

Taking Action and Moving Forward During Times of Uncertainty | Jimmy Pitaro

Welcome to In Search of Excellence which is about our quest for greatness and our desire to be the very best we can be to learn educate and motivate ourselves to live up to our highest potential It's about planning for excellence and how we achieve excellence through incredibly hard work dedication and perseverance It's about believing in ourselves and the ability to overcome the many obstacles we all face on our way there Achieving excellence is our goal and it's never easy to do We all have different backgrounds personalities and surroundings We all have different routes and how we hope and want to get there My guest today is Jimmy Pita Jimmy is the chair of ESPN where he is responsible for its live programming sports news non scripted sports related content as well as Disney's cable channels including ESPN Plus and ABC Prior to becoming its chair Jimmy was the president of ESPN co-chair of the Media Networks and chair of Disney Consumer products where he was responsible for licensing the Disney Pixar Star Wars and Marvel brands It was also responsible for the hundreds of Disney store locations around the world Prior to joining Disney Jimmy was the head of media at Yahoo where he was in charge of Yahoo's media properties including Yahoo sports and Yahoo music He has received many accolades in his career including being named the sports Business Journal sports executive of the year in 2000 In addition to all of this Jimmy is a dedicated philanthropist and serves on many boards including the National Football Foundation the college football Hall of Fame and the V Foundation Jimmy It's a true pleasure to have you on my show Welcome to In Search of Excellence Thanks Randy Thanks for having me Great to be here I always start my podcast with our family because from the moment we're born our family helped shape our personality our values and the preparation for the future You grew up in an Italian American family in the city of Edgemont in Westchester County Your dad Anthony was in construction battalion during the Vietnam War and then started his own painting company and your mom Lucille was a homemaker and later in life a computer operator your parents had a great relationship You said that they have doctorates in love They worked all the time to provide for your family growing up you took maybe one or two vacations ever You didn't go out to dinner that often either I want to start a podcast by talking about two dinners And I when you were younger

when you were with your parents and sister and somebody at the table next to you was rude to a waitress and did leave a tip and a dinner later in your life when you were at a restaurant in Connecticut and there was a group of military men in uniform next to the table You were a waiter in law school as was I and I think we can both relate to these situations Can you tell us more about these dinners What your dad did on his way out at both restaurants as well as what you learned that night And some of the other important lessons your parents taught you growing up and in search of excellence how important is compassion for others and respect for others You've done your homework Wow That that's incredible that you have that level of detail right out of the gate Uh Yeah So the first dinner uh I guess I was maybe 12 or 13 years old and yes we did not take uh a ton of vacations We did not go out to dinner very often when we did go out to dinner It was it was a big event in our house Uh My dad was working six or sometimes seven days a week Uh My mom was always working as well Uh And so it was kind of a celebratory event when we would go out to dinner Anyway We were at a uh I think it was an Italian restaurant and the folks uh at the next table were being quite rude to the waitress and we we couldn't help but overhear it We were right next to them and my dad was getting very frustrated by the whole experience And uh long story short uh when the uh the couple got up to leave it was clear that they had stiffed the waitress uh and left no tip and just just walked out and uh on the way out my father went up to the waitress and and gave her a tip and just just thanked her and she wasn't even our waitress Um but he um you know my my father was very very much focused on people who serve Uh he served as you mentioned in in the Navy during Vietnam uh for around two years And um he was uh just very aware of of the situation at that at that moment in time and I just I remember it and it it definitely resonated with me Uh And then I experienced it as as I'm sure you did Randy firsthand as a waiter uh you know during law school Uh I was waiting tables at a very fancy um kind of white table cloth Italian restaurant in the Hamptons trying to you know help get through law school help my parents who uh were were putting me through law school Uh And so I I definitely experienced the challenges of of of being a waiter It's a very very tough job and I'm a lot of respect for people um who are who are serving others not just in that capacity but in in any capacity Uh anyway fast forward to a couple of years ago we had moved to Connecticut which was um really a you know a great move from my parents' perspective My wife and I uh we lived for about 20 years in Los Angeles And yeah my my parents just

thought we were on vacation for 20 years So when we moved back to Connecticut uh they were they were very very happy uh because they're in Connecticut Anyway We went to dinner Uh one of the first nights we were back uh another Italian restaurant We we we we go to other restaurants but but this was another Italian restaurant uh in Fairfield And um there was a a bunch of uh military members at at at a nearby table in uniform I believe they were army Uh and uh I I decided that I was just gonna thank them for their service in my own way And I went up to the to their waiter and said just do me a favor and and and put their put their meals on our tab And about about five minutes later uh I saw my dad get up and walk over to the waiter and he tried to do the same exact thing but I had beat him to it So we had he had no idea that I had done it and we obviously didn't communicate about it But you know iii I learned that I guess from from watching my father and then many many years later my dad was still trying to do the same thing which is repay people who were serving others So anyway yeah I've been very fortunate to come from a family Uh a very tight knit family We're still close to this day Yeah That doctorate and love thing I can't take credit for that That's actually Dick Vitale who works for us Um He he says all the time uh his parents weren't doctors but they had doctorates in love and that you know that that really resonated with me the first time I heard him say it and I feel the same way about my folks I'm so incredibly blessed They're both here They're healthy I'm actually having dinner with them tonight How important is respect and compassion for others in search of excellence It's incredibly important I have a I have a poster in my office and it says work hard and be nice to people And I actually don't think it's any more complicated than that And anyone who walks into my office sees it and we usually have a conversation about it But yeah these are these are things that I learned from from watching my parents uh their work ethic and um and and how they treated others not just friends and family but how they treated uh folks in a restaurant that were serving them wherever we were Uh They're always so focused on being thoughtful being considerate uh being compassionate And yeah I try to I try to take those learnings with me uh in into the workplace And we try to create a culture at ESPN and at Disney where folks feel feel like they belong Folks want to be a part of something folks feel like they can show up as they want to show up They feel like they're gonna be respected when they bring their true selves to work Uh That doesn't start with me by the way this is a fantastic culture that I actually uh inherited Uh but it's been it's been a pleasure to to con continue to develop it cultivate it and and be a

part of it You grew up in a huge sports family where ESPN Sports Center was the mainstay of your living room The New York Yankees Giants Knicks and Rangers games were always on You're a huge Yankees fan growing up so much so that your mood was completely dependent on how the Yankees were doing Your cousin Rick Dempsey was actually a catcher for the Yankees for four years He played in the majors for 24 years in a total of 1765 games and was the most valuable player of the 1983 World Series when the Baltimore Orioles beat the Philadelphia Phillies four games to one And as a fun fact he was most famous for running around the bases during rain delays and then sliding into home plate at head first on that huge plastic blue tarp that they put on the infield when it rains which would cause the crowd to go berserk in addition to Rick one of your favorite players was a third baseman named Mike Mike Pagliarulo who had 100 and five runs over six seasons in New York from 1984 to 1989 When you got married to your wife Jeannie in 1997 you immediately went out and got a dog and named him Pags We're going to talk about your days playing college football and the progression of your career a little later in the show today But before we do how did your love of sports shape your future And what important lessons did you learn as a kid Watching your favorite teams and sports heroes including lessons you learned from watching athletes make mistakes and do stupid things like Pete Rose who holds major league records for games played at bats and hits being permanently banned from baseball for gambling and being precluded from being inducted into the baseball hall of Fame Sports were a huge part of my upbringing The Yankees were on in my house 100 and 62 games a year even during dinner Uh and it wasn't just me It was it was my mom my sister who by the way is the general counsel for major league baseball Uh And my dad we were all uh yes our moods were in large part dependent on how the Yankees did It wasn't just the Yankees We were Knicks fans we were Giants fans we were Rangers fans and that was pretty much my neighborhood in Edgemont uh New York But it was uh it was a huge part of of my upbringing The sports were the soundtrack including including ESPN to this day uh ESPN and sports in general the soundtrack uh in my homes growing up and and and now uh but you know there was so much bonding when the when the when the Yankees won there was a celebratory environment when the Yankees lost We would we would commiserate uh you know I I grew up with a tight knit group of of guys In fact there's seven of us and we are still best friends to this day Uh We talk almost every day whether it's text or or actually talking Um We're in we're in

communication seven days a week Uh And they are the guys that I grew up with going to the bleachers in the Bronx you know we would leave school and and and drive to the Bronx which was only about a twenty-minute drive from Edgemont Uh but we would sit there in the bleachers and and and and cheer for the Yankees And to this day we watch games together We were we're texting during Yankee games Uh We're all you know fascinated with Aaron Judge right now And there's a there's a there's a text thread dedicated to just Aaron Judge and his his quest for Roger Marris But yeah I mean I mean look we uh of course I learned a ton from sports in general not just watching sports but playing sports I I mean my my whole life has been consumed by by playing sports and I say this all the time and people who know me are tired of hearing me say this So I apologize if you've heard me say it before But uh I've I've learned as much from being a part of team sports as I did from from all of my formal education You know this idea of just being part of a team this idea of checking your ego at the door and focusing on what's best for a group of people as opposed to what's best for yourself You know dealing with defeat It's it's agonizing and and just focusing on the positive I I had a coach in uh junior high school who said you either win or you learn and it seems pretty basic but there's there's a lot of truth to that Uh And you know I there's a lot of losing uh for me growing up some of the sports that I played we weren't our teams weren't very good but that builds character and I feel like it in part made me the person I I am today And so that that team environment Randy I I tried to bring to the to the leadership table at at ESPN I have a team of about I don't know 13 direct reports and we meet every week for an hour an hour and a half And it's the highlight of my week because again I just I just love being a part of a team And I love I love when we accomplish something celebrating it together And then likewise obviously things don't always go according to plan It's a roller coaster and when we have challenges getting together as a group and trying to figure it out you know that's that's in large part the joy of of this job just being a part of something special at ESPN There are millions of young kids out there who idolize athletes when someone asks them what they want to do when they're older They say they want to play in the NFL or the NBA or some other sport These are amazing dreams and I wanna go over some of the numbers here and start with the NBA There are 30 teams and each can have 15 players on their active roster which equates to 450 players There are roughly 500,000 high school boys basketball players in the United States at any one given time of these roughly 16,000 will go on to play at the college

level A number that includes division 12 or three of these 16,000 only 100 and 10 will ever play in at least one NBA game That's the one in 3333% chance or 0.03% of getting there Now let's talk about football There are 32 teams in the NFL and each team has 53 players on its rosters for a total of 1696 players There are 1 million 93 234 high school players in the United States and 6.5% of these are 71,060 will play in college of these only 1.2% or 853 people are drafted into the national football league or 0.07% If you want to become an Olympic athlete the odds are one in 500,000 If you want to make the US women's soccer team there are only 23 spots The sum of all of this is that tens of millions of people want and try to become professional athletes but only thousands actually make it So look at these numbers What are the odds of some sports obsessed kid who sits at home every night watching Scott Van Pelt On sportscenter sitting in your seat one day and running ESPN And what's your advice to others So look at the odds of trying something opening a restaurant starting a new company getting a job at Google or Goldman Sachs or entries in Horwitz or dreaming about winning a Golden Globe People who are telling themselves that the chances of success are very low or one in a million or one in 100 million and say to themselves why should I even try We were just talking about this yesterday in a in a in a staff meeting Oftentimes I'm asked to give advice to younger people especially younger people at at ESPN or younger people in the sports industry that are looking to um make a change uh younger people that are just looking to get into the sports industry And the first thing I'd say is just take the job And what I mean by that is I didn't I didn't have a plan I'm I'm sure you're gonna want to talk about my background at some point But you know I didn't start out in sports II I knew one day I wanted to work in sports I want I knew one day I wanted to get to a position like the one that I'm in right now But there wasn't a clear plan here I was watching an an Eagles documentary a little while ago and uh Joe Walsh a member of the Eagles was talking about how you know his whole life Uh It it it just felt like a chaotic mess and it was like this cacophony of sounds and fast forward to today and he looks back and it looks like a beautiful it sounds like a beautiful symphony and and his point is that you know it's a roller coaster Um but it all works out and it all worked out for him It's it's all uh worked out for me It's not to say it all works out for everyone of course But my advice just to bring this back to your question is take the job get your foot in the door get started There's a lot of inertia out there at least from what I've seen uh with with younger people uh you know it's ok to hold out for for the perfect

job But how long I I'd rather see I have two teenagers I'd rather see them get their foot in the door get started Uh and then outwork everyone treat people with respect Uh and then expect that things are going to ultimately work out some patients A lot of patients in fact is involved and I I'm happy to to dig in on that topic We could spend the whole podcast I think just talking about patience and what that really means Uh but yeah I I think that you just got to get going and and and then you just gotta try to outwork folks um uh deliver what is expected of you be clear in terms of where you ultimately want to end up Don't be the squeaky wheel but also don't be afraid to convey to your manager what you would like to see next for you have to engage in those conversations But yeah just just get going and then work hard and and and and be nice to people Let's talk about education which I think is one of the most important ingredients of success And what I think is the single best investment we can make on ourselves Your dad highly valued education and was very strict growing up He told you that if you ever got to see in any subject in any quarter you weren't allowed to play sports for the following quarter until you improve that grade You thought it was a little hard core but your dad was dead set on you having a better life than he did Something many of us can relate to And it worked You never got ac he worked incredibly hard and got mostly A's at Edgemont High school in Scarsdale In addition to being a good student You were also an incredible athlete Your sister Laura said you are one of the best natural athletes you'll see anywhere And although you weren't good enough to ever think about going pro you were recruited as a running back to play football at Cornell But your playing days at Cornell weren't what you wanted them to be You played as a freshman but at that time there was a rule that freshmen could not play varsity So you played on the freshman team then had some injuries then played as a junior But because of your injuries you ended up losing a lot of weight You're 5 10 you went down to 100 and £65 and the coaches moved you from running back to wide receiver which wasn't your natural position Your recruiting coach was not the wide receiver coach It just didn't work out for you You had a bunch of injuries and you told yourself that maybe you weren't good enough I think we've all had that moment where we told ourselves the same thing without a doubt There are people listening and watching who are telling themselves right now that they're not good enough What's your advice to them What's the best way to pick ourselves up after a huge disappointment and tell ourselves that we are good enough and how do you know when we should stay the course or move on to something else

Well first off you got it Exactly right Uh in terms of my my college uh football experience it was a huge disappointment I'm not gonna sugarcoat It was a huge disappointment for me personally And for for pretty much everyone who knew me because my identity growing up was football Football was uh uh I guess what I was best at the sport or the thing in life that I was best at And I'll be honest with you I actually thought I was gonna there was a moment of time I went to the Penn State football camp Uh there was a moment of time where I thought that I would play division one football and then reality set in during recruiting and I really just wasn't getting any interest in any I remember showing up uh for on a recruiting trip at Boston College And it it just my dad and I left that that recruiting trip and we were we both agreed that this was probably not in the cards Uh And so I then shifted gears and started to look at division one AA schools uh even some division three schools that were recruiting me And I ultimately uh uh decided to go to Cornell because I fell in love with the recruiting coach and he sold the school uh really well to me He was uh he was visiting me and my parents often it was a guy named Pete Noise Uh uh and he's still around and he's a fantastic human being I just my family and I fell in love with him and we formed this personal bond and I decided to to go play for him and be a part of his program I also love the campus I love the people the the visits that I made anyway I got there I literally showed up on crutches because I had a torn medial meniscus Uh summer before freshman year I had surgery Uh then I had some some other complications coming out of the surgery which were unexpected And so yeah I played freshman year as a running back but it was hard recovering from these injuries going into my sophomore year junior year They moved me to receiver You nailed it Uh not my natural position but I loved it anyway II I just did not do well Uh you know II I stuck it out for as long as I could but it just was not uh what I wanted that experience to be but they say that which does not break you makes you stronger And yeah all of that disappointment from from college football um I think made me a stronger better person and I realized that that you know I wasn't going to be uh great at football and I needed to shift gears and think about what the rest of my life was going to be And the entire experience for me was actually a positive because I I learned to deal with failure Uh And like I said before there's a ton of failure in my job today Uh It there are ups and downs and you you have to you you can't get too caught up in your failure You you you you try to learn from it Uh you know we have a culture at ESPN of experimentation where we try new things and and when you try

new things by definition you are you are going to fail and you have to be OK with that You have to have thick skin you have to grow and you get better because of it and because I had so much failure in in in my football career Uh I feel like I'm I'm better able to deal with a lot of the failures in corporate America Today I wanna talk about the life changing experience You had your your junior year when you were at the Cornell and Washington program you were interning during the day and attending classes at night including one title of the Holocaust and Juris Prudence Can you tell us what happened after class one night and how right then and there it changed the trajectory of your life and in search of excellence what's your advice to the many millions of students and the many millions of people who are in the workforce already who don't know what they want to do with their life and have tremendous anxiety about it And does your advice differ whether they're in school or just starting their career or have been in the workforce for 10 or 15 years all through high school And my first three years in college I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life I really didn't again I thought football would somehow be a part of it I guess Maybe I thought I could coach uh if if playing didn't work out but I really didn't put a ton of thought into it There's never like a ton of stress about what I was going to do after college I was just kind of took it one day at a time But then I made the decision to go to Washington DC for a semester while many of my friends were going to France and and Italy I decided to go to Washington DC Uh And yes I studied uh at night II I worked for the small business administration during the day Uh and then took classes at night and they were really small intimate classes about six or seven people in each class And so you got to bond with with your teacher with your professor And one of the classes as you said that I took was called the Holocaust in Jurisprudence Uh It was taught by a gentleman named Neil who was one of the prosecuting attorneys for the United States government going after Nazi war criminals Uh and he was incredibly smart articulate uh charismatic And again I'm one of six people in this classroom that has this direct connection with this with this man that that I really uh idolized Yeah I I remember looking at him and thinking I would love to be exactly like this person doing what he's doing and you know advancing humanity in the right direction here And we went out one night after class and we were all just sitting there I think we were having like pizza and beer And he uh I don't even remember what the topic was but I had said something and he looked at me and he said you know you'd make a good lawyer And Randy that was the first time in my life Anyone had told me I'd

be good at anything other than sports And that was good enough for me I I said all right II I now have a path Uh this guy is is is fantastic He's brilliant He's a lawyer He's doing good Uh He thinks I can do this Ok I'm gonna I'm gonna give it a shot And so I talked to my parents about it I'm incredibly fortunate in that my parents uh they didn't just pay for my undergrad again Remember this is a family that never took vacations that rarely went out to dinner And yet I graduated from undergrad without a penny in debt And and when I talked to my parents about going to law about going to law school they they said we support that and and we will do everything we can uh to to get you through law school And they did and I graduated from law school without a penny in debt And and so I'm incredibly indebted to to my folks Uh But yeah that that one sentence that one line from Professor Neil she changed my life and and off to law school I went what's your advice to the many millions of students and millions of people who are aren't in the workforce already who don't know what they wanna do with their life and have tremendous anxiety about it They didn't have your professor And does your advice differ whether they're in school or just starting their career or have been in the workforce for 10 or 15 years Subject matter What what is the subject matter that you are most passionate about And for me I always knew that sports was what I was most passionate about And I wanted to end up with a career in sports but I was also aware of the fact that just at 24 years old right out of law school going to work for a team or a sports agency or a league that was gonna be very challenging and and and those jobs were few and far between And so I didn't I I thought about it and I think I even had some interviews uh didn't get any of the jobs and I I thought about holding out for that perfect job but I didn't I just decided to get going but not losing sight of the the the fact that I ultimately wanted to end up in sports So throughout my career I've I've tried to network Uh I've tried to make as many connections as I possibly could in sports even when I was not working in sports When I ultimately was fortunate enough to join a company that had a sports division or a sports segment I made it clear very consistently that I wanted to end up there again without being the squeaky wheel every opportunity that I had whether it was a part of an annual review or just an informal discussion with my manager and my boss I made it clear that sports was was my passion and and that's where I wanted to end up So I just to just to bring this bring this back to your question my advice would be network as much as possible even if you're not working uh in the in a field that is what you're most passionate about Figure out how to network and make contacts

with folks who are in that field you know on your time on weekends or after work and then figure out how to get uh uh you know attached to an organization that uh is addressing the subject matter that you're most passionate about You don't necessarily have to be working for for that group or that team but just figure out how you can gradually get closer to landing a job connected to that to to your to your passion area Just two little personal things here I spent a summer in DC after my junior year at Michigan in a program called the Public Service internship program My one of my best friends Joe Hart and I would go to TJ I flips I don't know if you remember that place \$2 beer pitchers on Tuesday night And I didn't have any money and we'd go to the uh Safeway the Watergate Safeway and uh a box of Kraft macaroni and cheese was 99 cents We get four meals out of that thing for 25 cents 25 cents each I had a great time in Washington that summer As far as Cornell goes it's probably most famous for its hospitality program but maybe you should start a sports program You went there Gary Bettman the commissioner of the national hockey league went there as did Rob Manfred the commissioner of Major League baseball As did your sister Laura as you said the general counsel of Major League baseball As did Joanne Neal the president of Major League soccer What's up what's up with Cornell and all these sports people You're right I don't I don't know I I actually didn't take a single sports business class at Cornell Uh obviously Cornell is very focused on athletics and they have some fantastic teams lacrosse hockey um some powerhouse programs But III I actually think that's just that's just a coincidence Andy so you graduated from Cornell's College of Human Ecology with a Bachelor of Science degree in Consumer Economics and Housing Then you went to Saint John's University for law school Then you practiced law at several firms in New York City including Wilson a Moskowitz Edelman and Dicker You were a litigator and spent most of your time defending insurance companies who had been sued which is a former lawyer Sounds really awful to me But your preferred mergers and acquisitions have wanted to do deals during that time you got married Your wife Jeannie was an actress Her first major role was in the movie Uncle Buck where she starred alongside John Candy And two years after that she started in Mr Ho with Richard Dreyfuss two amazing movies Up until that point Jeanie had only done theater and film and the two of you started talking about having a family and how getting a job on a TV show would be a good gig for her because it's steady and it's only one job So she goes out for pilot season immediately gets a NBC show that was shooting in

Vancouver and you say let's go So you sell your beautiful apartment in the West Village quit your job as a litigator and move to Vancouver with your dogs at the time the head of the network who I think was Warren Littlefield told you that the show was going to run for 10 years Nine episodes later the show gets canceled When that happens The cast actually made fun of you because you were more upset than any one of the cast that that meant you had to go back to work So at that point you and Jeannie packed up your minivan drove to the coast moved to L A Once you got here Jeanie signed was called a Talent Holding deal with CBS that put her on a show called Yes Deer It was a big hit right out of the gate At that point you knew you're going to be in L A for a while I love the story It goes against the traditional and antiquated norm of the man playing the role of the breadwinner and the woman supporting the man and following his career wherever it takes them we're going to talk about launch in a few minutes But before we do can you tell us what was going through your mind when you quit your job packed up your apartment and moved to Canada for a risky pilot TV show where your wife was shooting Were you scared And what's your advice to others who are thinking about doing something similar whether they are single or with a partner or are married Should they take a massive risk to move to a new city and hope they land on something when they get there or should they wait until they have a job which could be extremely hard to do when you can't go on 10 in person Job interviews I was not loving being a uh a lawyer Working for a law firm I was surrounded by people who did love it and I just felt like ok something's wrong here Everyone around me seems to be thriving in this environment and and I am not And so in the back of my mind I felt like the next step for me would be to go in house and have one client and and and exposure to a bunch of different lines of business That's where my mind was at that time This is 1999 We had been married living in the west village of Manhattan uh been married for a couple of years and my wife grew up acting She was as you mentioned she had done a lot of professional work by that point but was not really focused on television because television was on mostly on the West Coast other than some law and orders Uh Almost everything was shooting on on the west coast And my wife grew up doing some Broadway and doing some feature films and really loved being an East Coast New York based actress But yes we we we were starting to entertain this idea of some more stability We were like up until that point Randy we were two ships passing in the night She was gone half the time on location shooting movies Uh We actually got engaged in Wichita Kansas She was

shooting a Western uh and I flew out there and we went to the Wichita Botanical Gardens And uh I proposed but that was you know I proposed we're engaged and then I turned around and went home and went back and went back to work and we didn't see each other I think for another several weeks after getting engaged But that was that was our our our life at the time And so we said OK maybe television would be the right next step because of this stability and so long story short yeah she started auditioning She immediately booked a job on an NBC series called Cold Feet Uh We it was shooting in Vancouver So I decided to quit my job Uh We made a huge mistake and sold our apartment in the West Village uh more on that later Uh But we uh we moved to Vancouver Uh We were rookies we were uh beginners in the television business We thought that the show was going to run five years because that's what we were told and they literally shot nine episodes and then they you know Halloween Day uh my wife got a call saying show is over And so we packed up a minivan we threw pags uh our dog into the minivan and uh drove down the West Coast Uh And uh yeah she immediately signed a talent holding deal with CBS Got on uh a show called Yes Dear And so I then decided that I was going to uh pursue what I thought was the next step for me which is go in house And that's when I started to interview and and and uh and found a job for a a music internet company My advice to folks would be if you're gonna do it great Uh Just just do the homework in advance Like don't just get there don't just walk in quit your job move to another city you know do some do some work before you you make those radical changes do the research make connections make phone calls So that when you're there you have some opportunities not necessarily some jobs but some opportunities lined up You're ready to go with interviews you have your your resume ready Don't just don't just pull the cord and then just go So I did something a little similar to you in 1993 I moved to L A after graduating law school but 5.5 weeks after I got here I lost my job due to layoffs I had \$3000 in the bank and managed to get a job in the Costa Mesa office of an L A based law firm where I commuted three hours a day from my apartment in Westwood And then I had to look for my third job in eight months when the managing partner told me that I had to move to Costa Mesa which I politely declined to do three jobs in eight months Other than a summer associate colleague getting arrested for robbing a bank in Chicago I probably held the record for the worst start to a legal career I had dinner one night in Bob Roach's apartment in Santa Monica At the time Bob was married to my childhood friend Julie Jacobson who like

me grew up in the Detroit suburbs and they graduated from the great University of Michigan for my listeners who don't know in February 1994 Bob and a guy named Dave Goldberg had started a company called launch dot com It was the first music site where users could find information on music uh musicians watch music videos and listen to music It was an early version of Pandora and Spotify That was way ahead of its time I remember sitting there at dinner hearing how Bob had been a lawyer and how he and Dave had taken the chance to bet on themselves and were doing something that was cutting edge and that they loved And I remember the fire in my belly burning envious of what Bob and Dave were doing and thinking to myself that I really needed to get off of my ass and get out of the practice law which I hated is start a company which I had always wanted to do Ever since I started reading profiles of successful entrepreneurs in business week during my sophomore year of high school It's a small world especially in the social media craze world we live in today in search of excellence How important is it to surround yourself with like-minded people people who can motivate and inspire you And how important is it to build real long term relationships and find mentors to guide you through life I did not know about your connection to Bob I was actually just with Bob uh two weekends ago Uh Look II I did have a connection with Bob in that Bob was also I think frustrated working for a law firm and then went out and and started his own company with Dave when I got out to L A Bob and Dave were some of the first people that I met And yeah after meeting them I felt like we are like-minded I love what these guys are doing The mission of launch was discover new music I felt like that was uh a problem at the time It's still a problem but enabling passionate music fans to discover more music that they like It really resonated with me again I knew I wanted to go in house and you know Dave by the way Dave Goldberg almost went to law school He actually took the LS A and was I think he was even accepted to some top notch law schools And at the LA because his dad wanted him to go to law school at the last minute he decided to not do it Uh And then yeah his child childhood friend Bob roll back and and he started launch dot com And so I I got in early uh and they hired me as as one of their lawyers But I think look again I knew at that time I wanted to go in house Uh and I knew I was passionate about the subject matter not as passionate about sports but music was a very close second and it still is a close second for me I'm a crazy music fan as are so many people But to your point Randy I'm a huge believer in mentorship We talk about it all the time uh at ESPN In fact just yesterday I was sitting down

with our HR team and looking at our mentorship program at at ESPN and pretty much every time I do a town hall every time I speak to a large group of employees I will weave mentorship into the discussion And so we ask each of our leaders at ESPN to make it a priority to mentor I think I'm mentoring five different people right now Uh Either formally or informally at at Disney and ESPN And I get as I get as much out of it as as they do believe it or not Uh In fact sometimes I get more out of it Uh But yes mentorship you know one of the things I've learned from from Dave Goldberg uh and unfortunately this was very uh apparent at his funeral Where everyone was talking about how Dave mentored them And I remember thinking to myself how in the world did Dave find all of this time to do all of this It's just incredible But Dave's Dave's uh you know his focus was pay it forward You know we hit the lottery in life and and it's our job to make sure that that um we're we're we're helping folks out who are um you know underprivileged And you know I I was separated by a half an inch cube wall uh from Dave Goldberg uh for many years And I would I would watch how uh if a 22 year old kid called him or a CEO of a major music label called him he would respond and be available and accessible you know in the same capacity And and so he he he made it a priority to to give back and to mentor and help younger people or just people in general And so yeah I try to carry that forward uh you know to to to Disney and and to ESPN and I try to make sure that our employees are proactively reaching out to folks and offering up uh their their mentorship their their guidance their their advice et cetera And then yes for for in in the other direction I would say as an employee of of of a company or you know in whatever capacity you know you're in whether you're student or you're working try to find a mentor or mentors people who will who will look out for you and help guide you And when when when you face troubles or hit walls you have someone to turn to I think it's it's incredibly important when I was a lawyer I I got out of the practice school I wrote 300 letters to CEO S asking for meetings and I got 80 meetings One of the meetings was a guy named Straus Zelnik who you've probably met in your career who was at that time the 40 year old CEO of BMG And I remember him coming out to the lobby He was actually on a telephone call with Clive Davis And instead of sending someone out he was three minutes late he came out and he said I'm sorry three minutes Um And when I got to know him well and we become good friends today He's not only a mentor but a friend he told me that he spends 15 to 20% of his time mentoring people And that was a huge lesson for me I never forgot where I

came from I have a summer uh intern program each summer we have 35 kids from uh schools around the country And I love mentoring Like you said it's giving back is one of the most enjoyable things that I've done in my career And it's super fun for me Now 20 years later 15 years later that some of my former students are my peers today and that's just one of the most rewarding things in my life that I've had So I I share the mentorship gene there Thanks for listening to part one of my amazing conversation with Jimmy Pita the incredible chair of ESPN Be sure to tune in next week to part two of my awesome conversation with Jimmy