

The logo for 'higher ed social' is displayed in white lowercase text on a dark blue square background. The words 'higher ed' are stacked above 'social'.

**Episode 124:** bill zimmerman & the virtual bar

- LOUGAN

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- JACKIE

I'm Jackie Vetrano from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

- LOUGAN

And I'm Lougan Bishop from Belmont University. You're listening to higher social part of the ConnectEDU network.

- JACKIE

I'm sure that Lougan hit record already probably. Yay! We're here! We just push all of our guests right into the deep end of the pool. We don't even say like you ready? We just do it.

- BILL

Yeah, it's more natural I think it is. It's when you start keeping the tech-

- JACKIE

You know it's funny because Lougan says that he's always been kind of inspired by conferences, and like the social hours and you know and everybody's hanging around and you talk about yourself a little bit. You talk about work a little bit and that's what's kind of inspired the show. And it's funny because the three of us were just in California together and we didn't do this. So now we get to!

[Laughter]

- BILL

Yeah, now is our chance.

- JACKIE

This is great. Well welcome to our our virtual bar I guess.

- BILL

Yeah. Thanks for having me. Belly up to the bar here and have a good time!

- JACKIE

Drinks are on Lougan this round.

- LOUGAN

I don't have any, for once.

- BILL

You know I remember you too mentioning that. You often you know crack open a beer during a talk. And I'm being lame right now I just got some tap water right now

- JACKIE

I'm drinking water as well, don't worry.

- LOUGAN

I just finished a glass of water.

- JACKIE

Going hard!

- BILL

Sensible tonight. That's good.

Well usually I need some level of something on a Sunday night to kind of get me back out of the introvertedness and get me back to the extrovertedness. But you know it was a very interesting day at work today so I'm definitely ready to go.

- JACKIE

Well, now that we've all settled in with our healthy beverages. Will you introduce yourself.

- BILL

Yeah my name is Bill Zimmerman. I'm a lecturer in Penn State's Donald Bellisario College of Communications. I teach in the Department of advertising and PR. I teach public relations classes. One class called Digital PR and another called PR media and methods which is essentially a PR writing course. Prior to becoming a full time faculty

member. I worked in Penn State's Office of Strategic Communications which is essentially the state's central PR office, PR and marketing office. And my last few years there were spent as social media manager and before that I worked for nearly a decade as a journalist at a small newspaper in western Pennsylvania. So it's been quite a ride and I could say as a faculty member right now I'm very much feel like I've found my dream job. It's been super fulfilling and it's been just very fun and been a work that really suits my kind of personality - pretty much - in a lot of ways pretty introverted but I get my extrovert time in the classroom, and I love the bulk of my other work time is spent in solitude and that's when I find I can focus the most. Not a fan of things like open office plans and you know especially didn't like it never felt like I adequately stated my point of view or defended my projects or anything like that. So very happy to be in the position that I am right now.

- LOUGAN

That's awesome.

- JACKIE

I was gonna say before you before you said it I was going to ask Is this the path you saw yourself taking. I'm going to guess the answer is yes?

- BILL

You know in some ways, I was a first generation college student and I had a you know a professor John Auerbach who really took a liking to me and was an early mentor. One point he told me that he could see me as a professor which I thought was would be a fantastic job path but it was nothing that I pursued until about 12, 13 years later when I got hired at Penn State I took advantage of a tuition discount for employees and start working on a master's degree in higher education, and in around that same time I also got to teach a journalism class as an adjunct and at that point - that first class was in 2015 - and I really just really hit me that I had a love for teaching. And I kind of shaped the rest of my master's studies to it to look into the area of teaching. So that was when - after that first moment when I was able to teach a college course, that's when it became the destination that sort of became the goal for me.

- LOUGAN

Here's a question for you. So you're working at the same school you were a social media person for job. Do you ever get FOMO? That fear of missing out being a lecturer and seeing the other stuff happening over here and seeing what you used to be doing being done by someone else you have

- BILL

Yeah, no way. Yeah yeah. If anything I get these kind of bad flashbacks to the experience I was not a big fan of working in social media. I love talking about it in class. Didn't love being in the day to day. And you know it's just content creation - lot of fun. I loved being out taking photographs, I loved interacting with students and faculty. I love telling those good stories, but the customer service side of things; the sifting through criticism you know all that kind of weighed on me, and it made it just...made it not a very fun job for me. So when there's like you know a controversy in the news, you know, when there's a snow day and I know my former co-workers are getting

pounded because class wasn't canceled and they're seeing all this criticism on Facebook. You know I feel for them, but in no way do I wish I was back in their shoes.

- JACKIE

Yeah. Social media is overwhelming. Generally. And I joke with my team all the time that I really hate it. Like I really don't maintain much of a social media presence like personally, at all and I'm pretty sure it's just because I get so sick of it doing it all day.

- BILL

That's interesting and I've seen that happen with other people kind of lose their appetite for maintaining their personal social media because they are so just deep into it. And professionally.

- LOUGAN

I kind of hit that but, now I think I'm coming back out of it which is positive. I think. It was kind of rough there for a couple of years. I got a little overwhelmed with all of the things that happened on social, and just I needed to kind of disconnect a little bit. So I did. I still talked on Facebook but I didn't really do much else on Twitter or Instagram but I feel like I'm coming back I found stuff to actually post about and you know being able to talk about the show and stuff is actually been fun on Twitter so you know, it's been a thing. It was just a little crazy for a little while but it's actually kind of interesting what a social media crisis kind of does to you; like mentally. I don't think people ever really think about that when they're yelling at a brand on the internet.

- BILL

Sure there's a human that's dealing with all of it

- LOUGAN

And it gets a little overwhelming.

- BILL

Yeah

- BILL

And you know, and I imagine in your situation you've probably dealt - created some kind of coping mechanisms some - hopefully the job afforded some times to disconnect and disable push notifications and all that. It seems like people kind of did if they're going to work and if they do started adapting and figuring out some ways to make it make it manageable.

- JACKIE

Do you guys maintain your social media accounts the same way you maintain like the institution's? Do you think about like Social Listening and, continued content and posting more than once?

- BILL

Yeah I guess I think I do think about some of the best practices and trying to post strategically in the right times a day and all that sort of thing. But I haven't yet like drafted a social media strategy for my podcast and how I want to promote it yeah, and set aside my own do's or don'ts but, I have done exercises in class where I've asked students to kind of come up with their own personal social media mission statement and kind of define the type of tone and the attitude they want to have on there and what they're going to stay away from posting. And that sort of thing. So I think it is good to kind of just think a little bit about your...what you want to do out there but no very formal planning process.

- JACKIE

Yeah it's like a thing. I read an article about you know those millennials who like curate content very specifically especially with Instagram, like deleting posts after a certain amount of time and it does get a certain threshold of likes and all these things. And when I when I actually was in California for eduWeb - I was hanging out by the pool and there were two younger I will put them in the millennial category. Guy and a girl like right near me. And I heard the guy get the girl and say I got so many Instagram followers today and the girl said Oh yeah I saw your sponsor it looks really good.

- JACKIE

And I freaked out! This is like the myths that we tell our supervisors in meetings. But like it actually happened in front of me.

- BILL

Wow. That's becoming that routine that it's a conversation you can over here now. Wow.

- LOUGAN

It's crazy. It was just an awkward couple anyway. I was there too and it just was weird, let's leave it at that.

Yeah I don't know if I'd want to live that way but, you know I think we probably all have those moments where we realize that those kind of moments where we check ourselves and think wow I'm putting a little too much stock in a like, or the absence of a like. And I need to need to chill out.

- JACKIE

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- JACKIE

For sure.

- JACKIE

So now that you've kind of transitioned over into the classroom side of the house obviously it sounds like you're really enjoying it. What types of things now that we're in this new digital age and social media is so influential especially in PR, even marketing too. Like what types of stuff are you teaching your students?

- BILL

Sure yeah the big thing that I feel like if I accomplish this I've won for the semester, is if I can just get students to appreciate a strategy. To understand that these things are - that social media is not being executed in a willy nilly way by brands. So trying to help them understand that likely your company probably already has a mission statement brand pillars a strategic plan, you know, and how all these things can help inform a social media strategy so really helping them appreciate the role that planning plays in sound social media. And we're also you know just touching on best practices, things that I've learned as far as writing a post, taking engaging photographs, putting together good videos. We talk about that. So, really kind of it's fun teaching a lot about social media because it's not a big stretch to help the students realize what you're talking about has real world application. They figure out pretty quickly, you know, that this is stuff that they most likely will be doing. They may not be doing social media full time but they're probably going to be asked to maintain it as some portion of their job. So that's kind of the big thing. At Penn State right now there is a big overall push from the University to promote entrepreneurship and to really promote economic development. Penn State has campuses across the state and are and have been building up these innovation hubs, business incubators, co-work spaces across the state, and in some areas that have seen better days. They're are a little economically depressed and Penn State's trying to play a role in helping build these places back up. So the climate is very

pro-entrepreneurship right now, and especially in areas like it seems to really have a lot of life in engineering and in our information systems technology you know college that sort of thing. But I like to try to you know promote the possibilities to the students that the digital age brings to them. So you know I think - you two have probably experienced this - that kind of, the power of launching a project and the ownership you feel over it and just how involved and how much you care about it. You know in work sometimes you're you know you have to care about things that you really don't care about much. And you know getting yourself motivated and up for a project like that can be tough. But when it's your own thing it you that the hours that you're putting in the time the money even, doesn't seem to matter as much because you're enjoying it and it's giving you something. So I really try to you know help my students realize that the digital age has created possibilities and not just you know to be an influencer and get to get paid to promote things

- JACKIE

Which is still pretty cool.

Yeah exactly. Yeah I see the allure there, but that you could launch a small business of some kind, that you could launch a blog and that you could have a voice out there. So in this podcast that I launched; Happy Valley Hustle in

January was part of was kind of a part of a lesson that I wanted to give my students. I mentioned this in my talk and eduWeb a little bit - in my digital PR class the first semester I taught it. We did a a large scale project where students and groups had to evaluate a brand and then talk about their web presence and social media strategies and that sort of thing. And then they gave a presentation and the presentations were pretty lifeless and I was really bored through all of it. And not because my students did a bad job it's just not that really great of of content. It wasn't it was interesting to an extent to see what some of these brands were doing. But the students energy level was low and you know it just wasn't into it. So this next time around assigned what I called a digital enterprise project which was this. Getting them to tackle using social media for purposes beyond just trying to engage with friends and family. So I had to come up with an idea, they had to create a target audience, they had right a strategy for this. They had to review how its performance later on and create a little mini report or give a presentation. And it was so much more fun to see what the students were doing to grade this assignment and see students take ownership and get excited about an assignment. And you know so they were doing things like some students in my class were artists so they did youtube tutorials. One of my students was on the track team she was a high jumper and she managed the...took over an account for for Penn State jumpers and did all sorts of great photographs for that. Speaking of innovation, there's a student entrepreneur that is trying to do 3D printed sneakers they're really cool and he's starting

off with with making slides with sandals. So the idea is that by 3D printing you'll be able to make this footwear that fits you perfectly. And some students connected with him and took over his Instagram account. So what I want to show the students was, hey I'm going to be in the trenches with you. I'm launching a program I'm launching a project this podcast giving it a shot. I'm going to be exploring my own level levels of comfort and being kind of front and center and being very self promotional and I'm going to be dealing with numbers that I probably wish were a little higher than they are, and there's going to be growing pains, but it just kind of showing them hey I'm going to be out there too, you know trying something new. So it was really great for me to see that students get excited about this. Some said they were going to maintain the accounts that they created beyond this semester. Some really appreciated it that they had this great piece you know to add to their portfolio. So that's another thing - really trying to get it across to them. The promise of the digital age, you know for people who have an idea. For people who are creative and want to want to learn things.

- JACKIE

That's so interesting. Are you finding a lot of these students are taking your course?

- BILL

I haven't yet connected with any students who are really entrepreneurial. I'm trying to think, there was a student - one of my students who was was very artistic and has been doing making some money selling stickers that she designs online. Seems like every student at Penn State has a bunch of laptop stickers so she's she's actually creating those and having some success with it. So that's that's there. But I haven't found yet that word is getting out that there's this entrepreneurial angle in my class. But we have you know as a whole faculty in the College of

Communications have had directives that this is to keep our eyes on and need to be knowledgeable of the resources available to university and how we can help nurture students who want to be entrepreneurial.

So cool. I just love working on a college campus kind of for that reason because I get to see all these like really innovative students like taking on big problems that I wouldn't even think about. Like you don't think about 3D printing as shoe.

- BILL

It's really great. And you know at Penn State have to give a shout out to Happy Valley launch box. It's the University Park Main Campus focused business center that Penn State has created and I've done a lot of podcasts interviews there. And it's a place that is supporting these student entrepreneurs with great ideas and also giving free legal advice and all sorts of other help to local small business owners. And I got to hang out there a little bit and get to know some of the people working there and was really inspired by what people were doing and just loved the energy and the enthusiasm that people have their own projects. And since I was like I want to really be more of a part of this place so I've been, you know, interviewing for the podcast some of their for lack of a better word - entrepreneurs in residence. Each semester they bring in a class of people and really nurture them and train them and give them lots of resources so I've been talking to those people you know gave us give a talk there in the spring. So yeah it really that I love working on a college campus. I love the energy and in this area of entrepreneurship there's really some stuff happening that's just really exciting and you can really get swept up in it and excited.

- JACKIE

And so I want to hear about your podcast.

- LOUGAN

Yes

- JACKIE

Because we love talking about podcasts.

- LOUGAN

Yeah yeah let's do it. So my podcast is called Happy Valley Hustle. I do it on the first and third Wednesday of each month. Doing it weekly seems like way too much of a task and even twice a month takes a surprising amount of work but I've really loved it and it really kind of grew out of...So I moved to State College, Pennsylvania when I was in my early 30s. I was 31, and for the first time here I really started fighting some like minded people and having finding myself having some awesome conversations with people over a drink, over coffee, over lunch, and just felt very very fortunate in my life to be connected with so many people who are creative who are really focused on bettering themselves on being lifelong learners. And I was having some of these great conversations I thought would be great if maybe I could figure out a way to document these to start recording some of these and sharing



them with people. So that was really kind of what made me want to do a podcast through the job through and through my job. When I worked at Penn State I got to know a lot of people throughout the university so you know me having guests on the show is the least of my problems right now. You know I have a long list of people I want to talk to. I've been keeping it. I want to keep it very niche, very kind of regional, because I felt like that was the way for me to make an impact to have an in, and create something different.

- BILL

So it's been, you know talking to people most of the people have a Penn State connection; maybe they're alumni, maybe they work at the university. So it's all kind of had a connection to Penn State but also kind of expanding a little bit beyond to other parts of central Pennsylvania. But it's been a lot of fun you know telling stories of creativity and innovation it's focused mostly on entrepreneurs but also just people who are who are doing cool things and also and probably always a recurring theme is that people are exploring ways that the digital age can help them. So maybe that's - maybe they're self publishing a book maybe they launched a podcast. Maybe they're sharing music through SoundCloud. All these things so people who are really kind of took their destiny into their own hands. So you know it started off where I was just thinking about entrepreneurs and now it's kind become and becoming you know professional development personal development that sort of thing. So I'm having a blast doing it. Probably one of the best decisions I've made personally and professionally. You know it's just I see my colleagues in the college. They're interested they think it's great that I'm doing this meeting a lot of great people and it's just been so much fun.

- JACKIE

That's great.

- LOUGAN

It sounds like you're really enjoying what you do and that's just the best feeling. How long have you been doing it? How many episodes are you up to?

So far we've released 14 episodes and I've sprinkled a few kind of bonus ones in here, where just maybe just me talking. So are fourteen episodes that have had a guest and we started it in January. Yeah. I always say we, I don't know why I do that, I think maybe it's because I want it to sound like a bigger deal than it is. I keep doing that when I'm recording my intros and outros. But it's just me. You know I started it in January. But that said it couldn't happen without you know all these willing her interview subjects who have to Chancellor ain't opened up you know when I've reached out to them and

- JACKIE

That's so great because - oh sorry, go ahead.

- LOUGAN

Oh just friends of the show. That's what they are.

- BILL

Yeah yeah

- LOUGAN

I think that's what we're supposed to call them right?

- JACKIE

I don't know. What do we call them. I think everyone's a friend of the show. All of our listeners too.

- BILL

And I was thinking you know I made note of the length of your podcast and mine have continued to go longer and longer and where the last few were about an hour. And I just recorded one today that I took down again to maybe about the 40 second - or 40 minute mark. How did you kind of figure out what was the ideal time to do this?

- JACKIE

Was like how much time we had.

- LOUGAN

Well the show has gone. We started about 30 minutes, and then they started getting longer and longer and longer and then we had one episode that went an hour and a half and we had to cut to 45 minute episodes and then we really decided hey we need to kind of maybe not be so long. And I think this year starting in 2018 we've really kind of tried to get all we need said and do all the talking we need to do within that like 20-25 minutes and then once once things once we start getting off topic or we say something like really profound. Towards the end that's when we cut it off

- BILL

Sure, leave on a high note.

- JACKIE

Cue the music! I'm kidding.

- LOUGAN

And it would have been awesome if we...if that was the amount of time we have right now but still a little ways from there so

- JACKIE

We can chat, we can still chat.

- LOUGAN

Make up something!

- BILL

I think that's a really fun thing about doing this podcast, or doing a podcast and I'm glad you said that. It's very it's just it really is an evolution in that it's it's fun just to keep playing with things and experimenting and you know doing a Facebook Live or doing a live episode or you know doing that going really long going really short. So it's it's comforting to me to see that you're still feeling it out and figuring out that length.

- JACKIE

I think as much as like you know Lougan and I can present about it or you can read books about it or Internet or whatever and it you learn you have to learn by doing. You have to figure out what works for you especially if it's like. I mean Lougan and I this is something we do outside of work and it's something that you do alongside the rest of your work responsibilities. You have to know how much time you have. Like if I were a full time podcaster - whoo - it would be really fun but you'd perfect it much quicker. So. Yeah it's it's an interesting one but I'm excited to - we will have a link to it in the show notes. And I'm excited to listen.

- BILL

Thank you. Yeah appreciate the publicity.

- JACKIE

Are you getting ready for your students come back?

- BILL

Yeah yeah that is that is happening here shortly. And it's really you know I reflect on my first summer as a faculty member and I feel very blessed to have those months free and just kind of shocked by how little I did as far as like I had this stack of books that I wanted to read you know for to improve as a teacher and in what I'm teaching and I touched him a little bit but you know it's just like where did the time go. I guess is what I'm trying to say but I'm I'm working towards it getting there. I'm also redesigning an online course called social media strategies that we're going to launch. We're already out there but this new version of it will launch in January. So I'm, these last few weeks have been spending a lot of time working on that. But yeah these next...I have two more weeks. I'm really going to be getting down to work getting the syllabi and all that, but I'm getting to the point where I think I'm really...I'll be teaching both of these courses for the third time which I've been told is kind of the magic number that's when things start really coming together so I'm really I'm feeling good about the ideas I have for the semester and also having a much more expanded section on podcasting. I'm excited I can bring personal experience to it. I've gotten to meet some local podcasters who I want to bring in as guests. So I'm really looking forward to the semester

- JACKIE

Great and how many classes are you teaching?

- BILL

Yeah I will teach two classes but one of them I teach two sections of it. OK. So it's a good it'll keep me busy. But it's you know really I'm excited to give to really kind of keep shape - reshaping these courses and I think I'm getting close to the point where it's going to be firing on all cylinders.

- LOUGAN

Nice

- BILL

Yeah.

- JACKIE

It's gonna be great!

- LOUGAN

Yeah that's the spirit. Already August

- LOUGAN

It is already August.

- JACKIE

Can you believe it?

- LOUGAN

No. I can't believe it's just July last week.

- JACKIE

What are the what are the things that you wanted to do this summer. Both of you, that you are sad that you didn't get to do.

- BILL

Oh wow. That's a good question.

- LOUGAN

Go to a beach. Wait I did. I went to a beach. I was at a beach last week.

- JACKIE

There you go.

- LOUGAN

So there is literally evidence on the frickin' podcast account that we went to a beach that is

- JACKIE

Sure we did go to a beach.

- BILL

Yeah I did. I felt kind of bad about being in San Diego and not getting to a beach.

- JACKIE

It was a packed schedule!

- BILL

Yeah yeah, it really was a great thing about that conference it all the social activities built into it. But it also leaves you leave a little drained.

- JACKIE

Yes.

- BILL

Yeah I think for me it was just really you know the stack of books that I was hoping to read that just didn't didn't get through. But other than that it's been a really good summer and feel like I'm making the most of it.

- JACKIE

Well there's still the fall.

- BILL

Does the summer ease up a little bit in your offices?

- LOUGAN

Nope.

- BILL

Yeah.

- JACKIE

Everybody says it does and then it doesn't. And they'll act surprised every year like that.

I feel like I would hear that from a lot of people where they would remark that in recent years it seems like that summer didn't bring much relief, and I guess it's probably just kind of speaks to the duties of social media and how that's not going to rest whether there's students on your campus or not.

- JACKIE

I just got stressed out.

- BILL

Sorry

- LOUGAN

Well, with that said. With Jackie being stressed...

- JACKIE

Oh is that the profound note?

- LOUGAN

That is the profound note!

- JACKIE

I'm so glad.

- LOUGAN

Well thanks for joining us this week.

- JACKIE

Yeah, we appreciate it.

- BILL

Yeah thank you so much for having me. It was you know was going to get up the nerve to put myself out there as a potential guest. But I'm glad I reached out to you and this has been a lot of fun. And yeah. Keep up the great work. You know I think it's it's awesome to see that this is out there for higher education people. I think that was a big takeaway that I got from from EeduWeb is just how innovative it seems like people are in higher education. And really I guess you just got to be. You know so we heard so many different...heard so my best practices and different technologies out there and just all these creative ways that people are promoting their schools. So I think it's just it's really cool that you have to show that you're part of just one of the many innovative things people are doing to kind of to talk about higher ed

Oh thank you. And now you're part of it too good to have you. We are so happy and yes. Thank you so much for joining us. We really appreciate it listeners of course we thank you too for sticking around. Head over to our Web site [higher.social](http://higher.social) and you can get links to some great stuff that we talked about today of course including Bill's podcast, can't wait to take a listen. You can also subscribe to our show pretty much anywhere you listen to podcasts, and if you like us please consider giving us a review on Apple podcasts and you can also follow us on Twitter. We are @HESPodcast. We love talking to you. We love sending gifs and if you want to be on the show shoot us a tweet. That's pretty much what Bill did! And now we're here and it was a great episode!

- BILL

Glad I did it!

- JACKIE

Absolutely.

- LOUGAN

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- JACKIE

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