

In Proximity
Season 3 Episode 4
Warner Bailey
Final Transcript

Warner Bailey: They were like, "Did you see what was sent by Ari?" And I was like, oh, my god. Ari Emanuel, for those that don't know, probably one of, if not the most, powerful person in entertainment. He had screenshotted a meme that I made and sent it to the entire company. And he had sent the meme around and said, "Who did this?"

And I was like, my life's over! There's going to be hitmen coming out. I was in my house literally pacing around. I looked like a crazy person.

[00:18 - "KN 9 to 5" by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

[HUMMING]

Paola Mardo: [LOOKS UP FROM PHONE] Oh, hey. You're watching and listening to In Proximity. I'm Paola Mardo, and today I'm scrolling through my phone because we're talking Assistants vs. Agents.

[PHONE VIBRATES]

No, I said flat white with oat! With oat!

[PAOLA SIGHS]

Okay, I'm totally kidding. Assistants vs. Agents is an Instagram meme account that pokes fun at the wild world of Hollywood assistants. Being a Hollywood assistant can be glamorous, but it's also challenging and very tough. I know. I was once one myself.

And Warner Bailey has created an Instagram account that pokes fun at that world through memes and posts and all sorts of fun stuff. What started as an inside joke amongst Warner and his fellow assistants when they were working in the mailroom on the music side of WME, one of the big talent agencies, has now grown into an Instagram account of 140,000 followers and a brand and platform that includes a newsletter, merch, a job board, and even a podcast.

We hear a lot about the challenges of being a Hollywood assistant in news and the trades, but what AvA is doing is shining a light on some of the positive things and poking fun at the kind of crazy world of being an assistant in this industry while also building community. We get into all that and how Warner is building AvA into a business. Here's my conversation with Warner Bailey.

[VOICEOVER ENDS]

Paola Mardo: Warner Bailey, creator of Assistants vs. Agents, excited to be In Proximity with you. Thanks for coming to our studio here at Proximity.

Warner Bailey: Thanks so much for having me. It's an honor.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, very excited to talk to you about, you know, yourself and your journey from assistant to not necessarily agent.. what do you call yourself these days?

Warner Bailey: I don't know. A jack—I wouldn't say jack of all trades, but have my hands in a lot of things. Working on some content, educational ecosystem we're talking about, and actually, some tech as well. So a bunch of different areas, certainly an evolution from the assistant days.

Paola Mardo: Awesome. You're an entrepreneur, essentially.

Warner Bailey: That's—that could probably be the right word for it, yeah.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Yeah. Well, before we start, we did want to do a little bit of an icebreaker. We dug into your distant past—

Warner Bailey: Oh, boy. Here we go.

Paola Mardo:—from your assistant days, and we found someone to send you a surprise question—

Warner Bailey: Oh, my god.

Paola Mardo: —via Voice Memo. So you're going to have to basically guess who this person is and answer the question. You ready?

Warner Bailey: Yes. This is amazing.

Paola Mardo: Okay. Here we go.

[VOICE MEMO]

Kirk Sommer: Okay, Warner, my question is: What advice would you give every agent enabling them to be better mentors to their assistants?

[VOICE MEMO ENDS]

Warner Bailey: Wow, I love that. Was that—is it not Kirk?

Paola Mardo: It is Kirk.

Warner Bailey: It is? Wow.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. Can you—for those who don't know, can you say who he is?

Warner Bailey: Yeah, wow. Means a lot. They—we actually were just together a couple weeks ago when I was in New York—but Kirk was my third boss at WME. He's now Co-Head of the Music Department globally, and one—and certainly a mentor to me. So that means a lot. And I think the question was around what advice—I don't think I need to give Kirk any advice. I think the best mentors and bosses that I've had, and Kirk being probably number one, gave me a seat at the table and listened to my opinion and enabled me to be creative on the desk as well as—you know, after proving myself during, you know, my tenure as his assistant. But he empowered me, and I felt that—that was one of the first real times, you know, with an exec who really gave me a shot, and I felt seen and heard. So I don't know if there's advice within that, but definitely see value in the people under you and, you know, see them as the leaders of the next generation. That's how I see the people that work for me now.

But that means a lot. Kirk, truly a mentor, one of the nicest, kindest, most respected and powerful people in the industry. So that's amazing, though. Was not expecting that.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, we were excited to get that. And for those—for the listeners who are listening to this, because on-screen, I think we'll flash who this is, but it's Kirk Sommer, Co-head of Global Music at WME.

Warner Bailey: Cohead of Global Music at WME. And also, for the record, none of the memes are about him.

[LAUGHTER]

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Warner Bailey: He truly was a great boss. Love him. And, you know, we—we caught up in person a couple weeks ago in New York. So, wow, thanks for doing that.

Paola Mardo: Awesome. No, yeah. Thanks, Kirk. Shout out!

Warner Bailey: Yeah, shout out Kirk.

Paola Mardo: So, when you were his assistant, was he the—at his position right now, or was he an agent? Like, what was his role at WME, and what was your day-to-day like?

Warner Bailey: Yeah, so he was a—I believe a senior partner. At the time, Marc Geiger was leading the department of music globally. And, I mean, his roster is insane. You know, The Killers were one of his first, Adele. It's incredible to go on his roster and see the breadth of talent he has worked with for many years but also young, emerging talent.

Paola Mardo: That's awesome.

Warner Bailey: So day-to-day, on his, I was the second assistant, actually. So it was my third desk at WME. It's probably—at that point was the most—it was my goal to work for him from the beginning. I—there—

Paola Mardo: Can you say why?

Warner Bailey: I mean, he was—again, going back to that advice—was someone that really believed in and enabled their assistants, but the path from who were his prior assistants to where they are within the company—Michael Coughlin, another great agent who I was with in Nashville recently; Alex Bramwell, who was my first boss, who was one of the youngest agents at the company—were his assistants before. So you kind of see, looking, when you're in the mailroom, you're like, "Who are the—the agents that have had assistants go on to do great things at the company?" And he was probably, to me, one of the top, certainly there. So it was always a goal to work for him.

[5:59 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: I have to ask, I know you said the memes weren't based on your old boss or old bosses, but, like, assistant world is very—especially at an agency, I feel, there's crazy stories.

Warner Bailey: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Do you have any crazy stories?

Warner Bailey: Coming from an area where I had zero entertainment ties, I applied to a job at WME on a Thursday after graduating, got it on a Friday. Never been to L.A. They said, "You have to be out here by Monday to start."

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Warner Bailey: So it was like a whole new world for me. I—I think I maybe flew through L.A. once. So, as an assistant, there were certainly challenges of working 14, 16-hour days. The average assistant, still, in entertainment makes 45K. So I think, financially, it was really difficult to be in L.A., alone in a new city, not knowing a single person.

But going to work, you were surrounded by—at WME, it felt like you were in college again. You had 100 people on your floor who all were your age. You were integrated into a community of

people who had shared interests. So I think, at that point, I really felt like this is—the area, at least, the industry that I'd like to be in. I think I quickly figured out being an agent wasn't for me, but I did enjoy my time as an assistant.

Paola Mardo: That's amazing. It's not easy working for someone that closely and kind of learning their tastes and how they like things. And I don't know if your bosses were that particular, but, like, did that come naturally to you, or was there a bit of a learning curve?

Warner Bailey: There was certainly a learning curve because everything that you do at an agency is unlike anything you learn or are exposed to in—in school. But to enter into the mailroom, essentially—we called it Music Central—you had to memorize a stack of—I think it was 120 note cards. And it had all the agents' names on it. You had to memorize their four-digit extensions, all of their names, their assistant names—

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Warner Bailey:—the role they had. At that point, it kind of filtered out who really wanted to be there and who didn't. But the first day, actually, I remember, I got a call. Deep British accent, I had no idea who it was, literally, I think, within the first couple minutes. Repeated his name. I said, "Do you mind repeating your name for me again?" He did. I couldn't understand it. I was like, "Kirk, I don't know who's on the phone."

And he, very nicely, was like, "Yeah, who is it?" And it ended up being—I won't give it away, who it is by name, but the biggest client's manager. And that was kind of a wake-up call for me, like this is a different level at which things are operating. We laugh about it now, dropping probably the most important person the first five minutes.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Warner Bailey: But those things were—yeah, I mean, it was definitely a new world.

Paola Mardo: Your field is music. Did you always want to work in music?

Warner Bailey: I did, yeah. And I, I didn't really know what I wanted to do growing up. From Philadelphia, went to school in D.C., Georgetown, and played a sport, got hurt, and had some free time. So started wanting to get into some sort of creative field. I took one graphic design class, which probably is pretty helpful to making memes now.

Paola Mardo: Makes sense.

Warner Bailey: But I always wanted to figure out how I could work in the industry because I was a terrible musician. I think I took guitar lessons for a day. I liked bringing people together, so I started booking concerts and throwing events on campus and outside and saw the music industry as an outlet for my creativity. But also, I got that same sense of camaraderie, teamwork,

and, like, working towards an ultimate goal, putting on an event that felt pretty similar to the athletic world.

[9:23 - "In Proximity '90s" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: The memes are oddly—even as someone who isn't an assistant anymore, I see it, and I'm like, "Why—why is this relatable right now?"

Warner Bailey: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Actually, shout out, Hannah Baker, my colleague, who actually turned me on to your Instagram account a couple years ago. I think the meme I saw was—it's a girl sitting in front of a computer, and it's—the caption says—I have it written down. I should show it to you, too. "Ever since I was a little girl, I knew I wanted to be a rockstar with thick skin able to work in a fast-paced environment." I mean—

Warner Bailey: Take that off your LinkedIn post, please. If you're promoting a job, and you have "rockstar," "thick skin," "fast-paced environment," toxic!

Paola Mardo: Toxic, toxic, toxic.

Warner Bailey: Toxic. But, yeah, just, like, it's—it is funny the people that will reach out now that, knowing it's me, screenshot and text it. Kirk does, too, which is amazing.

Paola Mardo: Love that.

Warner Bailey: He's like, "Nice post." I'm like, "Oh, god, what have I posted?"

Paola Mardo: So I wanted to ask: why is it called Assistants vs. Agents?

Warner Bailey: Yeah. So there is still an account out there called Agents vs. Promoter, and a couple of us got together pretty early on and just created a—the account was purely a meme account at that point. Still—you know, we definitely still post memes, but there were 10 people following it. So I never thought it would go beyond that. There were probably four of us that sat down and had the idea to do something—

Paola Mardo: And you guys were all agents' assistants?

Warner Bailey: Yeah, yeah, and we had just started. You know, and this is before my time with Kirk. This was probably a couple weeks in. We were all sitting near each other, and Ben, Lauren, Eunice, and a couple others, Tim, we just kind of had an idea to put it together just for fun and share some funny content. So the name is an ode to that current Instagram account, as well, which is very funny. Go check it out.

Paola Mardo: It's Agents vs. Promoter?

Warner Bailey: Agents vs. Promoter, yeah.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Warner Bailey: So it's very much geared towards the music side of the industry. And ours was, of course, at that point, and still is, an ode to being an assistant in Hollywood.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. I love that it's, it's called Assistants vs. Agents, but it does—it can apply to really any, like, executive or boss within the industry whether it's film, TV, or even music. But why the "vs." though? Like, what's up with that?

Warner Bailey: Yeah. I mean, I think, initially, it really was just purely based on that account. But looking back now, I think when you start at the bottom rung at a place like that, there's always tension between—whether you're on a sports team, coach/players; whether you're in whatever industry, you can relate to being in a corporate environment or others, you know, even in the world. You know, there is that level of tension between people who are leaders and others who are at the beginning. I think the "vs." also is an ode to the unique things that assistants deal with versus the things that agents are dealing with.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, totally. And, and for those who don't know, because now Assistants vs. Agents is more than an Instagram account, more than a meme account, how do you describe it to people you're just meeting for the first time and explaining it to them?

Warner Bailey: Yeah. So about—I was anonymous behind the account for—for years. There was an article or two that came out probably two years ago. And at that point, it was at a crossroads because I had a full-time job. I went to Live Nation during the pandemic, was at a couple tech companies, left. I ran a festival in Phoenix for a couple years and then launched my own company running music festivals and producing them around the country.

And at that point, when it came out, I still very much had a career that I was—thought that that was it. You know, I was going to be in music festivals. But that allowed me, when my name got tied to it, to sit there and say, "What leverage do I have to do some good to the industry and also provide resources and empower that next generation.

So sat down, put together a business plan. Started writing a newsletter, and that was purely just a way to get emails. Now that's a very core part of our business, and to this point, we have a newsletter, we have a job board we just launched, we have panel series and events around the country. We just did a 600-person panel in New York that was amazing to get in front of, a lot of assistants, interns, and those wanting to break into the industry.

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Warner Bailey: We've done events in L.A., Nashville. We have Chicago, Boston. We have Philadelphia, going back home.

Paola Mardo: Incredible.

Warner Bailey: And a bunch of other cities coming up the next couple months.

Paola Mardo: Do you have a podcast? Do you have a podcast, as well?

Warner Bailey: Yeah, podcast just launched. Excited about that. Getting to interview people that really—you know, I admire. We have a large community. We have leverage. We have access to these companies, these individuals. What can I do to help you succeed in ways that others have—weren't able to?

The other side is the media side. So that's just because now, I'm not a content-first person, I really was building this from more of a business sense in—on the event side, we're building out IP and storytelling that will be short-form, long-form, and have a bunch of stuff in production—or, in ideation, as well, as well as the podcast that just came out.

The layer below that is a tech piece. So we're working on some pieces of tech to solve for some of those issues that hopefully will empower the next generation to be able to be creative on their desks, I'll say. I'll say that much.

Paola Mardo: Ooh, very exciting!

Warner Bailey: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Oh, my gosh! From this meme page to, like, a full-on business. What is the business model? Can you talk that through? I mean, it sounds like it's different streams of events. Is there subscription? Is there—there is merch! I've seen some merch.

Warner Bailey: Yeah, merch. Yeah, yeah.

Paola Mardo: You guys have some good merch, actually.

Warner Bailey: I got to send you some.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Warner Bailey: I should've worn some today.

Paola Mardo: Please do.

Warner Bailey: Yeah, of course.

Paola Mardo: Please do.

Warner Bailey: My aim is to diversify the revenue streams from the beginning. But also the core of it is it's hard to create a B to C model that charges a consumer, our community, that's making that 45,000 when they're entering the industry. So anytime that I can create a B to B model and a lot of what we've done is that, I'll—I'll emphasize it and really focus on it.

So these events, brand partnerships, the core of it is: how can we always go back to trying to avoid charging a fee to the people who, you know, are just entering. Because they—you know, disposable income is not at a premium, as you well know, when you're just starting out. So the—big focus on that.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, that's great. I mean, it blows my mind that the average salary is 45,000 because I was probably making around that, a little bit less, when I first started out, too. So it's like, nothing's changed. Has anything changed?

Warner Bailey: Yeah. I mean, definitely. I think things have changed. But again, I had a great experience as an assistant. I know others still don't, and they deal with some crazy Hollywood things that everyone does. But at the same time, there's a lot more opportunity to go out and start your own company, to be a creator, to start a podcast, to write a newsletter. There's tools at disposal for young creatives and people breaking into the industry that, you know, if they have the self-started mentality and—and can take a risk, it can often be very rewarding.

So I think the thing that's changed the most is that you don't necessarily have to go into a mailroom to be successful in the industry. Although that's what I did, and I value it immensely, there's many ways to break into the industry now, I think, that were—that didn't exist in years past.

Paola Mardo: So you built this business, and it—you're an entrepreneur. And you just said that new folks coming to the industry—entertainment industry today, there's so many different kinds of paths they can take. The assistant route is no longer the only way or the main way. But you also run this—your business on this whole idea of Assistants vs. Agents. So would you still recommend the assistant path for people starting out now? Or has your opinion sort of changed?

Warner Bailey: Looking back on my career, and I wrote about this the other day, if I were to start a career now, the most important thing you can do is focus on the room you're in versus the title you have. I think so many people worry about the titles early on. You know, is it—am I an assistant or a coordinator, an intern? If you admire someone in the industry, find a way to go work for them, work closely to them. You will be able to jumpstart your career a lot faster than going to chase a flashy title at a bigger company.

But yeah, I think being an assistant was incredible because I got to sit on calls with artists that I've admired and listened to since I was young. I got a chance to look through Kirk's and others', you know, like, contracts and understand deeply: what are the behind-the-scenes aspects that make the industry run? Things that I certainly wouldn't have—you know, if I went and chased a title.

Paola Mardo: I think that's a really great piece of advice. It's interesting. I did not know about the agency route at all. It really wasn't until much later that I was like, oh, that's a way in. I was just, like, thinking about movie studios or, like, how do I get my foot in the door into there? But even looking back now, though, even though I—I had my fair share of interesting assistant stories and challenges, I did get really good training.

Warner Bailey: Yeah. I mean, I didn't know about agencies even when I was booking shows. I booked probably 50 shows in college, and I applied to a job at CAA and didn't get in. And WME, I just was like, oh, you know, must be the same. I really, at that point, had no grasp of even the difference, really, of what an agent did versus others. I knew I wanted to be in music.

So, yeah, it was just, I want to go. I know they have a great training program at these agencies. But yeah, I felt, once I left there, I was like, there's nothing else you could throw at me that I haven't dealt with before.

Paola Mardo: Exactly.

Warner Bailey: Or at least know how to now deal with.

Paola Mardo: So you, you were just talking about a survey you guys did, right?

Warner Bailey: Mm-hmm.

Paola Mardo: And I remember hearing about this earlier this year. You surveyed how many people?

Warner Bailey: For the—for the data? For the—

Paola Mardo: Mm-hmm.

Warner Bailey: I think we did over 4,000.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. What did you find out about being an assistant today? Like, what were some of the trends? There's the 45,000 salary. What else were, like, some of the highlights?

Warner Bailey: Yeah, well, we did a recent one asking, "Do you feel overpaid, underpaid, or fairly paid?" And 89 percent said underpaid, which wasn't surprising. Ninety-one percent said if they went into their boss's office today, they wouldn't get a raise. And that was something we did

more aligned with a different show that I was on. I think a lot of what we find is that sometimes people, especially from the outside looking in, feel that there is no roadmap to enter into entertainment. And that's what I'm also trying to solve for on our team, and is providing those resources, so whether it be—we just started a new series called Rolling Calls, where we're going to bring in recruiters and allow college students to tune in virtually and submit their questions. "What are the things you look for on a resume? Does a resume even matter? Is it a portfolio? Or—

Paola Mardo: Wow. That would've been helpful when I was starting out. Yeah.

Warner Bailey: Yeah. And so—but those were ideas that we're getting from our community because just listening to them, "What are the things that you want?" A lot of them are, "I want to understand how to even get an interview." The job market is really difficult. We started a series called Funemployed where we bring together—I think we had 500 people in L.A. that were all looking for jobs. And—and we brought them together.

And I didn't even go. I was like, "You guys have a space to now connect with each other, ask each other questions, you know, hear from each other, maybe feel like you're not alone, and hopefully start a business." Like, that's the goal, is from those events we're going to bring to other cities, bring people together that are looking for work, that maybe they have two ideas, there's a producer and a writer, onscreen talent, and a podcast producer, and maybe come up with some fun ideas.

So the things that we've really found are the job market is—is very difficult right now. We launched a job board that hopefully will help bring more opportunities, but there's also no roadmap.

[20:17 - "In Proximity '90s" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: You have an assistant now, right?

Warner Bailey: Yeah. I mean, we have people working for us.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Warner Bailey: I wouldn't classify—it's funny. I've been really holding back, like, hiring an actual assistant because I feel like, I don't know, it would be kind of—we have people working at various levels. But certainly very young, talented, smart individuals have joined the team that I'm thrilled to have.

Paola Mardo: So do you roll your own calls, or does someone else do it for you?

Warner Bailey: I roll my own calls, yeah.

Paola Mardo: Okay!

Warner Bailey: I answer my own emails.

Paola Mardo: You do your own scheduling?

Warner Bailey: I do my own scheduling, yeah. Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Wow, okay.

Warner Bailey: I really—it's funny because being—like, it's not a control thing. It really isn't, but I feel like there's so much better use of people's time. There's enough apps out there and pieces of tech—some we're developing, can't get too deep into it—but that anyone I want to hire is going to have a seat at the table, a voice, and I don't want them wasting their time with the admin stuff.

So, yeah, it's—some of it's tough. Like, I've missed meetings because I've mis-scheduled, which is funny looking back. But anyone that I bring on the team, I want to empower them in a way that, you know, I wish I was in some roles early on. So, no, I answer all my—I still answer all the DMs in the account, too, which, like—

Paola Mardo: That's amazing.

Warner Bailey: My wife is going to kill me at some point. She's extremely patient. We've been married a year.

Paola Mardo: Wow.

Warner Bailey: I'll be in—I'll be in bed at 11:30 just, like, going through and just answering people, like, because I feel like—I feel so connected to it. And it's hard to give things up at that point. And it's not—I've given a lot of stuff up to people that are smarter than me in certain areas, but I feel, like, so connected to some of that stuff where if I just had someone else do it, I would kind of lose that—

Paola Mardo: So are you still the only person posting on the account, or do you have—

Warner Bailey: No. So we have—one other has access, Jaylen, shout out. He—he has access to the account.

Paola Mardo: Shout out. And you have designers? Like, you have people making the content?

Warner Bailey: I'm still in Canva doing a lot of stuff, too. Seriously, and I do all the memes, besides Jaylen and a couple others. But, yeah, I—like, on the way here, I had an idea for a meme, and I have an app on my phone. I pulled over. It's probably—

Paola Mardo: That's why you were late to this meeting!

Warner Bailey: That's why I was late, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Paola Mardo: No, I'm totally kidding.

Warner Bailey: And pulled over and made it.

Paola Mardo: Dope. That's dope.

Warner Bailey: And I think inspiration strikes wherever. You know, it's on the 101 in 100-degree heat with the top down. Jeep. I should've put it up. But, yeah, so I am still doing the "grunt work" call it, but it's fun for me, like, being so connected to it. And it's been a passion that I'm full-time on now.

Paola Mardo: That's awesome.

Warner Bailey: I never thought I'd be. So.

Paola Mardo: That's really cool. How do you—I guess, it doesn't sound like it's harder now that you're a boss to run this thing because now—do you have more empathy for the agent side, the boss side?

Warner Bailey: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I mean, 100 percent. And, like, yes, in apps, it's hard to lead people, especially now in an environment where everything's virtual or a lot of things are. I struggle with that because I built in a silo for, like I said earlier, for five years where I was doing actually everything at that point, and also I still had a full-time job that didn't know I was doing it. I was running music festivals that didn't really know I was doing a lot of this other stuff.

So I think, when you go full-time on something, and you're so connected to the work, especially business owners, everything is on the line there. I don't have a security blanket here. There's no other option for me and path besides doing what I'm doing, which excites me. But also, when I go and hire people, you got to make sure that they have the same level of passion and drive as you do.

And, you know, I'll give another shout-out here, Dominic. He cold-applied to a job we didn't even have open, wrote me a business plan and said, "Here are the things I think you should be doing."

Paola Mardo: Nice.

Warner Bailey: Hired him on the spot. And that was—and the initiative taken there was unbelievable. But it is also—he's done amazing things for us, but the empathy part—it's hard to

manage people because I think when you're moving a million miles an hour, to sit down and say, "It is really important to train people, take hours out of the day," often—I'm guilty of it, too. It's really hard.

Paola Mardo: You're answering DMs and—

Warner Bailey: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. No.

Paola Mardo: Rolling your own calls, and then you have to train people, too.

Warner Bailey: Yeah. So, yeah, I totally have empathy for that side of it.

Paola Mardo: Is there, like, a hard lesson you've learned now that you are a boss about managing people?

Warner Bailey: Yeah. I think find people early on that really believe in the mission of what you're trying to do, and delegate as much as you can. It is worth spending time upfront to train people to give them the opportunity. And it will free up your time later on when you're trying to now grow the business. So I think a lot of it, I still wanted to hold onto doing certain things not, like—again, not a—it was just by habit. So I think really taking the time early on to sit down and say, "Hey, let's take a whole day, whatever you need, five days, to train you and integrate," because oftentimes, you forget that they don't know what they don't—what they don't know.

So I think that is a big thing that I've learned the hard way it's just not—just things are moving so quickly, and we have our hands in a million things—is slow down. Just take a breath and just—and give them the training that they deserve, or at least the knowledge.

Paola Mardo: How big is your company right now?

Warner Bailey: We have about seven, like, to ten. We have some people working—so when we have a big project, we'll bring on contractors for some of these events. We'll bring on a lot more people. But we are developing our content arm of the business, which I'm really excited about, taking some of this IP that's existed, crazy assistant stories and others—

Paola Mardo: Love it.

Warner Bailey:—into short-form, long-form, potentially some editorial things that we're working on, too. So we'll grow the team a lot out in the next couple months.

Paola Mardo: Cool. But you're about seven to ten full-time-ish?

Warner Bailey: Yeah. Like, yeah, very specialized, though.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Warner Bailey: So people, like, on the newsletter side and growth side and tech.

Paola Mardo: Gotcha.

Warner Bailey: So they exist in certain areas. But I've only been full-time on this for six months. So—

Paola Mardo: Right.

Warner Bailey: Yeah, and it's—it's—we're at a stage now where we're—we will—we're moving quickly to grow the company, I'll say.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, because six months ago, you were still working your festival job.

Warner Bailey: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: And producing festivals and doing this "on the side," or just as a second job. And now you're doing it—

Warner Bailey: Yeah. Yeah, so Coachella was our last—I worked on the—the day events for Goldenvoice called GB Surf Clubs. It was at the surf club out in Palm Springs. That was my farewell festival. It's very bittersweet because it's something I've wanted to do since I was, you know, just entering the industry, is working festivals. But, yes, so full time and just getting my—you know, just having an understanding that, and appreciation for, the challenges ahead.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Warner Bailey: Which I think are exciting, and just growing the company, you know, being full-time.

Paola Mardo: Amazing. Wait, when they DM you, are these people asking for advice?

Warner Bailey: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Or commenting on the posts? Or, like, what's—

Warner Bailey: Yeah. I mean, everything, some people just sharing stories and some, we can post. Some, we can't. Submitting things, some just saying, "Hey, thanks so much for posting this. You know, I really feel like I'm not alone in this. Some saying, "Hey, come to Brazil and throw something!" I'm like, "Okay, buy me a plane ticket. I'll go to Brazil."

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah, I mean, all types of different, different things come in, and a lot of it, you know, people wanting to come work for us or pitch us ideas or do certain things. But I just have such an appreciation that people engage with the account. And it, it really—it's very interesting because I have existed as this, like—almost like an internet, like, meme personality, which isn't really what I'm like in person. Like, I'm not—I think people are kind of surprised, to be honest, when they find out I'm the one behind Assistants vs. Agents, which has been interesting to navigate.

But I think just connecting with the community, especially at that panel and others, where you can just talk to people that are struggling in their jobs, just getting an—saying, "Thanks so much for doing," whatever it may be, "bringing us together" or putting—you know, allowing—it was amazing the panelists that have joined us and the interviewees to share their own stories. So I just feel very lucky to be in the situation of having a community that is, you know, I think, has been undervalued for so long that feels empowered now through whatever we're doing by accident or on purpose. And it—it just keeps me going and wanting to build more.

Paola Mardo: Do you feel, like, a lot of responsibility, though?

Warner Bailey: Yeah, 100 percent. I mean, I—one, because I could post something on that account that could turn the entire community against me, not in a way—you know, maybe smaller because so much of it is built off of authenticity, and I'm not doing this for any money thing. I really feel so driven by everything we're doing. And there will be a lot of projects that stem out of this and people that we end up working with and collaborate with that we're talking to now. But making sure that every person we bring in or work with, whether it be in the podcast or a scripted show or, you know, panelists, like, they understand the mission of what I am and we are trying to do. So I feel immense responsibility.

And also, this is my life now. Like, it's my—you know, I put everything that I've had into this one singular project which is now existing as many. So I feel a deep responsibility to the community that has allowed it to be my full-time job, in a way, for sure.

Paola Mardo: Yeah, yeah. Are there, I guess, in the DMs or the stories you get, are there any that have stuck with you?

Warner Bailey: I mean, we've probably gotten 1,000 plus. What I will say is we're taking those stories and doing things with them in IP, which I'm really excited about.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

[LAUGHTER]

Warner Bailey: But there's crazy stuff. It's like trying to convince their boss to, like, land a plane—or their boss trying to convince them to, like, get clearance to land a plane at NASA or, like—but I will—I always use this example of: it's the juxtaposition between sorting M&M'S for Marshawn Lynch one by one to trying to get your boss's cousin a visa. Sorted it five seconds

later to go running, you know, 20—20 miles away to go pick up some very niche, like, skincare product that you must have back within 20 minutes. So it's just the craziness of the selection of stories back to back and the range of them.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Warner Bailey: Some of them are very serious, and I—I, again, never have posted anything calling anyone out by name because there's enough accounts out there, won't name them, that call people out, can get themselves in trouble, and just, people—that's—it's a toxic side of the industry.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Warner Bailey: I'm trying to provide some laughter, I guess, but also group therapy, in a way. And I always kind of say that but often—

Paola Mardo: Community, community.

Warner Bailey: Community is the core of it, exactly, and, and relatability, to feel like I'm not alone in dealing with this absolutely insane task that I got asked at 4:55 on a Friday. Maybe there's other people that have done it before. Maybe they can help me out, too.

[30:12 - "Good Times" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: Can you share the Ari Emanuel story real quick?

Warner Bailey: Yeah. So probably a couple years ago, we—I wake up to no less than 100 texts and missed calls. I thought something, like, crazy happened because it was people I used to work with, a lot of people from WME and others. And—

Paola Mardo: Where were you working at the time?

Warner Bailey: I think I was at Live Nation or maybe off on my own.

Paola Mardo: Okay.

Warner Bailey: I think it was, like, during the pandemic. So I was off working at a couple tech companies. And they were like, "Did you see what was sent by Ari?" And I was like, oh, my god. Ari Emanuel, for those that don't know, probably one of, if not the most, powerful person in entertainment. He was head of Endeavor and WME when I was there.

He had screenshotted a meme that I made and sent it to the entire company. And obviously, at that point, no one really knew it was me besides the 100 people in our circle that quickly found out, I think, through that. And he had sent the meme around and said, "Who did this?"

And I was like, my life's over! There's going to be hitmen coming out. I was in my house, and I was, like, literally pacing around. I looked like a crazy person, and I felt like a crazy person. And I was like, I don't know what to do.

And then he sent another email that was like, "I loved it. I wish you'd used"—and he'd made a joke about what the exact meme was. It was in relation to CAA, and something, a practical joke he had actually pulled when he was younger in his career. So I was like, damn, if, like—I had Kirk knowing that this account existed but now, like, also, at that point, you know, someone like Ari Emanuel knowing, so I was like, there's a lot of eyeballs on it. I kind of—you have to toe the line a little bit.

But no, that was—it was scary at the moment, for sure. It was crazy! I mean, I was like, why is the most powerful person, you know, that I've interacted with sharing something? But thankfully, he found some humor in it.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Warner Bailey: Yeah, and—

Paola Mardo: I like how he sent the follow-up, "I loved it."

Warner Bailey: Yes. Thank god. If I didn't get that, I would still be pacing around. I'd probably be moved out of the country at that point. But it was funny.

And, like, I tell that story, and I still have screenshots. I haven't posted the screenshot on the account. I've thought about it a couple times, but it is saved to my background.

Paola Mardo: Yeah.

Warner Bailey: I always click on it and laugh. Like, that is just crazy.

Paola Mardo: Yeah. You should frame it.

Warner Bailey: I will. I should—I know. I should've framed it.

[32:10 - "In Proximity '90s" by Ludwig Göransson]

Paola Mardo: So we've come to our segment where you are going to show something that illustrates a little bit of your process. And you brought a physical object—

Warner Bailey: I did.

Paola Mardo:—which is very cool. And I will bring it out right now. And, yeah, I'm just going to hand it to you. And why don't you tell us all about it.

Warner Bailey: Yeah. This is—

Paola Mardo: And please describe it for people who are listening to the show.

Warner Bailey: It's an old-school manila envelope. Has two meanings for me. The first, very personal one that I've actually never shared before, but my grandfather is still alive, in his 90s and not retired, will send me one of these every month. And inside of it will have news clippings of things that he had read that week or month that he thought would be valuable to me. So very specific stuff like music industry or even the creator economy or just business advice.

Paola Mardo: Do you have stuff in there that you want to pull out?

Warner Bailey: I don't know if there's, like—I don't necessarily know if there's, like, things that—because I haven't read them. But, but he—but I can show you how this—

Paola Mardo: Oh, this is from your grandpa.

Warner Bailey: This is—yeah.

Paola Mardo: Oh, my gosh.

Warner Bailey: This is from—so, like, there's, there's actually clips in here.

Paola Mardo: Wow!

Warner Bailey: And I don't want to give anyone any free press, but, yeah, there's clips in here where he'll—I'll just have to go home and read these. Yeah, this one here, "He brought the music of the world to the masses," and just a story about a guy who just passed. But, like, he—he—my grandpa has nothing to do with entertainment. He—he's very much in, like, an advertising business. So it's just—it's fascinating for me to open up and learn about things that he had sent and read.

That same style manila, manila envelope was something that we used as WME assistants, and they still do, I'm sure, all assistants where this is probably pretty triggering to look at if you're an assistant out there. But where you'd put a contract in there or something very—a lot—high importance in these things. You'd write the agent's initials on it. The mailroom would come around with their carts and bring it over.

For us, we tried to have a little fun with the system early on in our assistant days. So we would actually print out memes, and we would stuff them into the manila envelopes, knowing very well

that the assistant is the first line of defense to a boss, always, on anything, on a call, on a physical piece of contract or manila envelope.

Paola Mardo: So they would be the one to actually—they open the mail.

Warner Bailey: Yeah. Exactly.

Paola Mardo: Or, at least, this is interoffice mail, right?

Warner Bailey: Interoffice, yeah. But we—

Paola Mardo: I'm actually now remembering we had that at the studio. Yeah.

Warner Bailey: Is this—is probably pretty triggering, as well, to you. But I haven't held this in a while. But it was just kind of a game we had early on where we would then pull it out. There was like five of us. That was the origin story of how Assistants vs. Agents came to be as an Instagram account. So we—after doing this for a couple weeks, we were like, "Let's just make an account out of this."

And, as I told earlier, when it got to like 20 followers, I was like, I actually may lose my job if someone finds out, let alone like 50. And then I started seeing people from like CAA and UTA or ICM, at that point. And as silly as it sounds because it really was just making memes, it still is, like, these things represent a big moment in my life where just taking initiative in something that I was really passionate about and just having fun with it, too, and finding ways to just enjoy the craziness of what being an assistant is or working in Hollywood.

[35:12 - "Prox Recs Theme" with Ludwig Göransson and Ken Nana]

Paola Mardo: So we've come to the fun part.

Warner Bailey: This is always—this is—the whole thing has been fun.

Paola Mardo: The whole thing's fun. Great. Awesome. Love that. We've done our job, In Proximity. Where we ask our guests to recommend something to our listeners and now viewers. Usually, it's something to do with what, you know, you do as an entrepreneur, meme-master, however you want to call it. We don't have to say that if you don't want to.

Warner Bailey: No, I love meme-master. Are you kidding me? I've been, like, blushing over here.

Paola Mardo: Okay, cool. So, yeah, do you have a recommendation, a Prox Rec?

Warner Bailey: Yeah. I mean—and I've thought a lot about this one. I think there's—you know, on the surface, my recommendation or piece of advice to anyone earlier in their career, and I've

gotten a chance to listen to a lot, is don't wait for permission. If you are creative and you have this energy of wanting to create something to put out in the world that's never been there before, do it! And stop waiting for a reason why you can.

I think so much of my early career was spent just convincing myself on reasons why what I wanted to do would fail or that others would look at me and judge me for it. And looking back now, you know, there were—probably I got a late start into what I'm doing now, but I think those lessons of just going out and trying things, not waiting for permission from everyone else is probably the biggest piece of advice that I have for others.

In terms of a rec, been loving Emma Grede's podcast. I also love this podcast. I've told you a couple times, a couple references early on before this of ones that I love. But there's just so much content out there, and just go and listen to things that aren't in your industry. Go and expose yourself to other industries, other people, other voices or opinions than yourself.

But I think just going out, and the last piece I would say is just meeting people face-to-face. Like, we've talked over email. We've chatted before, and it's been amazing, but this time, getting a chance just to meet face-to-face is so valuable in a time spent so—with so much of your energy and time behind a phone. So those would be—I know you asked for one. I gave you three.

Paola Mardo: It's great. We'll take them all!

Warner Bailey: Yeah.

Paola Mardo: Thank you. Thank you, Warner. It was great to chat with you and be In Proximity and, yeah, excited to see what you do next with Assistants vs. Agents.

Warner Bailey: Appreciate you having me on.

[37:28 - "In Proximity Theme" by Ludwig Göransson]

[VOICEOVER]

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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[VOICEOVER ENDS]