

Java With Jim: Meet Mark Jankowski - Founder at Voltage Groups

Jim Ries: [00:00:00] Welcome to Java with Jim. I'm Jim Ries, Director of Business Development at Offit Kurman joined here today with my friend Mark Jankowski, Founder at Voltage Groups. Mark, how are you today?

Mark Jankowski: Doing fantastic. It's a great day.

Jim Ries: Excellent. All right. So Mark, tell us about voltage groups. What do you do there and what makes you different from similar groups that are, in the area, in the region, in the industry?

Mark Jankowski: Sure appreciate it, Jim. What we do is we work with CEOs and one thing I've discovered working with CEOs for the last 15 years is that most of them end up really drained. People are coming to them all day long, pulling energy out of them. What do the customers need? What do clients need? What do business partners need? What do employees need? And really, if you boil everything we do at Voltage down, we help give energy back to CEOs. That's basically the bottom line. How do we do it? What we do is we hold monthly sessions. We have a [00:01:00] group of CEOs, actually they have five groups now, Jim, in the Baltimore area.

Jim Ries: Wow.

Mark Jankowski: Typically around 12 to 15 CEOs and once a month we get together in a half day or a full day format, depending on the group. And what we're able to do is to be able to bring them together so that they can share business ideas. I bring in speakers. They are able to help solve problems or have their problems solved.

And what I realized after doing this for 15 years, I had one of my people come to me and he said, Mark, you know what? This is my favorite day of the month. I always walk out more energized, and I literally heard that and went, that's it. We supply the energy that these CEOs need and they need to come once a month and get their recharge because the way they get recharged is not golfing and it's not laying on the beach.

They get recharged by talking about business and when they go to cocktail parties, what do they do? They talk about business the whole time and then they get home and they complain that all they can do is talk about [00:02:00] business. We are the place that they take a day to talk about business, improve their own businesses.

But honestly, Jim, a lot of times they get more energy outta helping other people improve their businesses. So when you ask how are we different, I will say this one person, I asked that question, I said, how are we different? And he said, Mark, you and your people have a fire in their belly that we've never seen. There is an energy in the room, there's a focus in the room. They wanna improve their businesses. We're not in a networking group, we're not a social club. What we do is come in, we rip things apart, we make people's businesses better, and we give them energy.

Jim Ries: I love that. The last sentence was a great sound bite.

So it's all about the focus is on energy, hence the name voltage, right.

Mark Jankowski: That's it. We rebranded about a year ago, and I'll be honest with you, Jim, the business has taken off ever since. We had a speaker come in and I listened to my speakers and he talked about become a category of one. I spent a year figuring out my brand, but once I did, [00:03:00] things have taken off.

Jim Ries: Yeah. So Mark, when it comes to Voltage Groups, what are you most proud of?

Mark Jankowski: The thing I get almost chills about, Jim, and this is gonna sound weird when two of my CEOs connect outside of the circle when I find out that two of them reached out. One of my CEOs works for Benelli Guns. He's a CEO.

They're a shotgun company, worldwide known. And one of my other clients runs Carol Independent Fuel and Highs. One time I was gonna go meet the one Ryan Carol, independent Fuel for breakfast, and we get done our breakfast and we're getting ready to leave and the guy from Benelli walks in and set up an independent lunch with him so they could help each other out.

And for whatever reason, I can't tell you why I get so happy knowing that people connect not just through me, but out in the world. They're connecting with each other to help each other with their businesses, building that

community is phenomenal. And I'll say this, Jim, I know a lot of people, I've heard a lot of stories.

I know at least five stories of business owners who've committed [00:04:00] suicide after they've retired or before they retired. They just couldn't take it anymore. And you look at article after article, men in their fifties and their sixties, and women as well who run businesses who've worked through this thing.

They get to a certain age, they become empty nesters. Maybe they lose their business. They don't have relationships to sustain them. So I'm very proud that we helped build relationships and keep those CEOs from being so lonely that maybe they get desperate at some point. And that means a lot to me as well.

Jim Ries: It's lonely at the top. Heard it a million times. Mark, what is something powerful that you've learned recently?

Mark Jankowski: I was with Vern Harnish, he wrote the book Scaling Up. I just did two days of presentations to my CEOs. We were driving along and he said, mark, I got this new idea. I wanna run by you. Sure, Vern.

He goes, I think companies need to focus on their soul. Jim, it hit me like a ton of bricks and it was funny because I've been talking about culture 'cause everybody talks about culture and a lot of my CEOs, the entrepreneurial ones, [00:05:00] ah, culture, that's the soft stuff. That's not what it's all about. But I think it's undeniable when I say that anybody from this point forward, and I'll be doing this with all of my CEOs. What is the soul of your company? None of them are gonna be able to say, oh, that's no big deal. That's soft stuff. They will all know that is something that's important. And Vern and I were just laughing. I've been doing this for 15 years in coaching.

I've been in the training industry for 40 years. Vern has been doing this for 45 years and it's just weird that this far along we come to the conclusion at the heart of this all is the question, what is the soul of your company?

Jim Ries: Amen. I love it. All right, Mark, what do most people watching this video not know about you? Probably a lot.

Mark Jankowski: Yeah. I'm gonna give you three if I can, can I give you three?

Jim Ries: Yeah. You can. All cost the same. You can tell me as many as you want.

Mark Jankowski: Number one, I was a scoper for five years in Ocean City, Maryland, if you have pictures and you live between 125th and one 45th Street from [00:06:00] 1982 to 1987, there's a good chance that I'm the one that took those photos.

Oh, wow. Second thing that most people don't know about me. I went to Harvard University, and I'll say this, Jim, the only reason I say that is 'cause my kids will say to me, dad, do you ever notice when you tell somebody that you went to Harvard? They go you went they let you in. So I found out that unless I tell 'em, they would never guess.

The third thing is I was on the Scrabble game show. I went to LA after I graduated from college, before I went to law school. One of my bucket items was to get onto a game show and I was really good at Scrabble. And so I went on there. Chuck Woolery was the host. The Love connection guy will be back in two and two.

I got to meet him and unfortunately I lost in the final round. I guessed incorrectly. I got a ten second penalty and I lost to the other competitor by about three seconds. Those are the three things, a great and terrible defeat on the Scrabble game show. But I got a good video clip of it, and I show it at most of my programs.

Jim Ries: The Scrabble game did [00:07:00] that show your geeky side? Or was that normal? What's up with that?

Mark Jankowski: My dad started me playing Scrabble, I think before I could spell. 'cause he liked to win and he was a dad that said, I'll never let you win when you beat me. You know it. And I probably started beating him when I was in high school and then we battled at it.

And so my dad taught me to be very disciplined and he used to do crossword puzzles, so all the QI and XI and all the crazy letter things I had to learn, and I had to study the Scrabble dictionary. So I don't know if it was a geeky side. It might have been, it's probably more the competitive side that I wanted to kick my dad's butt and I had to learn it in order to do that.

Jim Ries: Love it. Mark, thanks for sharing all this with us today. And congratulations to you and what you've done with the Voltage Groups. It's

amazing, and I know I've witnessed it personally and you've got really quite a thing going there. So best of luck for your continued success.

Mark Jankowski: Jim, I couldn't have done [00:08:00] it without you. I can't tell you, you are one of the OGs of the BD world. You have helped me with so many introductions to people. There's nobody like you in town, Jim, and I know you hear that a lot, but I can't tell you how much I appreciate you that the faith you've shown in me to direct CEOs my way so that I could help 'em.

So thank you right back to you for what you do for this community.

Jim Ries: You bet you I hope to see you soon, mark.

Mark Jankowski: Alright man.

Jim Ries: Alright. Be well see ya.