

Join Julie Livingston, founder and president of WantLeverage Communications and host of PR Patter, a series of talks focusing on relevant topics in marketing and public relations today, in conversation with Judy Kalvin, president of Kalvin Public Relations, an agency that specializes in working with the creative services industry, working with the B2B services industry, creative agencies, advertising agencies, branding agencies, design agencies and more.

Livingston and Kalvin discuss how to create stickiness with media via telling a compelling, engaging, and lasting founders' story, the impact of humanizing your founder and brand and making them seem human, and building relationships with journalists to help keep your brand alive.

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"It's very difficult for a couple of agencies to differentiate who they are. They all say, 'we're creative and we're strategic.' And I'm like, well, that doesn't set you apart. But there are cases where they have some very interesting founder stories, and when it comes down to it, it's all about people. People buy from people, right? You need to get to the human side of your story in order to make it resonate, in order to make it interesting, in order to stand apart."

"If you can explain and give them examples of how it's worked for other agencies and other companies, and depending upon what type of company it is, you have to convince them that it's human. We want to find the human side that. You may not be the person in the room selling to that particular client, but you want those people who are selling for you to have that story to take."

"You have to constantly keep that story alive. So that they understand it and they are part of the legacy and understand the importance of it as well."

"I appreciate the time that journalists give me, and journalists these days have so little time that you have to be able to get to them quickly. You have to know exactly what they're looking for."

—Judy Kalvin

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### **Unedited Transcript:**

Julie Livingston:

Good morning everyone. Happy Wednesday. I'm Julie Livingston with Want Leverage Communications, and I'm here for another installment of Julie's PR pattern, a series of conversations where I talk to people in my network about marketing and public relations. So sometimes you just get lucky in life, and that's kind of how I feel about today's guest. We originally met through New York Women in Communications, an organization we were active in

for more than 20 years as volunteer leaders. And every year we'd work on the annual matrix awards, which is an amazing event for outstanding women in the communications and entertainment industries. She's one of my go-to people with whom I can share PR issues, resources, and brainstorm. And I'm just delighted to welcome Judy Calvin, president of Calvin Public Relations, an agency that specializes in working with in the creative services industry. She'll tell you about that in a moment. Placing their stories in key media outlets and amplifying their reach and their messaging. So, Judy, welcome. It is so great to see you on a Wednesday morning,

Judy Calvin:

<Laugh>. Thanks, Julie. It's so great to be here. It's great to be here. And thank you for that wonderful introduction. I don't know if I could add much to that <laugh>,

Julie Livingston:

I told you I didn't need to do much research for it. <Laugh>. Yes. We know each other so well and for so long. So why don't you tell us a little bit about what you do and what your specialty area is.

Judy Calvin:

Sure, sure. Be happy to. Yes. yes. I've been in the public relations industry for, as Julie said, probably more years than I really want to admit <laugh>. And I founded my agency Calvin PR about 20 years ago, actually. And I found this niche that I love and it's basically the B2B services industry, creative agencies, advertising agencies, branding agencies, design agencies folks who need to reach people you know, on the corporate side. So what I do is I help them get massive media coverage, which can help them stand apart and make them the agency of choice for big brands like Hershey's and Nestle's and all of the big CPG type of companies and, and big professional services companies that need their services. And it's very hard for them to stand out cuz there's thousands of agencies in this in this niche. So what I do is, is really help them find what sets them apart and, and promote what they do because what the, you know, many of them do wonderful, wonderful things,

Julie Livingston:

Right? And to really promote their competitive advantage. I mean, there are so many, there's so many resources for agencies to go to, you know, advertising agencies, brands to go to, you know, how do, how do you pick, which leads us to today's topic about leveraging your founder's story to get media coverage and to differentiate your brand. So I know you've done a lot of this work and I've always been impressed by the, the amazing media coverage you've gotten for clients by telling their founders story. Tell us a little bit about your experience and then I'd like to know, I'd like to talk about, you know, what happens if your founder on the out on the outside doesn't seem to have such a compelling story? How do we create that as, as publicists? I mean, we're not magicians, but how do we kind of cultivate something that's gonna have that stickiness with the media mm-hmm.

Judy Calvin:

<Affirmative>. Well, exactly. And you, and you said the word stickiness is, is important. I mean, it's very difficult for a couple of agencies to really, you know, differentiate who they are. They all say, oh, we're creative and we're strategic. And I'm like, well, that doesn't set you apart. But there are cases where they have some very interesting founder stories, and when it comes down to it, it's all about people. People buy from people, right? That's right. So you need to get to the human side of your story in order to make it resonate, in order to make it interesting, in order to stand apart. So there are cases where I've worked with agencies that have fabulous founder stories. I work with one agency, chase Design group, and their founder Margot Chase was a, an unbelievable visionary. She was, she was a typographic genius. She had this very interesting way of setting herself apart, and she was the visionary to start this firm back in 1986. And everything about her was baked into her agency. But that

Julie Livingston:

So that sense, that sense of adventure and innovation and, you know and

Judy Calvin:

Craft, I mean, everything was very, it was very, very, I mean, she really, really set, set the, the agency apart. And then several years ago she tragically died an aviation accident. And the idea was, all right, now our founder is gone. What do we do? And the smart thing that they've done is they've baked her story into everything they do. Even new people who come into work for the agency are given a presentation of their founders story. That's great. And they see what sets them apart and they've been doing a brilliant job of it. And they are extremely successful with that.

Julie Livingston:

So it's really, I think that if you know, I do this for my clients as well, it's really distilling and really drilling down to those basic things, those, those differentiators that are unique to your organization.

Judy Calvin:

Exactly. Organization doesn't have to be the founder who has this cool story,

Julie Livingston:

Right? It could be the founder, it could be the company,

Judy Calvin:

It could be the company, it could be, I mean, you've got stories obviously. You know, the Sarah Blakely story with Spanx is a, is is a great example, right? She has the story of how, you know, she was frustrated so she, she cut off the bottoms of her, her pantyhose in order to like wear them on, you know, underneath her pants. And, you know, she's got, so she's, she's got this great story, but you also have stories of companies and how they got started and, and it, some of it is really, really compelling. I mean, you've got, you've got companies like, you know, and they use those stories, right? They use the story of like, everything is about how did you overcome a conflict, right? So like even in a story, you've got like even a company like Pampers,

right? So they started out, you know, being like the first of these, you know, these disposable diapers, right? They didn't have a founder, but what they did was they found the first people started using their products and went and interviewed them and started using them. And they're advertising. And so they put a human face on their story,

Julie Livingston:

Right? Right. And they real, and, and Right. And they, they amplified that story. And that's what you and I do is we get our, we get our clients' stories featured in the media and, and other places across digital platforms, et cetera. Right?

Judy Calvin:

Right, right.

Julie Livingston:

I I think it's really interesting about Chase design, how their founder is no longer with us and with them, and they're still, they're still drawing upon that, those differentiators to, you know, heighten and, and, and talk about their competitive advantage. That's really what's what sets them, what sets them apart from other design firms.

Judy Calvin:

Exactly. Exactly.

Julie Livingston:

So it's, it's some, these are characteristics that really have longevity mm-hmm. <Affirmative>, right? That, that really relate to everything they do. So anything that they put out, whether it's an email newsletter on behalf of their agency, or I don't know, a holiday card or something, or a presentation, or of course the work they do for their clients mm-hmm. <Affirmative> is going to have those core elements embedded into that. Into it. Exactly. So you're constantly seeing the repetition of that. Exactly. Those messages, the founder's story. Exactly.

Judy Calvin:

It's baked into everything that everything they do. And that's important.

Julie Livingston:

Some, I have found that some, some innovators or, you know, presidents of organization CEOs are a little uncomfortable about sharing their story, right? I'm sure you've had the same thing where they're, you know, well, I don't know if my story's so interesting or compelling or, you know, whatever. How do you, like, what are some of your techniques to kind of pull it out of them?

Judy Calvin:

<Laugh> torture, <laugh>,

Julie Livingston:

Torture works, <laugh>

Judy Kalvin:

You know, it's, if you relate it, if you sh if you can explain and give them examples of how it's worked for other, other agencies and other companies, and depending upon, you know, what type of, of company it is and you, you really have to just keep explaining and, and convincing that you know, that they're, that they're human, right? That we wanna find the human side that, again, reiterating over, no, I can't say this enough. People buy from people. They wanna buy you as a human, right? You may not be the person in the room selling to that particular client, right? But you want those people who are selling for you to have that story to take, right?

Julie Livingston:

People are gonna buy kind of what you stand, what you stand for. It's one of the things that I love about that radio show, how I built this with Guy Raz. I love hearing about those founders stories. And you know how people, you know, very often ordinary people who had no background in being inventors or innovators, you know, found an idea, came upon an idea and developed it into something kind of extraordinary. And how they, how they built upon it, how they solved a particular problem like the woman from Spanx and developed it into a product or service, right?

Judy Kalvin:

How the hell they overcame those challenges. Everybody loves those stories, right? Because it really gives you like this sense of like accomplishment. And the thing is, you, you bake that accomplishment into your company and people admire that and they look up to that, right? It's, it's, you can be selling the most mundane product, but if you have a story behind it, it's compelling and it, and it will inform everything you do.

Julie Livingston:

So once you have developed the founder's story, where, where can, can people place it? I mean, they can obviously, you know develop a pitch and send it to media outlets that matter to them in your, in your client's cases, you know, the advertising, branding, packaging, trades, right? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> sometimes it's consumer major consumer outlets as well that cover those industries those businesses specifically. But where else can people can companies and brands amplify their founder's story in a way that would underscore their brand values and positioning?

Judy Kalvin:

Well, and I think you do this brilliantly, is you've gotta really put that into, it's, it's your own content channels where, where this has to be, again, in the case of, of Margot Chase, they have a section on their website, which is, it was dedicated to her founder's story, right? And you could do it in your blog, you could do it on your LinkedIn, you could do it in your Instagram, you could do it, you know, on all of the channels where folks find you. I mean, those, those are your most valuable channels or your own content. So you need to be putting, you know, weaving that story into all of those channels as well.

Julie Livingston:

Yeah, I think that's really important. And you know what, it's, it sometimes can feel challenging to always keep that content fresh. You always have to look for kind of a new angle or a new way to kind of liven it up over time. But I think with all of the digital tools that we have at our fingertips these days, graphics, video audio, I mean, there are just so many ways that you can reinvigorate a, a founder's story and a branding message on those kinds of, you know, content platforms. And each one could be slight is, you know, can be their own, can be slightly, can be slightly different. Exactly. Right. Exactly. No, I think that, I think that's great. And with, with Marco's in Margo's case where she is not around anymore, you have her partners, people at the firm who can speak to her legacy. So that's something that you could use going forward, even, you know, even now I,

Judy Calvin:

I'm even pitching podcasts now to to talk about how they've kept her legacy alive and how it ha it, he has helped them distinguish themselves from other agencies.

Julie Livingston:

So Oh, that's great.

Judy Calvin:

Yeah. Yeah. And I'm getting a lot of good, really good traction with those kind of pitches.

Julie Livingston:

That's great. I mean, she had such an amazing story to tell and I think, you know, that that is a, a case where the brand is so strong and has such st staying power mm-hmm. <Affirmative> that even after the founder is gone, that it still is resonant. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And and I would imagine that the people who are running the company now is it, is it a spouse or is it somebody No, it's not. Wow.

Judy Calvin:

It was their, her, her, her business partner. Wow.

Julie Livingston:

Amazing. So they can really still speak to those characteristics that, that set them apart. Mm-Hmm.

Judy Calvin:

<Affirmative>. Exactly. And again, and I think what's very important too is cuz you think about it, you know, people come and go from, from, from companies and agencies, right? So you constantly have to like, remind people some of the people who have been working there the last 3, 4, 5 years never met her. They, they, they never were there when she was there. So you have to constantly keep that story alive for them as well, right? So that they understand it and they are part of, of this legacy and understand the importance of it as well.

Julie Livingston:

So, Judy, once you have crafted this story, you've developed what we call a media pitch, which is sort of like a little sales pitch. It's usually a paragraph or two that you might, that you send to a particular journalist that who covers the space. But how do you identify those individuals? I know a lot of people find this very confusing, <laugh>,

Judy Calvin:

<Laugh>. I mean, how do you identify the, the, the media, the

Julie Livingston:

Specific, the specific media outlets and journalists that you want to pitch your story to?

Judy Calvin:

Well, I mean, I think you could go a little bit out, you know, it, there is, like you said, there's the, there's your, your typical ones, right? That cover the industry all the time, right? But you can go and you could be a little bit, you know, you could look outside the box, so to speak. And look for small business, in my case, you know, the agencies I represent would be considered small businesses, right? So you can go to the inks and the entrepreneurs and the other, you know, online public and the fast companies, et cetera. And relate that to how, how it has energized a business. So you can look out to those, those and and identify the ripe reporters who, you know, who, who know who, who work and are sort of steeped in these industries and, and cover them, right? So they cover the small businesses or they cover people in creative in, you know, cre the creative space. Sure. Right? I,

Julie Livingston:

I find that it's also helpful to follow those journalists on social media and, you know, kind of like, and comment on their posts with real substantive commentary. Not like great post, but really is to show that you're really invested in what they're covering and what they're writing about mm-hmm. <Affirmative>. Cause that, that is like sort of an intro relation relationship building kind of a tool, right? And then eventually you could build up to, you know, a pitch. You know, I, I read your piece on always reference something that they, that they wrote. Make sure that what you're pitching really is in alignment with what they cover specifically, because otherwise, right. They're gonna, they'll, they'll discard it in a minute. They get journalists get overloaded with with pitches from outside sources. So you have to be really targeted and specific. But I think following them and being active on their social media platforms in a positive you know, constructive way I is, is really also a really powerful tool to get your brand in front of them.

Judy Calvin:

Yes. And, and to your point, sometimes I go the an extra step in between those, following them on social media and maybe liking and commenting, et cetera. Cause also sometimes they're looking for a source. And if I'm able to, to respond to that, I'm just

Julie Livingston:

Gonna say that I have from one of my clients, a management consulting firm. We one of, one of the people there was interviewed by a human resources publication on a particular topic. And a few months later, the reporter who was so delighted with this, what this person contributed to her piece called me again to see if she could interview her another time. And then most recently has been reaching out on a regular basis saying, Julie, do you know somebody who might be a good source for this other story I'm working for, working on, it's not related to what I interviewed for before, but it's on another HR topic. I need somebody specifically in this space and I'll share it with my PR networks. And ultimately we'll usually find her a great source. And so we've built this re trusting relationship over years. I know that you've done this a lot with reporters over the years. You know, you, they, they look to you as somebody who could really help them to source their stories.

Judy Calvin:

Well, it's like any other relationship, it go, it goes both ways, right? I always consider my relationships with journalists to be symbiotic, right? I mean, I look to them and obviously I'm pitching them for a reason. <Laugh>, I want, I want them to do my story, but I also like I've had cases where like they, a new reporter came on and I was trying to reach them and I couldn't. And I went to, I knew the editor and the editor like took my pitch and walked into his office and put it on his desk and say, listen to Judy. She understands <laugh>.

Julie Livingston:

That's great. Looking

Judy Calvin:

For her pitch, respond to it. And we've become extremely close, you know, friends and, and and colleagues ever since. Right? because yes, you have to respect, look, I started in journalism. I remember what it was like, so, you

Julie Livingston:

Know,

Judy Calvin:

By these like ridiculous, you know, like pitches that had nothing to do with what I was covering. And so I appreciate the time that journalists and the journalists these days have so little time that you have to be able to get to them quickly. You have to know what they're looking for. And one of the other things we do, which I'm sure you do as well, is when I'm reading their stories, even if it has nothing to do with my client, a lot of times I'll just send them an email and say, and, and, and say, you know what? That story you did was so interesting and, you know, I learned something about, you know, that something I didn't know before. And just to like give them, just to make them understand that I'm reading their stuff, that I'm,

Julie Livingston:

I think that's awesome. That's so awesome because, and you're not just kissing up, this is a sincere comment. Yeah. And f and sincere feedback. And, and, and again, that's how you

continue to develop that trust and position yourself as a go-to source for sure.

Judy Calvin:

Exactly. And they know when they reach out to me that even if it's not, like you said, even if it's not one of, I don't have a client that that can help them, I will do my best to help find them the source. Oh,

Julie Livingston:

Absolutely. Absolutely. Right. Absolutely. That's the best, that's the best way I think to, to really develop a longer term relationship with a journalist for sure.

Judy Calvin:

Exactly. Exactly. Like I said, you wanna be, you, you don't wanna be that PR person that is just the, you know, looking only when it helps you. You wanna be helping them as well. And and that's what, again, we, we say this all the time that you know it, again, people, we're talking to people we're not talk, you know, we're, we are relating to other humans, and you have to be a human in order to relate to the,

Julie Livingston:

It's good to be human. Yeah. I mean, and also one, once you have landed that, that fabulous story about your founder, one of the, the other ways you can again say a virtual thank you is by sharing that, that placement, that story on your social media channels on your website, and tagging the reporter and the media outlets that's like saying Thanks, high five. You know, we really appreciate the coverage. If there's anything we can, we can do for you in the future, I hope you'll reach out. Journalists really do appreciate that. I know I'm constantly going into my client's LinkedIn profiles and making sure that the latest media coverage is all over their profile, you know, in the featured section under their work experience as a place to add publications. And even down below there is a dedicated publication section. So as many places as I could get, you know space airtime for those, that media coverage, I, I wanna do that. Mm-Hmm.

Judy Calvin:

<Affirmative>. Exactly. Exactly. And, you know, and journalists are judged by that too, that, that these days, you know, they're, they're looked at what their analytics of their stories are, and any way that we can help them boost those analytics is, is, is, it's a win from both sides.

Julie Livingston:

Definitely. Definitely. Well, Judy, I can't believe we're at time. This was so fun to have you here. Thank you so much. I'm sure we'll do this again sometime soon and hope you'll turn it, tune in next week for another installment of Julie's PR pattern. Thank you. Have a great Wednesday.

Judy Calvin:

You too.