

Margot 00:00:00 When you see ice hockey players sitting on the side, like, they don't have their feet out of their boots, reading a book. Like, you might be on the side, but you're ready. Like, they jump onto that ice so quick, and brands need to be that. They need to have all of that homework, all of that self-discovery. Who am I? What is my compass? Where and how do I fit into culture so that they can react in those moments?

Matt 00:00:24 To thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape, brands must move at an ever-increasing pace. I'm Matt Britton, founder and CEO of Suzy. Join me and key industry leaders as we dive deep into the shifting consumer trends within their industry, why it matters now, and how you can keep up. Welcome to the Speed of Culture. Up today on the Speed of Culture podcast, we're thrilled to welcome Margot Hauer-King, the SVP of Creative Strategy at United Talent Agency—otherwise known as UTA—and founder and owner of People's. Margot sits at the intersection of culture, entertainment, and brand strategy, helping companies understand not just what's happening now, but what's coming next. Margot, so great to see you.

Margot 00:01:04 Nice to see you, too.

Matt 00:01:05 So what brings you down to sunny South Beach for the Possible conference?

Margot 00:01:09 Sunshine. We had a brutal, brutal winter in New York. No, with UTA, we had an event last night, and I joined about six months ago.

Matt 00:01:17 Okay.

Margot 00:01:18 And so these are really great opportunities to see everyone and get everyone together. And I think one of the reasons I was so drawn to the business is that we are great conveners, whether it's talent, creators, or brands. And so these are fun moments to see everyone.

Matt 00:01:32 So tell me about your background and the road that led to you eventually ending up—

Margot 00:01:36 — Winding road. I will try not to give you my whole life history, but I grew up in a family of storytellers. My mom was in the theater; she had a documentary film company, and my dad is in—people don't necessarily think of hospitality as storytelling, but the guy was writing made-up stories and scripts about this restaurant, about old Viennese couples who moved to London. So I was always surrounded by this incredible love.

Matt 00:02:04 You have a lot of memories of being exposed to that skill so much growing up. Wow.

Margot 00:02:09 So much. And when you're growing up around that kind of energy, you don't really see it as anything but normal. And then you realize, as you get older, you're like, "Wow,

that's actually very different and very unique." And I graduated from college in the States, and I knew I wanted to do something that brought that storytelling to bear. But unlike the rest of my family, who all were, you know, actors, directors, restaurateurs, I didn't know exactly what that thing was, and I landed at WPP. I thought that was an amazing place to tell stories, but do it in what felt like this other itch in me, which was a bit more commercial.

Matt 00:02:43 Right.

Margot 00:02:43 My family thinks I'm very corporate. They bought me a briefcase.

Matt 00:02:46 Well, it's not cheap to live in New York, right? So sometimes you have to apply what you love to a business sense because you have to, you know, pay the rent, right?

Margot 00:02:54 Totally. And I think it's really interesting, you know, that idea of, you know, what I've sort of learned to call persuasive storytelling. You know, art for art's sake, storytelling for the beauty of storytelling is amazing, but there's also something fascinating about stories in—in search of some kind of very specific outcome, and that's what we do when we're, you know, in this industry and building brands and communicating with audiences. So I ended up at WPP, spent quite a while there, moved to a couple of other businesses—big, small—and then I started to open a bar. And it was one of those things I said I would never touch; I had no interest in going into hospitality.

Matt 00:03:32 You think it was just your father's influence, and you just kinda went to see if you could do it?

Margot 00:03:36 He had, like, big shoes to fill, so I was like, "I don't wanna do this." And then as I got older, I—I think it was a complement of two things. I think partly it was realizing, kinda to your point about growing up around that, realizing this stuff was kind of in my DNA. And then I actually felt it a lot more, then I had it in me a lot more than I realized, and wanted some kind of outlet for that.

It was partly the fact that, you know, having spent years working with brands and speaking to CMOs and helping them craft their story and their message to the world, I was like, "I kinda have a message that I wanna craft." And I felt that it would also help me kinda hone my abilities in that other part of my life because I can look a CMO in the eye and be like, "I get it. Every dollar you spend is a big choice," and there was a sort of affinity point there.

And then the third really blunt thing is I felt a need in New York—and it sounds ridiculous because New York has, I think, like, the highest restaurants and bars per capita. But something after COVID had shifted; I—I was like, "Where do I wanna go out? Like, where do I wanna spend time?" And there was such an insane surge of members' clubs opening, and I just felt this need with my business partner to do something a bit different.

Matt 00:04:44 Okay.

Margot 00:04:45 So we opened People's about a year and a half ago. It's been more of a joy and more of a headache than you could ever have imagined, but I've loved it. And—

Matt 00:04:54 How often do you go there?

Margot 00:04:55 I'm there most of the time.

Matt 00:04:56 Oh, really?

Margot 00:04:56 Yeah, I'm there a lot. And I heard Dave Grutman on, yeah, this podcast, talking about the role in hospitality when you kinda shift into not drinking. I've never drunk as little since I opened the bar, but I've never been out more, which is an interesting shift—

Matt 00:05:12 Yeah.

Margot 00:05:13 —to make. But I'm there a lot, and it's amazing because I'm a firm believer that you're only as good as the great people around you. And both UTA and People's are just such, like, abundance of riches in terms of meeting people. And on a really great day, I'm, like, meeting clients from there, there, and it—it all kinda just is perfect harmony.

Matt 00:05:34 It also keeps you in the world that you wanna be in for UTA, right? Because part of UTA is connecting brands with culture and celebrity and talent, and so much of that is on display in nightlife, right, in terms of what people wear, what they're talking about, who's coming in, what's popular. So I would imagine it's sort of like a living focus group, if you will, and it feeds your brain with ideas, and then you apply it toward your work at UTA.

Margot 00:05:59 Yeah, I love that way of putting it. And a 100%, you know, I think I was so interested in UTA—to take a quick step back because you're bringing something really important up. I always knew UTA in the context of, like, an agency, like a talent agency. And when I realized that all this other amazing work was happening in the brand space, I was like, "Oh, that's fascinating," because everyone is running to participate in what is this, you know, new need to build cultural competency within brand creation and content creation. And this is a business that is in no way having to catch up—like, that's just what this business has always been.

Matt 00:06:39 The world's going to where this business is.

Margot 00:06:41 Yeah. We're just applying what is an authentic, integrated part of who we are—culture—into how we converse and support brands. So, you know, I think that that was so incredibly appealing to me, and it made the People's of it all work because I can say to the business, like, "UTA is in the business of culture, and that's what People's is, too." It's the same thing. So people will often ask me, like, "Which hat are you wearing right now?", and I'm like, "I'm kind of just wearing two hats."

Matt 00:07:12 I think what people don't understand is because, you know, I run a software company, I do a lot of public speaking, consulting, and it's like, "Well, how do you do everything?" And it's like, I don't know how to do one without the other, because there are things I take away from one thing that I apply to another thing. And when you're an entrepreneur, when you are ambitious, you wanna be involved in a lot of different things. And I think, like, one plus one can equal three—

Margot 00:07:34 A 100%.

Matt 00:07:34 —especially if you're passionate about both things that you're doing.

Margot 00:07:37 Completely. And I do think that, you know, there are some people who really truly excel with single-minded—

Matt 00:07:44 Yeah.

Margot 00:07:44 —focus.

Matt 00:07:45 Right.

Margot 00:07:45 And my husband is one of them. Like, that is how he's—

Matt 00:07:47 —television, I know what he's doing, right?

Margot 00:07:49 Absolutely sets on fire, and it's amazing.

Matt 00:07:51 And there's a lot of benefits to that, too. I'm—I'm a little bit envious of that.

Margot 00:07:54 Oh, every day. But I think there's another type of brain, and I've—you know, it's taken me a minute, but I'm now not just accepting it, but embracing it that, to your point, really thrives on that. And to sort of reveal that I'm a total nerd, but there's a quote from a book that I love by Margaret Atwood, and she says, "Where did we learn that talent for insatiability?"

And when I was young, I felt like my sort of insatiability, like my—sort of my insatiability was a problem because, again, I was in this family that had very clear views of, like, "this is the thing." And I'm now finally seeing how joyful it can be and how much it tickles my personal brain to be doing all these different things and let them work in concert.

Matt 00:08:35 Yeah. So you joined UTA. So tell me about—you've been there for six months, you said so.

Margot 00:08:40 Something like that.

Matt 00:08:41 What's one thing that surprised you about the company and the culture?

Margot 00:08:44 The amount of information and knowledge that sits in this business. I mean, I feel there's a lot of conversation at the moment about, obviously, AI, but then simultaneously, like, intuition and just knowing, and that kinda "you know it when you see it" thing. And it's amazing to walk into a business where you really see both working together. We have so much rigor around how we are understanding what's going on.

And I mean that not only in the brand space, but in the creative space, and, like, what films are coming—like, we just know everything. There's also this much more intangible thing that just happens of having all these different people doing all these different things, but ultimately, towards the same end goal, interacting. To give you a really kind of weird answer, one of the things that surprised me is we still have phone culture at UTA. I felt a little bit—

Matt 00:09:33 Phone culture, meaning you call each other?

Margot 00:09:35 Pick up the phone and call each other. It's not just meeting culture, which I love. I have a friend, and it's one of my—

Matt 00:09:41 Unannounced, like, your phone will just ring, and you pick it up?

Margot 00:09:44 We just call each other. It's kind of radical.

Matt 00:09:45 What is this, 1986? Right?

Margot 00:09:48 And I have this friend, and she's got this amazing line—she also works in hospitality—and she always says, "Emails are embarrassing. Don't get me started on Zoom."

Matt 00:09:55 Right.

Margot 00:09:56 And I think we've got to this funny place where, like, you go into your day, and your day is a series of squares in your calendar. And you're meant to keep your conversations and your outcomes and your objectives and your to-dos in these little boxes. And I think that has an interesting—Are you—

Matt 00:10:10 —structured, preplanned way?

Margot 00:10:11 —those structured, preplanned. in the agency world, you pick up the phone. People just call each other. And I have found that so refreshing, but also genuinely productive. I would say the other thing that I've been really taken by is people are interested in getting to know each other. And, you know, this is a business that was very small and is now very big. And I've been in very big businesses before—huge businesses. And it's good to see that, you know, people will just proactively reach out. "Oh, you sit in a completely different department, Margot. You work with brands. I don't understand what you do, can we grab a coffee?". And there's this kind of phone-plus-coffee culture that I think, looping back to the beginning of my answer, is what feeds that less structured side of how we keep our finger on the pulse.

Matt 00:11:05 Yeah. So tell me about your day-to-day role. What are you focused on? What does success look like for you at UTA?

Margot 00:11:09 That's a great question. If I had to put it in quite simple terms, my focus right now is sort of equal parts between thinking about great work for brands—how do we put them at a cultural forefront? And my kind of obsession right now is this idea that we're all just screaming for attention, so, like, how do we not kinda chase where it's happening and really truly create that with our brands? And then the other part is my big focus is telling the world what we're up to because, kind of, the, "I didn't know...", wait, you know?

Matt 00:11:35 So storytelling to the business world, what UTA does, because people typecast them as a talent agency.

Margot 00:11:40 Yeah. I had friends say to me, "Are you an agent now?"

Matt 00:11:43 Well, United Talent Agency, it's in the name.

Margot 00:11:46 It is, and it's in the DNA, and I think it's something that we need to celebrate and be proud of because it gives us such a depth—But it can also typecast.

Matt 00:11:55 Talent agent. You are more than a talent agent. So—

Margot 00:11:57 So that's a big part of my role. And my focus right now is: how do we demonstrate that to the world, like the breadth of what we're doing? And I lied, there's three parts. And the other part is, you know, I'm a middle child, and I've always joked that the roles I've been happiest in are where I professionalize my middle childhood. And so, finding in a business—whether it's coffee and phone culture—how do you really lean into that for the objectives that we have? So how do I make sure that whether it's film, creator, or sports, that I'm so in, like, everyone's business so that I can bring the best to bear for my clients and my colleagues can do the same for us.

Matt 00:12:33 Gotcha. So let's unpack some of that. So you talk about helping brands understand their role in culture and having to tell a story in a world where everyone's clamor for attention. What does that process look like? Like, what do you need to know from a brand in order to come back with a solution on behalf of your firm that will help them move the needle?

Margot 00:12:51 That's a great question. I'm gonna use a dinner party example, okay? So if you have a dinner party, people come over, and your home looks the way your home looks, and you are who you are, and you can cook what you can cook. But if you're a good host, what do you do? You think about your guests. I'm gonna think, "Oh, do you have a dietary restriction?"

Matt 00:13:11 I have, right, yeah.

Margot 00:13:12 He likes—oh, I remember, he likes white wine, or who listens to—who do you wanna sit like—the art of seating plans is beautiful. It's watching someone who's good at that. It's like watching a sort of—

Matt 00:13:23 Seinfeld episode, like, can you be a "middler"? You know I'm talking about—

Margot 00:13:26 Yeah. And what was the "side-sit" thing? Exactly, yeah. I love it. That's a great episode.

Matt 00:13:31 Yeah.

Margot 00:13:31 So a dinner party to me is—a great dinner party is the fusion between: who am I, and what am I expressing through this act of hospitality, and who is my guest, and where is my empathy for that guest? And I think it's such a simple thing to lose sight of because it's such a natural thing that we do for each other. But often, when brands wanna truly participate in culture, it's the same matrix.

So we wanna spend time with our brand to understand, really, who are you as a brand? Like, what does your flatware look like? What light setting feels right for your dinner party? And then: who is that consumer, and what are their dietaries, and what are their preferences, and who are they gonna get on with? And when you can bring those two things together, you throw an amazing party, you build an amazing brand and culture.

And—like, I think where brands might have, once upon a time... you know, I've seen it go in both ways. Either too much broadcast—"this is who I am, this is who I am, think of that as you come to my house, and I show a PowerPoint presentation about why you're gonna love my dinner party."

Matt 00:14:31 Very linear, top-of-funnel, where it shifts

Margot 00:14:32 Very, like, "this is what I'm doing to you." And then the flip side—we've obviously seen brands who overly cater, overly empathize, and actually lose sight of who they are, and suddenly I'm serving six different meals to six different people.

Matt 00:14:47 You're everything to everyone.

Margot 00:14:47 You're everything to everyone. And so I think the ability to interact in culture—i.e., be in places people wanna be and show up in ways that they actually wanna engage with versus sort of forcing them to engage with you—we need to figure out for them: who is your guest, what do they care about, what's gonna give them a good night? But who are you, and how do you provide against that? What's your authentic way of providing?

Matt 00:15:09 Yeah. I mean, I think there's a paradox in culture where, on one hand, people want to feel like they're part of a community, part of a tribe, they belong to something. But on the other hand, the tension is that they wanna be an individual, and they wanna basically have

their own story. And those two things can be in conflict with each other. But if you can thread the needle where you're part of this, but we recognize who you are—which is basically your analogy of you're at the table with everyone else, but you wanna sit where you wanna sit, you wanna eat what you wanna eat, but you're still at the table with everybody else—that's sort of the—the idea that you have to write.

Margot 00:15:42 I hadn't even extended the analogy to that point because I think what you're raising is such an interesting phenomenon right now. I would say that you've got a lot of people over here saying that we've reached kinda peak monoculture, and a lot of people over here saying that we've never seen more micro-communities.

Matt 00:15:59 Well, because of the long tail in media. Like, it used to be—you know, I think there's some stat that, like, 99 out of the top 100 most listened songs of all time happened in 1990 or earlier because now there's just a long tail, right? So it's just everyone's listening to their own thing on Spotify, and the same with YouTube and videos. So the long tail is there, and that does create this rugged individualism, yet the whole country watches the Super Bowl.

Margot 00:16:25 Yes. I think it's partly that long tail of just there's so much more. But, also, it's that coinciding with so many more ways to consume that more. So, for example—and I'm gonna run with your music point here—when I was, like, an angsty thirteen-year-old, like, what did I do to find my community? I listened to Green Day.

Matt 00:16:42 Right.

Margot 00:16:43 I—I didn't have subreddits. I didn't have TikTok.

Matt 00:16:45 Right.

Margot 00:16:45 I didn't have a gaming friendship group, you know? I didn't have all these other places that I could actually find that community. So in some ways, I don't think the radical individualism is new; I think we're being given platforms and content to let it breathe and let it become more visible. And then, you know, I think on the flip side, on this point of monoculture, it's the same as you say—it's the Super Bowl. It's the same thing. You know, I walk around New York, which, when I was growing up, New York, everyone looked different. You can wear whatever you want, like, "You're never gonna be the most weirdly dressed person on the streets in New York." That's what I was always told. Whereas now, you can often walk down the street, and you will literally see hordes of people in the same outfit, the same sunglasses, the same drink in their hand.

Matt 00:17:32 What do you think drives that? When you see women in SoHo all dressed in the same style, is that driven by just a couple of influencers on Instagram? Like, how do you think that happens?

Margot 00:17:42 I asked a similar question to someone the other day, one of my colleagues. I was like, "What is going—" because I walked in, and I had just seen one of these sort of hordes. And I turned to my colleague—

Matt 00:17:52 What is the horde wearing?

Margot 00:17:53 Jeans and a white top.

Matt 00:17:54 Right.

Margot 00:17:54 I'm hope—like, I'm not wearing jeans and a white top, hang on. And there's nothing wrong with jeans and a white top.

Matt 00:17:57 If your audience is wearing jeans and a white top, we're good, yeah, exactly.

Margot 00:18:02 And I—my colleague at UTA, Matt, looks me dead in the eye, and he says, "Carcinization." And I was like, "What's carcinization?"

Matt 00:18:09 Never heard that, either.

Margot 00:18:10 Never heard this word. And he proceeds to tell me about this completely insane evolutionary phenomenon where—stay with me here—non-crab crustaceans evolve into crabs. And I'm looking at him like, "It's 9:00 AM. Why are you talking to me about crabs?". But I couldn't get it out of my heart for the rest of the day. And I was like, "That's fascinating. Like, this idea that there is this, like, evolutionary gravity that pulls us towards this, like, final same form."

Matt 00:18:42 Yeah.

Margot 00:18:42 And why is that? And, you know, I think all the same reasons that we're discussing as drivers of individualism, I think, are doing the same thing. It's the access to—maybe it's the scale of everything that happens. It's down to these really, like, pragmatic, not cool reasons that just the scale of what brands can produce these days, right, there's so much ability.

Matt 00:19:08 Also, like, I think data-driven targeting where it's lookalike modeling. Like, "This person just bought these jeans and a white T-shirt. We're gonna actually find 10,000 people that have the same psychographic and demographic profile as this person, and we're gonna hit them with the same thing." And it could be driven from corporations and just the ability to leverage big data in such a powerful way where the person is being sort of forced into these cohorts without them even knowing it. It might not even be choiceful.

Margot 00:19:37 Yeah. But I think when it becomes choiceful, you know, I think creators have proved that this is not a trend, this is part of just, and always how we move through the world

now. And I think you brought up the word "community" earlier, and I think people deeply crave belonging.

Matt 00:19:54 Yeah.

Margot 00:19:55 And what you wear and what you drink are deep—deep ways of manifesting, or quick ways, I should say, of manifesting belonging.

Matt 00:20:05 We'll be right back with the Speed of Culture after a few words from our sponsors. I have a great example for you, which I'm curious to get your take on. So Mahjong is exploding now, right? So I live in South Florida, and my wife and all of her friends—

Margot 00:20:19 A long time ago.

Matt 00:20:20 —and it used to be an old ladies' game. Like, my mom is 77, she plays it. And now all these young women, young moms, are playing Mahjong all the time, and they're buying fancy tiles. And then now the influencers they follow—they probably maybe started first doing it. And now it's driving, you know, a whole new wave of things that people buy and how they spend their time. And pickleball is obviously another example of a much more mass market, if you will. But just curious, like, a trend like Mahjong, right, like, is that, like, a type of idea that you might bring to a client? And how do you think something like that gets started?

Margot 00:20:55 It's a great question. I mean, the Mahjong thing to me is—fascinating. We went from not even being in the same city, let alone breath, as a request for an event at People's, to—I got, like, three Mahjong—

Matt 00:21:07 —Wow.

Margot 00:21:07 —event requests.

Matt 00:21:08 Really?

Margot 00:21:09 Yeah, suddenly. And the other day, I got a sponsored ad for—

Matt 00:21:13 And now you're gonna get a thousand of them.

Margot 00:21:15 Yeah. And I don't know what this says about me, but it was a Mahjong app, like, you can play on your phone for weight loss. And I was like, so now Mahjong—

Matt 00:21:23 Right, it—

Margot 00:21:23 —it was like, "Oh, wow. Okay." So we're combining it with another thing.

Matt 00:21:24 —combining two trends. Right, great, yeah,

Margot 00:21:26 —Brilliant. Would we take that to—yes, if it makes sense for that brand.

Matt 00:21:32 Yes, of course. Right.

Margot 00:21:33 And I think culture is happening at, like, a million different planes all at once. I think that there are things that I would call evergreen trends—like, just they're here and they're truth, it's almost just like human truths.

Matt 00:21:45 Right.

Margot 00:21:46 Like that's just who we are. And I would maybe put, like, wellness—

Matt 00:21:49 —Uh-huh.

Margot 00:21:50 —somewhere in there. Then you have more, I would say, like medium-term things. Then you—you have things that feel really in the moment, like flash-in-the-pan, yeah. And I think—I don't know where Mahjong is gonna sit, you know? Pickleball, which you brought up, right—

Matt 00:22:03 Well, now it's already—well, a lot of the people are now playing padel, and the people who used to play pickleball and swear by it are like, "Oh, no. I'm over it."

Margot 00:22:10 Now I'm in padel. So you're like, "Alright. So is the flash-in-the-pan, short-term trend pickleball, but the long-term trend is accessible tennis?"

Matt 00:22:17 Right.

Margot 00:22:17 And, like, that becomes a really interesting sort of fabric to—to pick through, and it's our responsibility to our clients. But I also think, you know, I say frequently to the brands we work with, like, "Don't do the 'flash of lightning' approach to culture."

Matt 00:22:33 Right.

Margot 00:22:34 And what I mean when I say that is you can't just show up in people's lives in a completely different way out of the blue and expect them to buy it. We're all—

Matt 00:22:41 Yeah. You don't—if you don't have a right to play there, yeah.

Margot 00:22:43 — like, we've seen it now. Like, this isn't new, and we're all too cynical, and we're all too, like, smartphone-good when it comes to advertising now, and we smell a rat. What I think is very nuanced and different there—that doesn't mean that if you're a brand that has established yourself as a participant in culture, that doesn't mean you can't play in what could be a lightning flash moment.

So it's like when you're looking at this as a whole, build cultural muscle and capability. But if you feel like jumping in on a quick trend, go for it. You know, another one that came up recently that I thought was really interesting was quarter-zips and matcha. And there was this suddenly

overnight viral thing that young Black men were posting on TikTok saying, "I'm in a quarter-zip, and I'm drinking a matcha." And it became this really interesting conversation about, "I'm leveling myself up."

Matt 00:23:33 Right.

Margot 00:23:34 And like—and it was a really self-aware—

Matt 00:23:36 —redefining stereotypes.

Margot 00:23:37 Yeah. It was super self-aware, and it was really interesting. And it happened so quickly. And I think that there were some brands who have earned the right credibility who could have participated in that conversation. Do I think in a year, in two years from now, people will be talking about quarter-zips and matcha on TikTok? No. That community will move on; they'll have their next—

Matt 00:23:56 Of course.

Margot 00:23:57 —thing they're talking about, but you were there when it happened.

Matt 00:24:00 The question, I guess, of: what is the underlying insight behind that? Because I think what you're getting at is when these things happen, what you see on TikTok is the manifestation of an underlying insight. And if the trend goes away, it doesn't mean the insight won't. And I think, like, even going back to the pickleball/padel, it's like, you know, men want a way to play—or women do—to play with each other sports in a way that maybe doesn't have such a commitment that tennis has, right? But they really wanted that community; they want that physical activity.

Margot 00:24:31 And of their competitiveness, but they don't want tennis.

Matt 00:24:33 Right, exactly, for whatever reason, right? So now the question is: now will they end up at tennis at the end? Maybe. Maybe it all goes back to tennis.

Margot 00:24:42 Well, I think to that point, it's the dinner party again. And the ability to respond to a short-term trend is entirely predicated back on what we were saying that brands need to do to do this work well, which is know who they are, because you don't know if that insight's for you if you haven't done that work. You can't, out of left field, be like, "Oh, that feels like it could be interesting and on-brand for us. Let's try."

First of all, your internal structures are not gonna be set up for it, and we've all seen too many ideas die on the vine of, like, internal just ways of working. So you need to build that landscape and do that work, but you need to know who you are. Otherwise, you're never gonna see that amazing thing fly past you and realize it's yours to jump on.

Matt 00:25:31 Do you think the same dynamic exists with celebrity? So you mentioned the Dave Grutman podcast, and he's producing a reality show with Alix Earle. Alix Earle is the "it girl" right now, right? And she's done a great job building her own personal brand, and she was on *Dancing with the Stars*, now she's having a reality show. Whether we're talking about her in ten years from now remains to be seen.

I mean, the Kardashians are still, obviously, they've done an amazing job of getting staying power. Not everyone loves them, but you can't—you know, you can't knock their hustle, right? It's incredible the impact they've had on culture. When you think about connecting brands with celebrities, it used to be in the past, "Oh, we will give you Julia Roberts or Tom Cruise." Like, these are A-listers, mhm. But now the traditional movie stars aren't necessarily moving the needle as much as the creators of the moment—the Alix Earles of the moment. So what is your take on how the framework we're talking about trends applies to the notion of celebrity and talent?

Margot 00:26:26 The harsh answer is that some of them will stick around, yeah, make it, and others won't. And that—that is inevitable and natural. And for some people, that's actually what they want.

Matt 00:26:34 Exactly.

Margot 00:26:35 When you brought up Alix, oh, I was gonna mention the Kardashians, because I think she's achieved a lot of what they achieved. And it's interesting to look at the comparisons and how.

Matt 00:26:44 They started on TV, right? The Kardashians started on TV and went because there was not really social media when they started.

Margot 00:26:49 They created, in some way, social media on TV.

Matt 00:26:52 Well, Ryan Seacrest did; he's actually the guy who really was behind a lot of it, yeah.

Margot 00:26:57 We're see, you're seeing if you wanna, like, draw the line, like, that's where I start. What we see now with creators is that form of, like, reality to be able to social media. It was personal. We aren't building parasocial relationships with movie stars in the same way, unless they're also really active on social. Like, that relationship that we're building with someone when they're not acting, when they're them, is very different, and it benefits immensely from frequency; it benefits from contact. So, you know, Alix Earle brings in her family a lot.

Matt 00:27:24 Right. You get to know her; you're rooting for her.

Margot 00:27:26 And you're—you're sort of in that story. I think we talk to brands about how to interact with celebrities or how to interact with creators—it's such an interesting conversation now because you're not looking at a one-stop shop of—of how this works. We had the period of famous person on billboards, and now we're in this era where—and, again, I'll use Alix, she's taking equity in some of the businesses that she's—

Matt 00:27:57 —Yeah.

Margot 00:27:57 —then talking about. There is this much more involved relationship between brands and the people they surround themselves with.

Matt 00:28:06 And they're also starting their own businesses sometimes.

Margot 00:28:07 —also starting their own businesses. I mean, again, if we're drawing lines like—Bethenny Frankel, like, that and those reality shows, I think, are a really interesting thing to go back to—

Matt 00:28:16 100%.

Margot 00:28:17 —when you're looking at where we are now.

Matt 00:28:19 All the way back to *The Real World* on MTV, which is, like—I think it was the first sign that people are ultimately more interesting than scripted characters. And then you had *Survivor*, and you had *American Idol*—like, it goes all the way through the trajectory of where we are today, where people are looking at other people's lives in a way that's more interesting.

Margot 00:28:36 And if you ask people why they love Alix Earle, a lot of them will say because she was honest with us. A what she had happening, she told us. And when she did this to her body, she told us. And that's why these parasocial relationships become so intense. And there was an interesting—

Matt 00:28:51 By the way, I just wanna say, I think it's all about relatability. I think, like, nobody loves that girl who's just flexing Cartier and Prada and Chanel, like, nonstop and pretending like life is good. They might follow you, but they all hate you, right? But somebody who has been fortunate in life, right, but still shows their warts, shows that they're vulnerable, shows that life isn't perfect, those are the people I think people root for and love. And I think so many people struggle with—even on LinkedIn, it's like somebody who says, "Oh, I'm killing it. I'm killing it." No one—but if you say, "Oh, I made a mistake," or, "I had to make a tough decision today," it's the same thing in business as well.

Margot 00:29:29 And that's such a powerful approach for brands to take. You know, brands—I remember the first time I really thought about this was when the first wave of what I would call sustainability marketing and brands realizing that a lot of people were—consumers were looking at them and saying, "So what the hell are you doing about it?"

Matt 00:29:48 The green—greenwashing, basically.

Margot 00:29:49 And a lot of the greenwashing happened. And the brands that, I think, did really well were the ones who, like, "Well, this isn't perfect, but we're working on it." And people like things that are real. And I relate to that, and you relate, and—and it's something so often forgotten when we talk about marketing and audiences.

Matt 00:30:08 Right.

Margot 00:30:09 People.

Matt 00:30:10 Well, it's personified. Brands are people, people are brands, and they need to be personified. And just like you wouldn't wanna hang out with somebody who's always happy, and everything is going great, and they feel like they're plastic and shiny and you can't—I—I don't think people wanna interact with brands that are like that or creators that are like that.

Margot 00:30:24 Someone said a phrase to me recently—they referred to the "corridor of uncertainty" to describe, like, 4:30 to 5:30 on a Friday. Corridor of uncertainty being you don't know if the work email, something, is gonna land on your desk and mess up your — I later found out it's a cricket phrase, but I wouldn't know. I think we're kinda living in a corridor of uncertainty right now, I mean, generationally, I know we're not the first time that things have felt hard, but that doesn't mean things aren't hard and bizarre right now.

Matt 00:30:54 And more amplified than ever before, you can't escape it.

Margot 00:30:57 It's everywhere all the time. And do you put your head in the sand and feel bad about that, or do you get into sort of news consumption paralysis? But from a political, from a climate, like, from—

Matt 00:31:09 Economic.

Margot 00:31:10 Economic. I mean, how many times have we had recession, inflation in the past ten years? We're living in a corridor of uncertainty.

Matt 00:31:13 AI, job loss, fears.

Margot 00:31:14 No one knows. And I think that can create a lot of animosity between people. And I'm sure there are some people who, in the midst of that, reach for almost the stability of perfection. But I think there are many more of us that reach for what you're talking about, which is relatability, because no one is living in their own perfect little bubble right now. And so the brands that we connect with, the creators who are connected to those brands—like, we wanna see that, too.

And I've been very moved—it's maybe a big word, but no, I have been moved. I have felt moved recently. Seeing some of the response to this bizarre time that we're in has felt radically

positive. And we started talking about acne and Alix Earle, but then you're seeing a fifteen-year-old girl posting a video on TikTok that's maybe not amazing, right, and all these total strangers are piling into the comments to say, "You're doing great."

Matt 00:32:05 Right.

Margot 00:32:05 I didn't grow up with that; I went to an all-girls school.

Matt 00:32:08 I mean, social media also has changed because for so long, it was: you need a lot of followers. But now it's sort of like it's a meritocracy that started with TikTok, where it doesn't matter how many followers you have, if your content's good—

Margot 00:32:20 You can go viral.

Matt 00:32:21 Right. And that, actually, I think, is a great thing for a lot of people because it gives them a shot. Now, a lot of people—obviously, and younger people—they're scared to post anything online because they're afraid no one's gonna like it, they're gonna—afraid that they're gonna get judged. And I think that is—you know, there are a lot of things in social media, I think, for younger kids, which I think is damaging. And one of which is, like, you see everyone else's highlight reels, and you feel bad about yourself.

And I think, ultimately, it takes for you patience to actually go through the real work to create something of success on your own because you feel like everyone has it already, yeah, and you don't go through the needed steps that we all need to triumph and get there, so people take shortcuts. They get into debt, they buy things they can't afford, they take pictures in front of private planes, whatever it may be—that's not a good thing, yeah. But I think the thing that is good if you can manage it the right way is, ultimately, I believe that the people who walk into rooms and don't worry about what people think of them, but more be like, "What do I think of—" like, "I don't care what you think of me, I'm worrying about what I think of you. You can't change the way I feel about myself."

So because of that, I'm gonna post something on social media, I don't even care how many people like it. The sooner people can get to that, I think the sooner they're gonna ultimately be happy in their career and probably their life, but it's just very hard to get there.

Margot 00:33:33 It is. But what's—it's kind of wild because you're actually seeing—and I would put this more on the Gen Z, Gen Alpha, because I think millennials, we really grew up with curated Instagram—

Matt 00:33:47 Yeah.

Margot 00:33:47 —versus raw, relatable—

Matt 00:33:49 I'm Gen—I'm Gen X, so I grew up with *Seinfeld*, so—

Margot 00:33:52 I mean, it's—I—there was an article I read recently about there's a sort of eight-year gap of the—oh, eight-year sort of group of people who lived right on the cusp. And they're—just one of the descriptions they used, which I love, is: "old enough to remember the weight of an encyclopedia, young enough to instinctively introduce the other stuff."

Matt 00:34:12 The internet was just taking off, which was great in so many ways.

Margot 00:34:15 Can hold both, but truth was just super cool, right, yeah. People are starting to literally own what you just said on TikTok—posting a completely random video, and saying, "What's the worst thing that can happen?"

Matt 00:34:29 Right.

Margot 00:34:30 And I love because I'm now starting to see brands play into this dynamic. One of the things that has taken people from three views on their content to 30,000, 3,000,000 in some cases, is this trend of girls texting their boyfriends and saying, "How many likes for a trip to Italy?" And then Delta will comment as a—and, you know, it's such an interesting social dynamic that is playing out, and brands that are able to—we're literally finding new ways to connect to each other—

Matt 00:35:06 —and I saw something with Ryan Serhant that he did with somebody where he would pay for their honeymoon or something if he got 3,000,000 likes, and then everyone got behind it.

Margot 00:35:14 And then everyone gets so excited. And, you know, then you get the video—the next video with the girl getting the handbag.

Matt 00:35:20 Because, you know, someone—right, that's a great place for a brand to play.

Margot 00:35:23 It's an—

Matt 00:35:24 —amazing place, dynamic and agile to be able to take advantage of something like that.

Margot 00:35:27 Dynamic. And that comes back to everything we've said of, like, you need to have yourself set up to react.

Matt 00:35:32 Right.

Margot 00:35:33 When you see ice hockey players sitting on the side, like, they don't have their feet out of their boots, reading a book. Like, you might be on the side, but you're ready. Like, they jump onto that ice, right, so quick. And brands need to be there. Like, they need to have all of that homework, all of that self-discovery. Who am I? What is my compass? Where and how do I fit into culture? So that they can react in those moments and know that it's gonna

feel value-additive and real and fun and, you know, hopefully grow their business at the same time.

Matt 00:36:03 First example ever was very famously when there was a power outage during the Super Bowl, mhm. And Oreo basically made a post on Twitter at the time, and that was the de facto social media platform at the moment. And it was something like, "You don't need to have the lights on to dunk in the dark." And it was basically just an image of an Oreo being dunked in milk quick when it was dark, and it exploded, right? And it was Agency 360, I believe, that built it.

And it started this whole notion of, like, the real-time newsroom where brands can respond. And although that's kind of changed, what you're saying is almost just another symptom of the same opportunity, which is things are gonna move fast. And if you are smart enough—

Margot 00:36:41 —You're ready enough.

Matt 00:36:42 —right, and you can jump on it, it's gonna really be able to move your brand.

Margot 00:36:46 Already or late right now. And I love the Oreo example because I also think, you know, I can't resist bringing up what feels like such a prevalent conversation right now—and has been for a while, if we're being brutally honest with ourselves—of budgets being cut and CMOs being told, "Go and do more with less." And that's a really, really good idea. Was it expensive? No, it was good. And I think, you know, a lot of the hard budgets are always gonna vary. And the—the question isn't "is your budget gonna come and go?", the question is: how are you using the budget you have? And if you use the budget you have to do the deep work, to get yourself set up in the right way with the right partners, with the right internal understanding of who you are and how you behave... then they spent five minutes, but they were ready, and they were thinking, and it was an amazing idea. That wasn't a \$5,000,000 Super Bowl ad, and it won the Super Bowl.

Matt 00:37:37 Yeah.

Margot 00:37:37 And I think it's a good reminder when we're having conversations with people about: how do we do more with less? Like as creative industries, like, how are we supporting brands through a sort of ongoing era of, like, tight budgets and, like, high demands on return on investment? The best ideas aren't always the most expensive ones, and spend the budget you do have to put yourself in a position to have the best ideas.

Matt 00:38:01 I love that. So shifting gears as we wrap up here—and this has been such a great conversation, Margot, I'm so glad that we had you here on the pod—would love to hear from you as you look back on your career journey, and you mentioned some time on the agency side. What are some of the areas that you leaned into that you think, in a rearview mirror, were the right areas that put you in a position where you are today at UTA?

Margot 00:38:20 It's a great question, and I somewhat alluded to this. But I think the best piece of advice I have for myself moving forward and for anyone, you know, moving through their career, is: get comfortable with the lack of a plan. I spent far too much energy agonizing over what the right or the wrong thing was early on.

Matt 00:38:32 Even things that you can't control.

Margot 00:38:34 Even things you can't control. And I'm not a particularly religious person, but I do believe when you plan, God laughs. So getting comfortable with that and really following people. And that was something that happened, luckily, for me early on. There were some amazing people through my career that really, beyond mentorship, were just this sort of magnetic place for me.

And I often found myself putting more focus on "who am I working with or for" than "what's the thing I'm doing." I mean, at WPP, I was in traditional branding; I worked on this new team, Team Google; I ended up working for the CTO, like, I worked in gov-comms; I had a really un-linear, if you looked at it, really weird track. But I just kept letting myself gravitate towards the people who felt really dynamic and interesting because, you know, no big shock, the really interesting, dynamic people are often doing the really interesting, dynamic—

Matt 00:39:36 —going to great places.

Margot 00:39:37 —going to great places. So don't be afraid to follow people, but don't get attached. You're ultimately—

Matt 00:39:43 Right.

Margot 00:39:44 —just follow yourself. And then the other thing is: don't be scared of the periphery. There was a time where creators wasn't even a language. You know, things are changing at a pace. And while I do believe in building core competency, and I believe that there are some things that will always be true about the work we do and how to do it, don't be afraid to, like, play in those areas that might feel really strange and new, because they could just be the next big thing.

Matt 00:40:10 Yeah, it's great advice. So we always wrap our pod by asking our guests if there's a saying or mantra that helps encapsulate their career journey or personal journey. What comes to mind?

Margot 00:40:20 Leave people happier than you found them.

Matt 00:40:22 I love that. And why did that come to your mind first?

Margot 00:40:25 Because then people will always be willing to take the call or have the meeting, you'll build relationships. It's less about LinkedIn following and it's more about

relationships. And leaving people happier than you found them means you add a little value to someone's day, and that's a good thing.

Matt 00:40:38 Well, this pod's gonna add value to people's day, so I'm really happy you joined today. Thank you so much for joining, Margot. On behalf of the Suzy and Adweek team, thanks again to Margot Hauer-King, SVP of Creative Strategy at UTA and founder and owner of People's, for joining us today. Be sure to subscribe and review the Speed of Culture podcast on your favorite podcast platform. From sunny South Beach, we'll see you soon, everyone. Bye-bye.

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