

In Proximity
James Swoope
Season 3 Episode 2
Final Transcript

Paola Mardo: The number one question on some people's minds is, "How do I even get a manager?" So how does one get a manager, Swoope?

James Swoope: Oh, that's tricky. I mean, I always say, "Have something to manage."

[00:09 - KN 9 to 5 by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

Paola Mardo: You're watching and listening to In Proximity. I'm Paola Mardo, and today, we're talking management.

[PHONE BUZZES]

One second.

[ANSWERS CELLPHONE]

Oh, no, no. I said \$25 million. Yeah, call me back.

[HANGS UP]

James Swoope is a talent manager at M88. His client list includes the likes of Ironheart's Dominique Thorne, actress and musician Coco Jones, designer and entrepreneur Jeff Staple, and athlete and podcaster Matt Barnes. I'd heard of him long before we met mostly because he's worked with a lot of folks at Proximity. His breakout job in the industry was as assistant to Charles D. King on the set of Judas and the Black Messiah, which is filmed in his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio.

James, or "Swoope" as most folks know him, is a big personality with an even bigger sense of style. He's a unique individual—he even calls himself a "unicorn," and that kind of energy is rare, even in Hollywood. But it's important in what he does. Today, he breaks down exactly what he does as a manager, how to get one, hot takes on industry issues, and how to keep creating while keeping your business in check. Here's my conversation with James Swoope.

[CELL PHONE VIBRATES]

All right, you got it? Okay. Close that deal. All right.

[HANGS UP]

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Paula Mardo: Swoope!

James Swoope: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Welcome to Proximity! Thank you for being here.

James Swoope: Of course.

Paola Mardo: Long time coming.

James Swoope: Yes.

Paola Mardo: So we've revamped the show a little bit, but we're keeping some of the elements we love about it, including—

James Swoope: I'm ready.

Paola Mardo: A surprise voice memo. I'm going to play a little question from someone who I'm sure you will find out and figure out who it is.

James Swoope: Aw, that's crazy.

Paola Mardo: We got someone for you. They have a little question.

James Swoope: All right. Let's do it.

Paola Mardo: You'll figure out who it is, and then you'll answer the question. Here we go.

[VOICE MEMO]

Charles D. King: James Swoope. It's your friend Charles D. King, and I have a question for you: how were you able to navigate from Cleveland, Ohio when you didn't come up through the traditional course and training of the industry in Los Angeles and to become such a talented rising star in the management world of film, television, and multi-hyphenates? And can you tell us how your individuality and uniqueness and sense of style has played a part and contributed to that?

[LAUGHTER FROM PAOLA MARDO AND JAMES SWOOPE]

Charles D. King: And then the last thing is, why do you call yourself a "unicorn"?

[VOICE MEMO ENDS]

James Swoope: I feel like he always wanted to ask that last question.

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: This is his time.

James Swoope: This is his moment.

Paola Mardo: That was a couple of questions, so I wrote it down so we don't forget. Actually, can you first, for the listeners who don't know, and viewers, who did we just hear again, and how do you know each other?

James Swoope: So that was Charles D. King, and, I mean, Charles is Charles. You know, he's the amazing, you know, CEO of MACRO, the innovator, you know, used-to-be agent, you know. I always look at Charles as someone who, you know—I like to say he saved my life, you know? And he's one of the reasons why I'm here. And I wouldn't be here without him.

I've said that to people before, and they was like, "No, you—you wouldn't be here without you." And it's like, well yeah, but, like, God still put people in your life, and you have to take advantage of those things. And Charles is one of the people who, I feel like, was divine timing and someone who I met and was the springboard to take me to the next level. So, yep, that's Charles King.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. And I love that he asked you these questions because it's very fitting for how you guys know each other. First one: "How were you able to navigate from Cleveland, Ohio when you didn't come up through the traditional course and training of the industry in Los Angeles?"

James Swoope: Wow, that's a loaded question. Without going, you know, into, like, deep story mode, for me, it was never letting go of a dream, right? And also being wise enough to know that your dream can come from any type of interaction and from anywhere. So it was one of those things where it's like, I don't know how I'm going to get to that particular goal, and eventually the "how" stopped mattering. And I feel like once the "how" stopped mattering to me, that's when things started to unfold. I feel like, for me, I was paying attention to connecting the dots. That's kind of what I call it. It's like, how does this dot connect to this dot? So it's like, when I knew that I couldn't do certain things in "Hollywood," quote/unquote, what can I do at home that mimics that? Because ultimately, that's what I'm doing. The difference is budget.

Paola Mardo: Right.

James Swoope: So that was kind of what I focused on when it comes to navigating. It's like, if you're doing what you can do at the best ability where you at, the other opportunities kind of just come. You take advantage of it.

Paola Mardo: He asked about, like, your individuality and your uniqueness and your sense of style and how that plays a part in what you do. Could you talk a little bit about that?

James Swoope: Yeah. I think—it's so funny because when you're in something, you don't really know what's going on, right? And I've always been someone who—you know, things shift in life, right? So it's like, the stuff I'm getting praise for, the uniqueness, used to get shitted on, you know?

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: Mm hm.

James Swoope: So, yeah, like, stay the course. Like, whoever's watching this, stay the course. Like, as long as you're not, like, disrespecting anybody or, you know, like, belittling people, like, your uniqueness is your uniqueness. And eventually, the shit that they're laughing about, they're going to, like, team you for it, like, soon.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, yeah.

James Swoope: So, like, I think that mindset helps me stay who I am. And don't weary because, I mean, you are who you are. It's easier to be who you are than it is to, like, fake.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Why do you call yourself a "unicorn"?

James Swoope: I call myself a unicorn because I know that I'm different, and I embrace it. And, you know, it's one of those things where, you know, when I think of a unicorn, like, I'm sure a horse looked at a unicorn and was like, "The fuck is this?" You know, and he probably got laughed at and all these different things because he didn't look like the rest of the horses. You know, so, for me, it's like, when I was growing up, it's like, I was the skinny guy or the black as fuck and, you know, the big lips and all these different things. And I wanted to be in entertainment. I wanted to be a movie director. I had all that going against me because no one knew what the fuck a movie director was. It was like, "You want to be a what? What is that?" Anyway, bro, you know, especially in the community I grew up in, filmmaking is cool now, but, like, growing up, nobody really wanted to make films.

I call myself a unicorn because I was always the exception to the rules. People would be like, "How the hell that happen for Swoope? And how this and that?" And it's like, I'm not doing it on purpose. It's just the favor God has on me. So, to me, that's like, sometimes people never heard of, and it looks one way, and it's magical, and that's Swoope. That's me.

Paola Mardo: Mm hm. At what point did you start calling yourself a unicorn?

James Swoope: That's a good question. Maybe 2015?

Paola Mardo: Oh, wow.

James Swoope: 2014?

Paola Mardo: It's been 10 years.

James Swoope: Oh, it's definitely been over 10 years, 100 percent. Like, I'm consistent.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, you are. You are. And we will get into that.

[LAUGHTER]

James Swoope: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

[08:04 - Good Times by Ludwig Göransson]

James Swoope: And I do want to point out this, too, because—because I really, truly think this is important—and I don't know if I'm going to get to tell this story later on, so maybe I won't tell the story but just tell you kind of—

Paola Mardo: Just jump into it. We're on a podcast.

James Swoope: Yeah, all right, let's do it. Lillian Pyles is—is head of extra casting in Cleveland, Ohio, and she gave me my shot as a intern to get into extras casting. And—

Paola Mardo: This was your first sort of, quote/unquote, "Hollywood job."

James Swoope: That was my first—yes.

Paola Mardo: Or entertainment industry job, I guess.

James Swoope: Yes. It was. Yes, 100 percent.

Paola Mardo: Cool.

James Swoope: And she gave me, you know, the opportunity to intern. That internship turned into me actually, you know, working as her assistant. And the story that I like to tell is when we were working on The Marksman, which was the Liam Neeson movie, we saw this—this article that said "Judas and the Black Messiah"—it was called Jesus Was My Homeboy at the time—but "Judas is coming to Cleveland for casting."

And they had already kind of knew about the project a little bit. It was like, "Oh, it's coming to Cleveland. We thought they was doing the casting in—in Pittsburgh." So they was like, "Oh, we need to get on this." Like, how—because it was finally a Black movie that came to, you know, Cleveland where—

Paola Mardo: Wait, did you guys know the logline or anything? Or you just knew the title? Just curious.

James Swoope: We had the logline.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

James Swoope: We are on IMDB, you know, looking for, you know, the producers and, you know, who, like, who's a part of the project. And, you know, one of the people who was part of the project was Charles King. And, you know, they were like, "Oh, Charles King is a part of the project!"

And I was like, "Who the fuck is Charles King?"

And it was like, "You don't know who Charles King is?! Charles King dah, dah, dah, dah." And I'm like, "yo", like, "relax", like, "okay, okay, okay." But I noticed that it's because Charles', you know, project was The Land, which was Steven Caple, who is my mentor and friend's, first movie. So—which was the first movie I interned on. So it was easy for me to make the phone call.

I don't know who the fuck I thought I was, actually. I was like—I was like, "Oh, that's easy. Let me call Steven and just get Charles' number." So I called Steven, and I was like—

Paola Mardo: Connecting the dots.

James Swoope: No. Yeah, yeah. And, you know, I was like, "Steven, like, I need Charles King's number. There's this project, dah, dah, dah, dah."

And he was like, "Bro, I can't just give you Charles' number." He like, "What I can do is give you the number to MACRO. Ask to speak to Poppy Hanks and tell her what you need."

I was like, "All right." You know, I didn't care. Like, call Poppy, Head of Film at MACRO at the time. And she literally—they actually called me back. Like, shout-out to Kyle. Like, Kyle—like, Kyle was her assistant at the time, Kyle from MACRO. And—and, you know, I know some assistants who probably wouldn't even deliver the message. Like, "Who the fuck is James Swoope?"

Paola Mardo: Yeah, yeah.

James Swoope: But shout-out to Kyle for delivering the message to Poppy, and Poppy actually called me back. And Poppy said they were sticking with the people in Pittsburgh. So I was like, "Oh, okay. Cool. Whatever."

Eventually, you know, a couple weeks go by, and I get, you know, the opportunity to be Charles' assistant for the movie. And, you know, that was a difficult conversation. I remember having so many conversations with my colleagues at the time, which was, you know, Jillian Holt and Will Moore and Lavelle Brown. Like, we just trying to figure out, like, you know, like, what's the best way to approach her with it. And they was like, "Bro, just tell her. Like, Lillian ain't like that. Like—"

And Lillian even said it, like, "What kind of mentor would I be if I was to hold you back? Yes, you got something that we all wanted, but, like, you also got the opportunity to work with the producer. Go—go—go fly."

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

James Swoope: And I remember sitting in the office one day at work, and Ryan called me in his office and was like, "Hey, did you used to work in casting?"

And I was like, "Yeah."

And he was like, "Huh." He was like, you know, like, "What she working on?"

And I was like, "Honestly, this is the last day of The Marksman."

And he was like, "Huh. Well, we've been needing help in that area. Do you think she can do this?" And I was able to help—

Paola Mardo: Wow.

James Swoope:—us hire the company that I used to work for, anyway.

Paola Mardo: That's amazing.

James Swoope: So that kind of stuff, to me, is like—you know?

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

James Swoope: That's why I do this.

[12:55 - In Proximity '90s by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: People who will be watching this, they're probably in the industry or want to break in or are trying to figure things out. And I think the number one question on some people's minds is, How do I even get a manager? So how does one get a manager, Swoope?

James Swoope: Oh, that's tricky. On what level? It's kind—I mean, it's so many different ways to bring in a manager, right? I mean, I always say, "Have something to manage." Like, when it comes to, like, the level that, you know, I'm at, it's have something to manage.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Can you just explain that a bit? Because I feel like, especially, like, first-time filmmakers or, like, young or emerging actors, you always kind of get in your head that, oh, you need these certain things in your career. One is, like, a representative, whether it's a manager or agent. So—but you're saying you need to have something to manage.

James Swoope: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Which makes sense, but can you explain that a little bit more?

James Swoope: Yeah. I feel like some people forget that they are artists, right? And they get so caught up in the business that they really don't know about, which is fine, that it kind of take away from what they're creating. So, if I'm talking to a filmmaker, and they like, "I need a manager because I got this idea and dah, dah, dah, dah," you are—to me, all I heard was, "I need somebody to do the work for me," because that's how you think this goes.

What you really need to be thinking about is: How do I take this idea, where I'm at, to create the best version of this? Or any idea, you know? Maybe some things you hold onto when you get a little bit, you know, whatever it is, but there's always something that can be done on whatever level you at. You start doing that, you start making noise, you start networking, these pieces fall into place. But if you spending all your time not working on the creative because you feel like you can't start this because you need a manager, you're wasting time.

If you a actor, take your ass to school. Go sharpen the tools. Go to these networking events. Go to this, go to that. Cold emailing people? I'm not saying it's never worked, but if you going to cold email, be doing 100 other things too, you know what I'm saying?

Paola Mardo: Exactly. You have to have something to manage.

James Swoope: 100 percent.

Paola Mardo: I mean, I think about even how you got in touch with Charles King. You were already doing so many other things.

James Swoope: Correct.

Paola Mardo: And you weren't like, "Hey, I want to work for you or with you?" You were, like, "Oh, business for this casting agency that I'm working with." Like, you were thinking bigger.

James Swoope: It was that, but it was also—to that point, it was suggested. I was suggested. Like, you know, like, you know, he had a specific type of person that he needed for the job, and, you know, he put out some feelers, and I came up as a name multiple times. But that's because of what I'm talking about, you know? I wasn't waiting on a Charles. I wasn't waiting on anybody but God. And me and Him are tag-team champions, so, you know, He was figuring it out.

Paola Mardo: No, I love that. We talked on the phone before this, and you mentioned it's—you're in "the 10 percent business, and it's up to the talent to do the other 90 percent."

James Swoope: Yeah.

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: Can you add something more to that? Because I love it. It stuck in my head.

James Swoope: Yeah. I mean, you know, I have this client and a friend, his name is DeVon Libran, and we were talking one day, you know, about—about different artists and how they look at things and how they look at reps, you know, because I feel like, throughout time, representation evolved, right? Like, there was a point where you did one thing, and then a rep—like, you literally sat at home and did pretty much nothing, and a rep did a lot of the work, right? There was a time when that happened.

But even in those times, if you look at the difference between the artist and where their career went, the people who really made the most noise, you know, did things still on their own. So a lot of people I've talked to artist-wise, you know, they forget that they're artists, and they forget that of course a lot of opportunity might come directly to you because another artist—you know, you guys have ideas and all these things. And as long as you're not, you know, waiting around and you're doing what you're supposed to do, DeVon said to me, like, "Bro, you know what somebody told me one day?"

I said, "What?"

He was like, "Somebody told me, like, you only get paid 10 percent. So it's up to me to give them the other 90." And I was like—I'm still in that, for one, and for two, it's true because if you're not connecting on your level of artistry, what am I supposed to be doing? And in 2025, that whole, "I was in this big blockbuster movie on—that came out Friday, so Monday, I better have 14, 15 offers on the table," that shit dead. You want to know why it's dead?

Paola Mardo: Why?

James Swoope: Because we got away from being artists, and the industry has suffered from it, and it's forcing us to go back to that shit. So, yes, don't be afraid to—to go out there and connect with other artists and do some artist shit. That don't take your manager to set that up. That don't take an agent to set that up. We can scale the deal and to, you know, help place it and make it happen, but don't forget you an artist because you wasting time waiting on me. I'm 10 percent because that's what I'm getting, but you the 90.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Yeah.

James Swoope: And that don't mean that I'm not doing hella work or nothing like that. That just mean that you got to care more than I do.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

[19:17 - Good Times by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: So what does a manager actually do, though, if you were to explain this to someone? And maybe, to be more specific, how do you approach management?

James Swoope: Yeah, I was about to say I don't know how everybody else work—

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: How do you do it?

James Swoope: —because don't notice it. For me, again, I know my strengths. I know everyone isn't for me. But for me, what I've noticed with artists is they just need something to believe in that helps complement where they trying to go. So I believe that I'm really good at pulling that out of people and making sure that they get it done, you know?

Paola Mardo: That's a really specific skill.

James Swoope: It is.

Paola Mardo: Like, how do you do—like, I don't even—I can't comprehend how you do that.

James Swoope: I realize that that's just what I'm good at, right? And I've took that type—that type, and I paired it to, like, what am I passionate about? And what I'm passionate about are people and entertainment. So, like, how can I help people through entertainment, right?

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

James Swoope: Then I realized, like, how can that make me money? So, like, how can I add all these three things together? And I believe that's what it is. So, like, some people come to

management, you know, to a manager, like, for, like, "I need a specific strategy of how to do that." Like, yeah, I'm—like, we going to strategize, but I also want you to, like, remember who you are as a person, too, because that's a part of strategy.

It's a lot of reps that don't care about that part, which is fine because that's how they run their business. And some artists don't want you to, which is fine. Then you're not the one for me. But for me, specifically, I like to understand who you are, how you think, what you like to do, and, like, what risks we going to take? And I believe, for me, I'm the person that push a little more than other people.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. What's the difference between a manager and an agent? Because I think that gets a little confusing for people at times.

James Swoope: I was about to say we care. No. Shout-out to agents.

[LAUGHTER]

Agents are more transactional, which is fine, right? I feel like if you use the agency right and all the stars align, an agency can be your record label, you know? It can really help move you forward. But a lot of stuff has to be put into place for that. I feel like, on the management side, you know, and some agents are different. Like, I don't want to—like, I want to preface this by saying, like, everybody is definitely different.

Paola Mardo: Right, just like you do your job very different.

James Swoope: Exactly. But, like, overall, like, agents ain't trying to sit up there and take your calls and hear your fucking problems. Like, their job is to fucking go get you a job. Like, they don't care. Like, you going to school? Cool. My job isn't—like, I don't care about you going to school. My job is to get you a job. Like, you know what I'm saying?

Paola Mardo: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

James Swoope: And my job is to get the agent to think in a more, you know, palatable way of whatever that client wants.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

James Swoope: Which can be a—sometimes of a headache. But, again, I truly think the manager's job is just more personable, and the—the agent job is more transactional.

Paola Mardo: I just wrote some jobs down that I feel like are like what managers do, but you tell me if I'm wrong. Are you like a coach, a guidance counselor, therapist, all of the above, or none at all?

James Swoope: 100 percent, all of the above. 100 percent. 100 percent.

Paola Mardo: Okay. Okay.

James Swoope: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Checks out.

James Swoope: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, that's so interesting.

James Swoope: Police.

Paola Mardo: Police?

James Swoope: Detective.

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: Detective I can see. There's a show here.

[23:44 - In Proximity '90s by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Okay. Now we're going to get into a little rapid-fire segment. I have a couple of things down here that I'm just going to throw at you.

James Swoope: Let's do it.

Paola Mardo: And if you could just respond in a word or like a sentence or two, I just really want to hear your take.

James Swoope: Like, fast?

Paola Mardo: Yes, like rapid. Like, fire.

James Swoope: All right. I'll go as fast as I can. I'm a little slow.

Paola Mardo: Okay. No, you're not. Rapid fire, okay. Here we go, rapid fire, I will ask some questions. Just first thing that comes to mind or one sentence or two?

[BELL DINGS AND TIMER TICKING]

What excites you in the business?

James Swoope: Risk-takers and rule-benders.

Paola Mardo: What bores you?

James Swoope: The business.

Paola Mardo: What's hot right now in entertainment?

James Swoope: What's hot right now in entertainment? Ooh, that's tricky. What's hot right now in entertainment? Streamers.

[BELL DINGS AND TICKING CONTINUE]

Paola Mardo: What's not hot?

James Swoope: I don't know. This business, you never know.

Paola Mardo: It all goes back.

[LAUGHTER]

James Swoope: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Biggest challenge faced by manager or talent rep today?

James Swoope: Getting the artist to understand patience.

Paola Mardo: Biggest opportunities for emerging talent?

James Swoope: The ability to do things yourself.

Paola Mardo: Where do you think the industry is headed in the next five or so years?

James Swoope: Reminding people that they are artists and they can do things theyself. And they can, you know, instead of you—instead of trying to make it to Hollywood, you attract Hollywood.

[TICKING STOPS]

Paola Mardo: I love that. I love that. You did that.

[25:18 - Good Times by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: So, Swoope, this is the part of the show where we learn a little bit more about you and your process. And you brought something in.

James Swoope: Yes.

Paola Mardo: And I actually love what you brought. I'm gonna bring it out and you will talk about it.

James Swoope: Yes.

Paola Mardo: Can you tell our listeners, for those who are not—you know, for those who see it but also for those who are just listening, what'd you—what'd you bring in?

James Swoope: Okay. Let's start with the 3 Ninjas.

Paola Mardo: So he brought, basically, two VHS tapes. And the first one he's holding in his hand is, I would say a '90s classic, 3 Ninjas.

James Swoope: 100 percent.

Paola Mardo: Classic film. Three brothers taught martial arts by their grandfather, and they just get into an adventure after being kidnapped by a rogue ex-student of said grandpa, and ninja chaos ensues.

James Swoope: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think that was a good way of you, you know, saying, like, you know, three young white, you know, teenagers were taught by their Japanese grandfather—

Paola Mardo: There you go.

James Swoope:—to combat the FBI.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Yeah. I'm going to have to rewatch this and, like, was a parent Asian? I don't know. Was a parent Japanese? I'm not sure.

James Swoope: I can tell you for sure these three kids got zero Asian in them.

Paola Mardo: Right, but they could—they could fight. They could—you know?

James Swoope: But they could definitely fight. This movie is the movie that got me into filmmaking. I saw this movie and was like, you know, "Wherever they do this shit at, I want to do."

And I—you know, I asked my parents, and they was like, "Oh, that's, you know, Hollywood."

And I was like, "Oh. Where's that at? Down the street?" you know?

Paola Mardo: Wait, how old were you?

James Swoope: I was five years old.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

James Swoope: Yeah. I will never forget. So this forever lives with me because if it wasn't for John and these amazing 3 Ninjas right here, I wouldn't be here, I don't think, you know? I feel like movies driven by kids don't get enough credit, especially—you know, when we talk about representation, like, we always talk about, you know, race. But, like, representation is also, like, "I'm a kid, and I'm watching a kid do some shit."

Dude, I remember being a kid and seeing Blank Check and feeling like, "Oh, my god, one day I'm going to get a blank check, and I'm going to be able to go buy everything, that, you know, that I always wanted. Or seeing a movie like—what's another one? You got Blank Check. You got Richie Rich.

Paola Mardo: Richie Rich.

James Swoope: Seeing Macaulay Culkin, like, he was the ultimate kid that inspired kids. Jonathan Taylor Thomas, you know, Kenan and Kel, like, you know—

Paola Mardo: Good Burger.

James Swoope: Like, just all these different kids just doing dope shit.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. All That. All That.

James Swoope: Yeah! So that—you know, shout-out to the kids, man, you know?

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Shout out to the kids. I love that. And then what's the second VHS tape you have there?

James Swoope: The second VHS tape I have is Forrest Gump.

Paola Mardo: Ooh, another '90s classic!

James Swoope: Another '90s classic. Forrest Gump is funny because me and my niece—I have a bunch of nieces, but my niece India and Arielle, we used to watch Forrest Gump. I want to say we was probably all of like nine or some shit like that. But this was, like, the first movie that was long as fuck that we actually watched and understood, which was kind of insane that we were, like, under 10 understanding Forrest Gump.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. But he starts as a kid, right?

James Swoope: He was a kid.

Paola Mardo: So maybe that's why.

James Swoope: That is why!

Paola Mardo: And then you connected to that, and then he got the leg braces off, and he starts running, and you're like, "Aah!"

James Swoope: But no, seriously, then, you know, as I go through life, honestly, you know, I look at myself as a Forrest Gump because I done been in so many situations—

Paola Mardo: I was going to say.

James Swoope:—where I was there when certain things happened that helped change the culture.

Paola Mardo: Ooh! Are you going to name some right now?

James Swoope: Yeah, no.

[LAUGHTER]

I don't want to start any... yeah. Just know I have some interesting nights that—that people talk about whether they know I was there or not. So, yeah, that's Forrest Gump.

Paola Mardo: Right, modern-day Forrest Gump. And 3 Ninjas.

James Swoope: I'm definitely a 3 Ninjas.

Paola Mardo: Who would have known?

[30:05 - Prox Recs Theme by Ludwig Göransson and Ken Nana]

Paola Mardo: Swoope, what would be your Prox Rec for today?

James Swoope: My Prox Rec for today, would be advice.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

James Swoope: And, you know, take it or leave it like everything else in life. I want us to always remember what got us to these places. And no matter what it comes with as you get further in any career, any job, whatever you're doing in life, there are going to be challenges that remind you that you have to make a decision on, "What am I doing this for?"

And I want people to remember if you—if you a filmmaker, make films. I don't care what level you on. Until you can get to whatever that goal is on your board, but just make the film. If you are a musician, make music, put it out. If you a actor, act. I don't care what you do in this world. Do it. Because you're messing yourself up caring too much about the result, and you're not living in the present.

So you have to ask yourself, is this something you really want to do? Actors are, you know, struggling right now when it comes—especially actors of color. They're struggling right now. So what should you do about that? Are you going to wait on Hollywood, or are you going to go take the opportunity that presents itself when they take them? I'm not saying take, you know, crazy shit, but just open up more and remember why you here and why you do this because those are the ones who go off into legendary status.

And always remember, too, it's like, have patience with this. I tell people all the time, like, in order to be Beyoncé now, you got to be Beyoncé then. So it's easy for you to look at where she's at now and want to mimic that shit—

Paola Mardo: Right.

James Swoope: Forgetting that she was also in a group, she was also coached by her dad, she was also on Star Search. Like, all these things happened before she was Cowboy Carter.

Have some patience. Do the work. Enjoy this shit. And, like, that's my advice. Don't forget where you came from. Don't forget why you started this.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. I love that. I think it's perfect advice and just a perfect way to end our conversation and your first, hopefully not the last, appearance on In Proximity. Thanks for being here today, Swoope.

James Swoope: For sure. And can I shout out some people directly?

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

James Swoope: I'm truly, truly, truly proud of my city, Cleveland, Ohio. You know, we have an amazing young Black mayor, and I feel like he's helping turn the city around. I love what our filmmakers in the city is doing. You know, shout-out to Jillian Holt. You know, that's—you know, that's my producing partner and my heart and my homie. But I just, you know, love what they're doing in that space. I love what the music space is doing. I love what I'm From Cleveland is doing. Shout-out to John, you know, for being the heart of the culture, you know? And all the

DJs—I feel like we honestly have the best DJs in the world. I know New York probably side-eyeing me, but, like, I really truly believe that.

But just like, everybody just in the city, like, I, I just—you know, I do this stuff for you guys. I do this stuff for my family whose from Cleveland. But I just want you guys to know that, you know, the goal is to always give back and, and to take what I learned and figure out how to, you know, help the city more. And I love you guys. So I guess that's what I wanted to say.

Paola Mardo: I love that. Cue the music. Thank you, Swoope.

[LAUGHTER]

James Swoope: Thank you.

[34:35 - In Proximity Theme by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: In Proximity is a production of Proximity Media.

The show is hosted, directed, and produced by Paola Mardo.

Executive Producers are Ryan Coogler, Zinzi Coogler, and Sev Ohanian.

Theme Song and Additional Music by Ludwig Göransson.

Patrick Epino is our Co-Director and Director of Photography.

Ken Nana is our Sound Designer and Mix Engineer.

The production team includes Brittani Brown, Isabella Miller, and Alexandria Santana.

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