, it's a good takeaway for our listeners is that if you don't have one yet, thinking about having like a really solid referral program where there are real incentives for your clients, something that's in it for them, to talk about your friends and remember you and keep you top of mind. I know at MFF, we've tried all kinds of things over the years including giving trips to Costa Rica and all kinds of things.

Joanna: *laughs*

Michael: I can't say all of them have been successful but they do help your customers to keep you top of mind.

Joanna: Sure.

Michael: If they can win something, there's something in it for them, I think it does help. So just kind of zooming out on the marketing topic, I think marketing these days seems to be primarily just about kind of cutting through the endless digital noise in everyone's life. Our job as marketers seems to be kind of getting someone's attention just long enough so you can just start the process of getting them to know you, like you, and trust you. So, aside from creating a strong customer evangelist like we're just talking

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about, what have been other kind of successful ways that WeWork has helped kind of spread the Gospel? How else are you guys getting seen and noticed out in the world besides just customer referrals?

Joanna: Sure. I think we've - and I can't take credit for this. This has been mostly our public affairs team who are just rock stars. But we've made advances on two fronts, one in giving back and making sure that philanthropy is a big part of our mission. We have a program by which we employ, I think we have a goal of employing over 2500 refugees in the next 2 ½ years.

Michael: Wow!

Joanna: Then the same effort on the front with veterans and employing veterans. And then separate from philanthropy, we've launched this thing called the Creator Awards. It started just here in New York. Now, I believe we do it in 15 cities, everywhere from Buenos Aires to Tel Aviv where we allow our members who are mostly startups to compete for a million dollars.

Michael: Wow!

Joanna: It's kind of the American Idol of business ideas.

Michael: *laughs* I love it.

Joanna: Just announced a winner in January that does really incredible 3D printing and imaging. A lot of those businesses are non-profit based and really mission-driven. So, that kind of content, I find, really resonates in our social channels because it's authentic. And it's about our members and our customers and not about our mission to change office space.

Michael: Yeah, that's huge. Really, it's a perfect example of kind of putting your values first and showing your values in the work you're doing. There are so many people I've talked to even on this podcast about marketing. I love that your two biggest strategies were philanthropy and kind of giving back or celebrating other people in your networks. I think those are great takeaways for our listeners. It's so easy even for a small business and a small neighborhood with limited resources to find a local charity, to find a local soup kitchen, to find a local anything, really, adopt a school nearby, and just do some work that gets you out and seen in your community as someone who gives a shit. There's nothing better than that especially these days. I think millennials are really drawn to companies with a purpose, a purpose that they see them really acting on and so I love that. And then giving awards, that's also awesome. Any business can copy that, a version of that, not at that scale, probably not giving away a million bucks.

Joanna: *laughs*

Michael: But I think it's a really great takeaway for small business owners is any skill. You can just like, "Who do you want to celebrate in your community, at your business?" I think that's awesome. What great examples.

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I want to switch gears a little bit away from marketing even though I know it's your life.

Joanna: Sure.

Michael: I want to just talk a little bit about kind of leadership, kind of to the topic that you have some stuff to say about. Before today, before we started recording today, you had said something like we're taught how to do our jobs functionally. But then at some point you grow into kind of a leader position. In fact, you're in a real leadership position now. You get in that leadership position and no one gives you a manual, at least most companies. I never got one. You just don't get a manual. So, it's hard to learn how to lead. So what do you think makes a great leader?

Joanna: Sure. It's funny. I feel like I've gotten increasingly more "woo woo" in my old age. When I say old age, I work with a ton of kind of 20-some things at a startup, a growing company who are really smart, really wonderful. But leadership to me always used to be like Myers-Briggs ENTJ and like whoever was the most decisive and the most strategically oriented. What I think helps me most - I do a ton of reading. I love like my Simon Sinek and Marianne Williamson and kind of non-traditional leadership coaches if you will.

Michael: Yeah, you're speaking my language.

Joanna: Yeah. I mean, I think you just inherently soak up a lot from teachers like that. Marianne is a big energy person and believes that your energy precedes you in a conversation. If you want into a conference room guns blazing with an aggressive tone and a posture, you're probably not going to get your way.

Michael: Yeah. It's a great one. I think leadership, I mean energy coming first in leadership makes a lot of sense. Because I talk about this all the time but people kind of feel you before they see you. I think that's what she's getting at. And especially for leaders, that your energy and your presence is always amplified. There are always eyes on you, every move you make and every word you say. And so making sure that you're really showing up with the best positive energy is huge. So, you mentioned a few resources but how are you learning to be a leader?

Joanna: It's funny. I listened to an Oprah podcast over the weekend. *laughs*

Michael: *laughs* Everyone wants to be there.

Joanna: Like she's the standard totally. But she was asked, I think, what's her secret. She's like, "My show for years and years wasn't a talk show. It was a listening show." I found that so wise and so poignant, of course, Oprah. But to your question, I'm trying to listen a lot which has not always been a strong suit of mine. I think especially when you join a new company in a leadership role, the instinct is to prove something and to insert your opinion and to get some quick wins. What I'm really trying to do here, it's a new industry, it's a new business, we really don't have many models to follow is to step back and listen. Assess what the team needs.

Michael: Yeah, yeah, that's huge. I want to give that answer a standing ovation. *laughs*

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Joanna: *laughs*

Michael: In fact, I just recently wrote a blog post about listening and how important it is.

Joanna: You did!

Michael: Yeah! So, you're reading my mind. But it's so huge because so many people, especially when they're new in a job, think they have to come in and show how right they are, how many good ideas they have, or be like the most decisive. I really agree with you 110%. I think some of the best leaders I've ever had are the ones who listen the best, are the ones who actively get everyone to contribute the most meaningful version of what they got to contribute. I probably should have said what they have to contribute. And I love that so much that that's also been true for you. And especially when you're building a community like this, like a WeWork space where you want it to be a place where everyone feels like they have a seat at the table. Everyone can contribute. So the fact that they have you doing some quality listening is they're lucky to have you.

Joanna: Thanks.

Michael: So I know WeWork is just growing super-fast. You mentioned it earlier. I imagine things are changing every single day. So, as a leader, how do you personally manage to stay focused and productive in the face of all of those moving parts? How do you stay on task? How do you keep focused?

Joanna: Sure, learning how to do that every day. I reached out to you guys recently to see if I could take the MFF time ninja class again.

Michael: Oh sure, sure.

Joanna: Not a paid plug but truly of interest because time management here in an open floor plan and there's a DJ and a barista and foosball tables can be quite challenging. I try to block off an hour or two every morning to do some real focused work before the calendar gets crazy. I try not to let my email inbox run my day, some of the basics that you're far more an expert in than I am.

Michael: *laughs* Just because I know it doesn't mean I do it.

Joanna: Then just trying to roll with the ambiguity. I mean the amount of times in my day that I open a blank Google doc and stare at it because we don't have a process or we've never done it before is terrifying. But to go back to, I don't know, it's probably not Marianne but someone wise said it like, "It's how you look at it. It could be incredibly daunting or could be really exciting and an opportunity to do something crazy and new."

Michael: Yeah. I also know that your team is growing really quickly. So how do you manage time with them, time not with them, getting some of them together, getting all of them together? How do you think about your time with your team?

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Joanna: Sure. I'm a bit of a nerd about some underlying structure. I have one-on-ones with all of my direct reports early in the week. Then we have a weekly team meeting. I want to borrow this from a past co-worker at J.Crew. She called it your favorite meeting of the week.

Michael: Yes!

Joanna: By virtue of that title, nobody every missed it or rarely missed it. But I try to keep those weekly check-ins religiously and kind of drill into them the discipline of coming with an agenda using the time well. Then outside of that, everybody is on their own. It's so often the instinct, I'm sure not only here but at other workplaces is if a topic comes up, the instinct is to just throw 30 minutes on the calendar to try to talk about it, resolve it. I really try to push back and there's a solution out there that does not require a meeting or an email or even a phone call. Like just do it. Keep moving.

Michael: Yeah. That's so important because I think you're right. Everyone's impulse, and I've been in so many places where this has been true as well, is that the minute there's a topic that we think more than two people want to discuss, suddenly we need everyone to discuss it. And in most places, to be fair, it's like an hour for a meeting. You're even doing well if it's 30 minutes.

Joanna: Yeah.

Michael: Most people are just only thinking blocks of one hour. It's like -.

Joanna: There's so much time.

Michael: Really this conversation probably can be three people in 15 minutes. Let's get real. So it's so important especially for managing new teams. They're just creating this kind of norms. It's good to start those habits early. So another big challenge with a rapidly growing team is deciding kind of how to scale that team. So how big was your team when you started at WeWork, just a handful of months ago and how big is it now?

Joanna: It's a moving target. I think the instinct in a growing business is to kind of throw people at the growth. And not to say we've been reckless on hiring but there's just been so much work to do that we've brought so many people through the door. For a time, every Monday when we have new hire orientation, there's been about 35 to 40 people here. We're just blowing up.

While it's a little painful to not – like my instinct is to bring on as many people as I know. I know good marketers. Well, it's a little painful to go without and to kind of hold down the fort for a couple of weeks/months. We're trying to be really thoughtful about our hires go forward. But for our sake and for the sake of the careers of those who are coming in, so we're in a bit of a pause phase now giving a lot of thought to our ideal org and the skillsets we need before we go guns blazing on the hiring front again.

That was a question I had for you because I think you and Mark do such an incredible job at really hiring but like curating your staff to create such an unparalleled experience. Staff retention has been huge for you guys, curious for what you look for and how you approach it.

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Michael: Yeah. Well, we try to maintain a pretty slow hiring process which is hard for a company growing as fast as you are. I don't know if that was true when we were growing years ago but we try to hire really slow and really take time to get to know people. Again, I know it's not always possible but I don't know that we have much of a secret besides that. Then in that process, we try to ask some really good questions about their past experience. We called references religiously which a lot of places just skip over that stuff and you learn so much from talking to past employers about our candidate.

Actually, in this vein, I want to ask you more about what is your process for knowing, and you talked about this a little bit, but I want to just push a little bit further. What is your process for knowing when it's time to hire someone new and how to change everyone's roles as your team grows, right? Because I know at least at MFF and a lot of business that I'm working with, they start really small, just a handful of people. As you grow more and more, suddenly, you need layers, and you need supervision, and you need management. So, since you're growing so fast, how do you think about the changing lines here? You mentioned you guys imagining kind of your ideal org chart but what else are you doing personally to kind of think through who belongs in what seat and what seats do I need? *laughs*

Joanna: Yeah, as simple as this sounds, I think, again while it's tempting to just go out and bring in the people, and now we're at the point where we need some seasoned, experienced people, we're still trying to get our head around the work and like what is marketing at WeWork.

Michael: Yeah, what WeWork needs to get done, yeah.

Joanna: For so long, our marketing has been our community and we've grown organically through word of mouth and through people who like to be here and pulling their friends. So, we're really asking big questions around marketing. And then what functionally we need in terms of hires to do what that work is. But on the recruiting and hiring front and how it changes team dynamics, it's really important to me when I'm bringing in a candidate at any level, that the entire team meet with them.

Michael: Sure.

Joanna: And it might extend the process a bit. But I think for any of their peers, their direct reports, those senior to them, should spend time with them because I think it's revealing how someone interviews with someone more junior versus a peer. I try to grab lunch or grab a drink with this person and kind of lighten the mood or change the context of the interview beyond just sitting across the table from someone staring at a resume. And references, yeah, are huge.

Michael: I love both those suggestions. I am a huge fan of group interviews with multiple people. I like it either way, multiple candidates and one or two people.

Joanna: Oh! Oh! *laughs*

Michael: *laughs* Actually that's a big Gap thing. I know we both worked in retail for a little while but Gap used to do that for all their companies. Their first interviews were like 10 candidates and two managers.

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Joanna: Oh gosh!

Michael: At a table.

Joanna: It's Hunger Games.

Michael: Yeah. It was 100% like Hunger Games. But it was pretty civilized, at least, the ones I attended but it's just so fascinating because none of our work especially in retail and especially in both of our industries, none of our work happens solo. There's not a ton of a one-on-one. It all happens in group conversations. So, right from the beginning, seeing how people interact in a group dynamic is just so fascinating. Some people just need to be the first to talk every time and that's good to know. There are some people who will wait and be quiet until they're called on and that's good to know. You get the idea.

Joanna: Yeah.

Michael: There are so many layers in a group conversation. Just don't get one-on-one. Because one-on-one, it's like a little mini monologue, a little mini performance which is lovely and there are some great stuff you can do one-on-one but I really love group stuff. So I love that you make your whole team meet with people and start early on getting that sense of yeah, we're all going to talk to each other.

Joanna: Yeah.

Michael: I think that's fantastic. And I also love your tip there about changing the context. Because I think it's so easy for interviews to have a tone that is purely dictated by the environment. That you go in and you sit across from each other, across the desk from each other and it's very serious and it feels like an interview. But you can sit somewhere and it's like coffee or tea or you go actually out of the building somewhere. I think you do get a very different interview doing that.

Joanna: For sure.

Michael: So I think that's a super awesome tip. We can keep talking about teams forever but I'm going to move on to a topic that we mentioned but we haven't talked about yet which is community. I talk a lot about in this podcast about community. It's a big topic. I feel like community has been a little bit of a kind of growing buzzword in business for the last few years. I think it seems more important than ever in business to create a kind of genuine connection with our customers. So, how do you think about building community in business more specifically at WeWork?

Joanna: Of course, yeah. It's kind of inherent in our business model which is interesting and with that, at least for me, makes it feel like I work at a mission-driven company. With technology having a tendency to be so isolating, I love that at the core of what we do is to attempt to bring humans together in real life in spaces.

Everything about our building is kind of engineered behind the scenes to bring people together. Our hallways are designed to be super narrow so you might bump into people. We don't put signs anywhere that direct you to the bathrooms so that you have to stop and ask someone. In those bathrooms, we

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have awesome music playing and our colleagues in Tokyo or Mexico City are hearing the same music that you're hearing here. We have a community team that every Monday night they serve dinner and everybody comes together and eats together downstairs. And they're great about planning surprise and delayed events. So it's something we do that you can kind of engineer and then it has to a certain extent happen naturally.

Michael: Yeah. It's so funny. That's kind of my next question was just hearing you talk about that. It's fair to say that WeWork, I think could be described as kind of an engineered or planned or intentional community. So, how do you balance the designing it and having it meet certain business needs for sure and also creating a space for just genuine, organic kind of community development? How do you balance those two?

Joanna: Yeah. I only recently encountered, we have a dedicated team here that's actually called Workplace Strategy. It's a big piece of what we do. So, if you think about it, before I worked here I guess I never really did. The office was invented in like early 1900s, Frank Lloyd Wright and it was cubicles and all the big [0:27:29] offices. It was engineered for a very process-oriented work where you would be under visual supervision. And a hundred years have gone by and many of our offices look the same.

And like how humans interact with their space, where they spend the majority of their time had not really been re-examined, say for us and then Google and Facebook who throw Ping-Pong table and a beer tap in and call it exciting. But we have a whole team that's dedicated to spaces for focus, spaces for collaboration, spaces to reenergize, to think like you may even leave your office feeling better than when you got there which is like such a novel idea.

Michael: Yeah, definitely. That was not an idea that I think our parents or grandparents had about work.

Joanna: Right, right.

Michael: Yeah. That wasn't an expectation that I think they had. So, if you were talking to maybe a small business owner and they wanted to create a space in their business that is for building community, a place where people could connect and get to know each other better, how could they start? What are your tips for how someone would start in their business creating a space, both for their clients or maybe for their employees to create a space that is warm and welcoming, a space that does leave them better than when they walked in the door that morning? How could someone get started, any thoughts?

Joanna: Yeah. I think it starts with the team like sit down with them, talk about what's currently working, what's not working, what have they seen elsewhere that they would love to have. Sometimes the feedback is about the actual physical space. Sometimes it's about your policies and your culture. Everyone wants flexibility. Could I work from home one day a week? I read this a couple of days ago. Work used to be somewhere you go. Now it's something you do, like you could work from anywhere. You go from like desktop to laptop to what you can do on your phone. But yes, start with your team. What did they want within reason? It can't be free for all.

Michael: Everyone's going to start with a beer tap. That's everyone's first request.

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Joanna: Yeah, give you leads, which great, like we've never had better readings than when we're sitting around here on a Friday at 6 o'clock. Half of the business is like people want to work from home and our goal in life is to create spaces where you actually want to show up and interact with people. If it takes some of that to get people here, great!

Michael: I love that for our listeners. If you want to get started creating an environment that is more welcoming for your clients or for your staff, I think start by a conversation. I love that idea. Just start by asking them how do I make this place just 5% better, just 1% more comfortable? Just how do I make it so you want to show up here just a little bit more everyday because it could be simple? It could be like just get me a new chair. It could be I want a standing desk. It could be really simple things. Change the lighting. That's always my gripe in offices. The lighting is always terrible. So, given all of that, how important is design in everything you do here?

Joanna: I will not do it justice speaking about it. That's why we have dedicated teams who really apply precision and research around intentional design. It's a field I was not aware of before I got here. But it's all yeah, very thoughtful, very intentional. I think we just opened up a new floor in the building that I want to take you for a little tour if we have time after this.

Michael: Yay!

Joanna: But I don't understand the precision behind the design but I understand that my company is investing in me by doing something like that. Monday morning, like the energy upstairs is amazing. It really shows your employee cares about you. And there's a huge trend of millennials. I think they'll comprise like 50% of the workforce by 2020. They've inspired the trend. But I think you and I would agree this notion of being bought into your company and being bought into their mission but vice versa, feeling like they're invested in you. Many millennials as I read, I don't know, would choose like workplace amenities and vibe and culture over certain tangible benefits like salary and compensation.

Michael: No, it's true. It's just not enough anymore to get a paycheck. They want to know that you care about them personally. And you're doing something to make their day better, their life better, their environment better. So, I think it's got to be a huge part of the reason why WeWork has been so successful is because it is providing that sense of oh, my employer really gives a crap about me. Yeah, that's so huge.

So one of the things I hear often from the businesses that we work with in Business for Unicorns is they've been in business for a few years. They have a really strong community, great clients, great team. The minute they start to grow, the minute they start to open a second location, or bring in those 20 extra clients, things start to change. The culture kind of has to grow and change with it. That's a real issue with culture and community is that it does have this kind of organic sense of it needs to be reflective of whoever is there and present and engaged in the moment. So, I'm just curious. What's your experience? What makes scaling community so hard?

Joanna: Yeah. Another, I don't think we've solved it but it's an active conversation here. We are very focused on our why and for us it's about the community. It's about engineering this space, the design, the technology, all to support community. As we go in new markets like Tokyo where workplace is so

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different, when we opened our building there, it was a lot of middle-aged men in very formal business suits and not like hoodies and skateboards and Ping-Pong. But we tried to compromise with the local community of any market we're entering into. And it's a bit of a 50-50. Like how can we maintain what we stand for as WeWork but also embrace the local community?

Michael: Yeah, that makes sense. I love what you've first said. I love so much what you said, which was this scaling community and culture is an ongoing conversation. So, what does the conversation look like? How do you communicate both with the people on your building and you mentioned people outside of your building. What does that conversation look like?

Joanna: Yeah. We have community teams in every building. We have a ton of communication with them non-stop. Another thing I'm getting used to, the hashtag startup life is having Slack and Gchat and all of these different modes of communication. But we have a dedicated Slack channel on community and member feedback. Just to try to keep our ear to the ground on what's happening in our buildings, to make sure that there feels like a sense of community even as we scale. Like with almost 300 locations, it helps to have teams in the building that are responsible for curating events and making our members happy. So we kind of try as best as we can.

Michael: Yeah. That's huge. I would say for our listeners. If you want to start investing in the community, I think find a person who has some of their time focused on this. I think it sounds like what you're saying and I would agree, the thing they should be focused on is being in conversation with people, and getting feedback on a regular basis, and continually processing that feedback because as your client base changes or as your employee base changes, that feedback is going to change. If you are listening to it and you are even being remotely responsive to it, your sense of culture and community will grow with the people as it changes. So I think that's so important. I couldn't have said it better. That's great.

Joanna: Yeah. Our community lead in every building has equal parts like cruise director, party planner, connecter, matchmaker, putting individuals in businesses in touch with each other because again, going back to that like you're seven times more engaged. They work if you have a friend. It's so simple but trying to facilitate network and community in buildings.

Michael: It's so funny. For years at Mark Fisher Fitness, we've used the Gallup Q12 Survey and I don't know if you know the survey.

Joanna: Yeah, of course.

Michael: One of the questions on there that that team has always pushed back against was one of the questions is do you have a best friend at work? Everyone thinks it's a weird question, also just because the idea of like as adults, we don't really think of like our besties anymore. Not all of us think about having like a best friend. So there was push back against it. I would always say, "No, no, no." It's really important because you don't just want to have like some friends at work. We want to have like good friends, people that you would be friends with after you're done working together. I think that's the real goal of so many work places is not just like some good acquaintances and like, "Yeah, I'll go out with you and have a drink." But like when we're done coming from the same building everyday at some point

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in our lives, we're still going to stay in touch and we're still going to be friends. I think that's at least the metric I think we strive for is having that level of friendship at work. It makes a huge difference.

Joanna: Yeah. This is going to give away my age.

Michael: *laughs*

Joanna: I was reading a white paper on millennials put up by Google. But it had some stat about millennials looking to their co-workers as their second families. Think about how much time you spend with each other. I know you guys probably classify yourselves as such at MFF. But if you think about like the military, they call each other brothers and sisters.

Michael: That's true.

Joanna: Those you're working alongside which how lovely is that. This is right about the point we go off to defend and start singing Kumbaya.

Michael: You know I'm ready.

Joanna: We spend so much time here. You got to be able to look forward to it.

Michael: Yeah. This is the challenge in this growing need for real close friendships at work because our parents and grandparents would be like, "Friends at work! No." Like at work, we work together. It's not personal. It's business. I've always pushed against that. But I think there is a real tension I see in a lot of work places between this idea that we're all friends and we can be really close.

And back to, I think it was something you said earlier about this idea that you think of your team as internal customers, that we are both serving our teams who are employees who work here. And we are working on developing close, tight friendships with them. There's a real tension there of like I have the ability to hire and fire you and change how you get paid and change what your day looks like. So there's that. And I want to be friends. So how do you personally navigate that? That's two very different things to get out of one relationship.

Joanna: Yeah, especially with social media. Most of my team probably follows me on Instagram and luckily I think my posts are pretty clean. *laughs*

Michael: *laughs* You got to think about that.

Joanna: There's very little blur between work and personal and who you are at work and who you are in life. I actually love that. Like beware the person that shows up at work like an alternate human and they are in there. They're real life. I feel like we've all evolved past that.

I think it's Simon Sinek who talks a lot about your team just wants you to care about them. Yes, they care about your decision-making abilities and your functional expertise but they want you to care about their life, their priorities, and not just their skillset. I think he talks about like being a manager versus a leader. You want to be led. You don't want to be managed. So especially, and I hate to keep using like

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the millennial buzz word because I, myself subscribe to most of their intent as well. You want to work with people who you know care about you and have your back. It's more of intake versus what you can contribute professionally.

Michael: Yeah. It's true. I think I'm a big fan of where things are heading or where they really seem to be. I think for a lot of folks who are a little bit older in the workforce, it's a real shift because I know my -. I grew up in a house with my grandparents. I know they very much felt like, at least my grandfather did, that he had kind of a work persona and a home persona. The work persona, he was the guy who got things done and he worked often in construction and things like that. So he had to be like the tough guy who got things done and yelled at people when he needed to and put them in their place. At home, he was like a big teddy bear. I think that's pretty typical for a lot of older generations.

And now, this expectation that you are authentically the same person in and out of the work place and you bring your whole personal self to work every day is a big shift for people. I'm curious to see how it continues to evolve. I'm sure we can keep talking about it for hours and hours.

Joanna: For sure.

Michael: But we are coming up on about 45 minutes. So look at us talking for 45 minutes.

Joanna: Wow!

Michael: So I want to do good, do good, do well and switch gears to make sure we have time for our final five.

Joanna: Okay.

Michael: So I mentioned to you before, at the end every conversation, I ask five questions to everyone, the same five questions.

Joanna: *laughs*

Michael: They're not complicated or scary, kind of like inside the Actors Studio which is a reference that I think none of my listeners will probably get because there's not a lot of performing people listening.

Joanna: I wish.

Michael: But you know what it is.

Joanna: Yes.

Michael: So, are you ready for your final five questions?

Joanna: I'm ready.

Michael: Yay! Question number one. What is your morning routine?

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Joanna: Wow! I wake up at 5:30. I do a quick meditation, TM. I get to MFF, Mark Fisher Fitness, as all are likely aware. Most days, Monday to Friday, we have our little 6:30 AM crew. Get ready for work. And then I'm here like 8:00, 8:30. I get most of my work done in the morning.

Michael: Great.

Joanna: And coffee, all the coffee.

Michael: All the coffee. It's everyone's morning routine. Great! I love that.

Number two, what activities give you a sense of renewal? When I say renewal, I mean what are the things that like fill up your cup? That when you do this activity, you feel like you're ready to go tackle the world again? So what gives you a sense of renewal?

Joanna: Sure. I would just repeat answer to number one. My MFF, like I wake up after exercise. On the days I don't, I'm cranky. Same on meditation, it's a struggle for me for a long time and now 20 minutes in the morning, 20 minutes at night and I'm a different person.

Michael: How did you get into that meditation practice?

Joanna: My older brother who was super stressed, super anxious has a pretty intense job, had gone to the TM center in downtown Manhattan on Beaver Street. Did you know there was a Beaver Street in Manhattan? *laughs*

Michael: I did. I did. That's still funny.

Joanna: Oh yeah, so mature. He had been doing it for a couple of months and I'm like, "You are a different person. What's going on with you?"

Michael: Wow!

Joanna: He kind of sold me on it. And yeah, I've been doing it ever since.

Michael: Yeah. Did you struggle at first to get in?

Joanna: Still do, still do.

Michael: Did you just do it cold turkey like just -? I mean what's the opposite of cold turkey? Just like you dove in head first just 20 minutes, 20 minutes?

Joanna: Yeah. I mean I tried to scale up with the 10-minute -. The way they teach and like the practice they kind of enforce is to just like 20 minutes or best. I've tried the narrated ones and I get too distracted.

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Michael: Yeah, yeah, yeah, good for you. Good for you. That's a big deal. Awesome! Number three, this is a tough one.

Joanna: Uh-oh.

Michael: Just because I know that you read a lot of books and like to continually learn. But what is one book or learning experience that you think has really taught you the most?

Joanna: Oh wow!

Michael: If you have to pick like a top two, like I'm not going to be mad at you. But ideally what's like the one that you think of that's the thing that really gave me the best life lessons or helped me understand blah, yeah.

Joanna: Wow! I think I dropped her name a couple of times on this podcast but Marianne Williamson.

Michael: You're a big fan.

Joanna: I've read a bunch of her books. We have the luxury of listening to her speak in person here in New York. She speaks every Tuesday night at that church on Fifth Avenue which is amazing. But so much of her kind of pillars, like your relationships with your greatest teachers. She's so wise and really helps you untangle like the stress. Like it's all the world is bigger than this. I used to struggle a lot with anxiety at work. Yeah, she's not a business coach but should be.

Michael: Yeah, is there any particular lessons that send out for you of hers? Anything that's still really meaningful that resonate with you on a regular basis?

Joanna: I think a lot of her talk about energy and that it precedes you, and energy by which you approach your situation can make it night or day. Her talk about relationships being your greatest teachers and they're always sent for maximum growth opportunity. So, when you're in a particularly challenging spot like it's to teach you something, it's not to crush you or to humiliate you.

And she talks a lot about vulnerability. What you think comes back to you like this blend between your work persona and your home persona. I think it's great for your team to see you vulnerable or you admitting you don't know something. The most terrifying leaders are those that are on a mission who can admit no wrong and like steer you down a crazy path.

Michael: Yeah, yeah, I agree. I agree. It makes sense that that message about energy resonates so much with you because I said at the beginning of our podcast that I see that when you walk into a room. People are excited to see you.

Joanna: *laughs*

Michael: That energy you have, that precedes you. People are like, "Joanna Lee is here." Everyone is always so excited about that. So whatever you're doing, it is working. So, keep it up.

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Number four, this one's more whimsical. Number four, if you could have a super power, what would it be? If you could have a super power, what would it be?

Joanna: Oh wow! Time travel or to never interrupt anyone ever, I'm working on my listening but I struggle with it, or time travel.

Michael: *laughs*

Joanna: *laughs*

Michael: Let's start with the first one. Why time travel?

Joanna: Oh my goodness! I think it would be amazing to go back like at the push of a button in different eras.

Michael: Where would you go first or I should say when would you go first?

Joanna: Midnight in Paris.

Michael: Okay, nice, nice.

Joanna: Everything about that film and that time.

Michael: *laughs* That's great.

Joanna: The artist, the music, the costumes.

Michael: Yeah, that's a good one.

Joanna: Because they were outfits in those costumes in real life, right?

Michael: *laughs* Yes! I imagine they didn't really think of it as costumes then but you'll go back and find out.

Joanna: No. No.

Michael: Maybe.

Joanna: *laughs* Yes.

Michael: So not interrupting people, I've never heard you -.

Joanna: What! Just kidding

Michael: See. Good one. I've never seen that be your thing but obviously I've seen a lot of conversations but is that really a thing?

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Joanna: The struggle is real.

Michael: Yeah, interesting, interesting.

Joanna: We tend to have a very collaborative culture here, so a lot of meetings. And I find, yeah, I often speak up out of turn. It's hard to step back and listen.

Michael: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's so funny. I think one of the things - I went to coaching school. And one of the things they teach you in coaching school is how to intrude. They don't call it interrupting. They call it intruding. Intruding is often done like respectfully and thoughtfully. But you specifically cut someone off because either they've gone off too long and you can't remember everything they've said or you have a clarifying question that they've just kind of bolted right past. I think it's a really important skill to be able to cut people off in a way that they don't feel like crap about themselves or like hate you.

Joanna: Yeah.

Michael: But I hear you because I think so many people in a collaborative environment find it hard. It's like jump rope. It's like when do I jump in this conversation. When can I push pause? It's hard to do. It's hard to do. I love that.

Number, we're in number five already, number five, number five. This one's personal but tell me whatever you want. *laughs*

Joanna: Uh-oh.

Michael: What is the last thing you think about before you fall asleep at night? In general, what's the last thing you think about, the last kind of thing you think about before you fall asleep at night?

Joanna: Yeah. I used to be really good about a gratitude practice and I'd make my little list. It should help prevent me from going into like, "What am I going to do the next day," my to-do list. So yeah, it's often like a spectrum between the two.

Michael: Yeah. It's either what do I have going on and what I have to or what can I just be grateful for.

Joanna: Today's gratitude or tomorrow's anxiety.

Michael: *laughs* Those are good options. Those are good options.

Joanna Lee, this has been so much fun. Before we wrap it up is how can people learn more about you or follow you or learn more about WeWork? How can people find you on the interwebs?

Joanna: Sure. You can always visit our website. It's a work in progress for the marketing group.

Michael: *laughs*

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Joanna: So don't judge us. We're working on it. Follow us on any of our social channel. And then my LinkedIn is up-to-date. I'm on the Facebook and all of that. Yeah, this has been so lovely.

Michael: Great. It's been so fun.

Joanna: Great way to start the week.

Michael: Thanks again for letting me use your space. It's been a blast.

Joanna: Of course.

Michael: We'll do it again some time when WeWork is a few more years down the line. We'll come back and see where everything is at.

Joanna: We'd love that.

Michael: Awesome. Thanks so much, Joanna Lee.

Joanna: Thank you.