



Raymond A. Mason School of Business

WILLIAM & MARY

LEADERSHIP & BUSINESS PODCAST

EPISODE 111: LISA DENOIA & JEFF WERBY – THE COWORKING MOVEMENT

Ken White

From the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, this is Leadership & Business. The podcast that brings you the latest and best thinking from today's business leaders from across the world. We share the strategies, tactics, and information that can make you a more effective leader, communicator, and professional. I'm your host Ken White. Thanks for listening. While the traditional professional goes to the office every day, other professionals work from home, often alone and isolated. Those working from home have an alternative co-working. By next year over two million professionals around the world will go to work in shared offices or workspaces where they work independently. Amenities and co-working spaces include office space, conference rooms, private telephone rooms, and other necessities professionals seek. Lisa DeNoia and Jeff Werby launched 1701. A co-working meeting and event space in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and it has quickly caught on. They join us on the podcast today to discuss co-working, the types of professionals it attracts, and how it's grown from a simple workspace to a collaborative community. Here's our conversation with Lisa DeNoia and Jeff Werby of 1701.

Ken White

Lisa, Jeff, thanks for sharing your time with us. You have such a cool story and a very interesting business. Jeff, before we talk about the actual business, how about your background? How did you two get together and work together?

Jeff Werby

Lisa and I met about five years ago. We were working together at a defense contracting business. We started working a lot of projects, and we ended up doing a Salesforce.com implementation there, and she joined the team, and she was a project manager, and we've been working together ever since.

Ken White

And how did that lead to starting a co-working space co-working business?

Jeff Werby

Yup, co-working space, so when we were working on salesforce projects, we ended up doing some traveling. We went to Dreamforce, and when we did some traveling, we went to other cities that had co-working, and we thought it was a really great opportunity to bring to Virginia Beach. We ended up meeting with the city of Virginia Beach economic development. They were interested in co-working, and so we started working with them to find the space to bring it to Virginia Beach.

Ken White

And what was it, what's special about Virginia Beach to you?

Jeff Werby

I'm from Virginia Beach. Lived there pretty much my whole life. I join the Navy to see the world ended up getting stationed in Virginia Beach, which happens to some people. And you know my family's there, and it's a great place to live and the ocean.

Ken White

When you look at other co-working spaces, I mean being so close to the beach, that's pretty cool, I would think. When you see them in other cities, are there various spots they're trying to find? Do you try to be near the water? Do you try to be isolated? Do you try to be in the middle of everything?

Jeff Werby

I don't think it really matters. I mean, there is a co-working space that we talk to these people in Clovis, New Mexico. I had to even Google that because I had no idea where that was.

Ken White

Right.

Jeff Werby

They are in the middle of nowhere and in a little small strip of one street that they call downtown. I think you kind of go to wherever there is a density of people who might appreciate what you have. In Virginia Beach, when we started, we said we wanted to be at the ocean front. Everybody said we are crazy. We may be the closest co-working space to the ocean anywhere on the East Coast. I'm not sure if that's true. But we are three blocks from the beach, and that's great to be able to just go down there and see the ocean in the middle of the day and get your head out of whatever you're working on.

Ken White

Yeah. Lisa, who so you build it. Who do you expect to come, and who does come? And they're not. You don't really consider them customers. You consider the members. Right.

Lisa DeNoia

Yeah, so we have about 80 members right now, and they're members. They join a monthly membership plan, kind of like joining a gym instead of coming in to work out. You come into work. You know, we thought we would have a lot of entrepreneurs and startups. We thought we would have freelancers and remote workers from bigger companies. We also have a lot of members who are artists. They don't necessarily make art in 1701, but we are in the middle of the Vibe creative district, and so we have about 11 local artists who have their work on display in the space, and those artists are also running a business and so they come in to kind of work on some of their admin stuff here and there, and they come in for special events and stuff like that. We also just have a variety of really creative members. So we have people who do video and animation, and we have podcasters and authors, and it's really, really interesting to hear about all the things that people are working on that you wouldn't expect.

Ken White

What's the space look like?

Lisa DeNoia

There's two separate sides of the building, so the one side we call the main space it's very bright. It has a lot of windows. Has concrete floors and open ceilings. There's some sort of we call them cubbies like some little spaces where people can get together and huddle up and have maybe like a one-on-one meeting. We have some dedicated desks throughout the space. We have some standing desks, and then we have a lot of open desks where people can strap in and sit, and then about a third of our building, we call it the garage. It's a little bit more industrial looking and rough around the edges. It doesn't have as many windows, but which is cool because we can do a lot of like video or PowerPoint and stuff. We have a big projector and a screen in there, and we can set that room up in different ways for workshops and events and things like that so.

Ken White

And why either of you. Why do your members join? What is it about co-working that interests them?

Jeff Werby

I think it's not necessarily just co-working, but I think it's the community, and I think it's so some people it's for them being able to get up out of their home office and actually be

able to interact with other people. So we've had people who on the first day they met somebody there and gone to lunch with somebody they would have never ever met. We find that a lot of people say, you know when they used to work out of a coffee shop, they would go in, and they'd put it in their earbuds or their beats headphones, and they would sit there, and they would put their head down and do their work and never interact with the people that they saw in there every single day. And at 1701, people literally start communicating, and they'll go and get a cup of coffee and talk to people on the first day. They'll go for a run on the beach, and you know, not only are they collaborating and discussing things inside the building, but they're ending up going together, and their families are joining each other for dinner, and they're going out to the beach together on the weekends.

Ken White

Have you seen them collaborate in terms of business as well?

Jeff Werby

Absolutely. So there's been a number of people who collaborate everything from there is an app that was developed family app and that was a collaboration between really three different companies inside of our building. Two people joined to create a team. They got another guy to help do the software development, and then they used a third person in the building to help them with some of their marketing and creating animation and video.

Ken White

It's such an interesting concept. Where do you see it going? How might co-working grow?

Lisa DeNoia

I think co-working, in general, is just going to continue to grow. I mean, if you look at all of the research and the numbers that are out there, I mean, you know it's just going to continue to grow well through 2020 exponentially. So I think that more co-working spaces are going to pop up everywhere. I think you know the big ones like WeWork are just going to continue to grow and grow and become massive. You know, hopefully, we can eventually expand into a second location. There's a lot of amenities that we do have in our building, and then there are some amenities that we don't have in our building that our members are asking us for, and so we are always looking for ways that we can try to meet the needs of the members that we do have. And so even though we have 80 members now, we started out with one and then two and then three, and they've had a huge impact on the way that the business is today and what the things are that we offer. So as our membership grows, I think that'll help us grow and decide what to do next.

Ken White

Could it grow to where people are living in co-working spaces as well?

Lisa DeNoia

I think that's already going on. I mean, there's co-living. WeWork is doing that. Some other places are doing that. I mean, there's also these experiences that are geared towards digital nomads with people who will they'll basically go on vacation and go on these like year-long, you know, traveling adventures where they're co-working together all over the world. And those kinds of things so.

Ken White

Wow. What effects has your business and the people your members had on Virginia Beach and the business community?

Lisa DeNoia

I think we've had a pretty significant impact on at least the business community in the vibe district of where we are. I mean, so right now, the businesses in our building make up about half, maybe a little bit more than half of the businesses in the vibe district. You know that area is an area that's been revitalized over the last couple of years, and I think the fact that there are so many more businesses in the vibe district in our building is contributing to the stability of the neighborhood and as businesses grow and they're kind of graduating out of our building, and they need their own space or a bigger space. They're renting space nearby in the vibe district or at the oceanfront, and the city really wants the oceanfront to be a year-round place that's active year-round where restaurants and retail can stay open year-round, and so I think having more of these local businesses and people who are there and they're working, and they're generating revenue at the oceanfront that's really what's going to enable that to happen.

Ken White

We'll continue our conversation with Lisa DeNoia and Jeff Werby in just a minute. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond a Mason School of Business. The center's popular certificate in business excellence program is coming to the Northern Virginia Washington D.C. area this fall. Designed for the busy professional, the five-session program addresses leadership development from a cross-functional perspective. Five essential business topics will be taught in the program, including effective communication, managerial accounting, business analytics, business strategy, and executive leadership. The program helps you get a better handle on business, leadership, and your career. For more information, visit our website at wmleadership.com. Now back to our conversation with Lisa DeNoia and Jeff Werby of 1701.

Ken White

How would you define the vibe district when you're telling somebody is not has never heard the term vibe district.

Jeff Werby

Yeah, so the vibe district is what was historically kind of an underutilized piece of the Virginia Beach Ocean Front. It's really between 17th street and 19th Street. It kind of wiggles around a little bit, but it's basically, and it's still today a little bit rundown a little bit like I said under utilized there's a lot of empty storefronts. If you went through there, it would not look like the resort area.

Ken White

Right.

Jeff Werby

And so you know the city put in place some incentives and some structure to incentivize people to come into that area and make it utilized.

Ken White

Now you're doing more than co-working. You have events like panel discussions. Can you tell me about those?

Lisa DeNoia

Yeah, so for 2018, we decided to focus on bringing more and more different types of people into the building, and so we created a series of panel events to bring in influencers from around the region to talk about 12 different business topics and are relevant to the region. So we're talking about digital content and farming and agriculture, tiny homes and mobile businesses, craft food and beverage. That kind of thing. So we do those. We also rent space out for private events. We share space with some meet-ups and some nonprofits who are doing civic hacking is like code for Hampton Roads meets in our building operation code meets in our building, and so we've trying to have an amenity for local technologists and developers as well.

Ken White

Is there an easy way to describe the demographic of the members? Is it a certain age? Is it a certain education level? Is it kind of all over?

Jeff Werby

Yeah, I think it's it's probably as diverse as you could get.

Ken White

Really.

Jeff Werby

Without trying to put in a diversity control. I mean we, we have no agenda whatsoever in that realm, but it is very diverse, and we have you know very young to what we call you know seasoned professionals you know both genders, you know every race, you know education, where they're from, military background civilian active duty military you name it. We've got them in our building.

Ken White

And people who are full-time working on their project or some may be doing it as a second thing while they're working full time as well. Right.

Jeff Werby

Yup, I mean there's people who are, like I said, they're full-time active duty in the military, and they come there three or four o'clock whenever they get off work, and they work until 10:00 at night, and they come in on the weekends, and they know that that's their focus but they have their day job and then there's people who literally come in there every day, and that's what they're working on they're focusing on their business so and everything in between there's also people who are community members who only really come once or twice a month you know mainly just as a way to get out and network with people and have the opportunity to come to all of our we have social and business networking events that we put on.

Ken White

What about rules and expectations. You know, during the day, I maybe I don't want to be bothered, or I love to be bothered. How do you I what I'm thinking of is the old dormitory, right? The freshmen come in into their wing, and they've got to create their own rules how are we going to live together. I mean, it does. How do you manage that so that everybody gets along?

Lisa DeNoia

I mean, people are generally pretty respectful. I think you know; obviously, if someone's sitting there working with their headphones on, you're probably not going to start talking to them unless it's urgent or you're working on something together specifically. You know, I think co-working spaces kind of have their own little culture and their own unspoken rules, too, so everyone knows that everyone's in there because they want to connect more with human beings and they want to talk, but then again, everyone knows everyone's in there to work. And so there's these moments where it almost comes and goes in waves

like you'll hear someone talking or someone will laugh and then all of a sudden like the space will get very loud for a couple of minutes like everyone will start talking at once and then as soon as it happened like it will just stop, and everyone go back to what they're working on, or you know in the middle of the day like at 2:00 or 3:00 maybe a bunch of people will all be drinking coffee together or you know we haven't really had a lot of problems or you've had to ask somebody to keep it down or something like that. But if there is someone that's being loud or distracting or on a call somewhere where they shouldn't be, it's usually as simple as just tapping them on the shoulder being like, hey, why don't you head into the phone booth or go over here you know. I mean, most people are working, or they're working on a business. They're professionals, and they're trying to do the right thing so.

Ken White

For the introvert, it sounds great, but I'm introverted; I just don't know. What do you say to them?

Lisa DeNoia

I'm an introvert, so I mean, sometimes I like to go sit somewhere where I'm facing the wall, or I put my headphones on, or I just go, you know, it's really cool cause you can move around to different parts of the building. So even though Jeff and I own the business, we do not have our own office in the building. We don't have our own desks. We move from space to space just like everyone else does. And I think the best part of it is if wherever you're sitting isn't working for you, you can get up and move and go somewhere else. So if I need to reserve a conference room because I know I need to be alone for an hour, I can do that, or I can go work in the phone booth or if I am feeling like I want to be more socializing, go sit in the middle of the space or sit on the couch and know that kind of everyone will be sort of buzzing around me.

Ken White

If people want to try it out. Do you can you get a day pass or visit? How does that work in yours and other spaces you've seen?

Jeff Werby

I mean, so we offer everybody a free day. So if you come in for a tour, so you schedule towards automated system, you pick a time, and you come in for a tour, and then we let you come back and use a free day. I think most spaces do something like that. I don't know. You know some of them you have to email them and tell them that you're going to come. But yeah, I mean, it's the kind of thing that we always tell everybody come and try it out beforehand. You've got to experience it and see whether or not it's a good fit for you. And then the other thing is that we don't have contracts. So it's month to month. If it doesn't work for you, you know you're not tied into a long-term contract. So people really

like that, and they can also start using it as a community member and paying for drop-in days kind of a la carte, or they can get an all-you-can-eat, you know, full 24-by-7 access. If anybody ever starts in one and is a community member and they end up using so many days that they would pay for a full time, we just convert them to it. We don't charge them an overage, so it's pretty flexible. And people really like that.

Ken White

Yeah. So if they're wondering if they have some questions, give it a shot. Just try it.

Jeff Werby

Absolutely. And the other thing if people are visiting and they're at the ocean front for the summer, or you know maybe for a week, I know that everybody tries to go on vacation and not have to work, but you know we are open and in a lot of the hotels are getting rid of their I guess they call them business centers and the Internet the hotels typically is pretty awful. So if people need to get away, they can leave the family down at the beach and just come down and work for the day even while they're on vacation.

Ken White

What about equipment. So I've I'm there I've got my laptop and whatever with me and I want to go out what do I do with that. Does it stay there? Do I put it away somewhere?

Lisa DeNoia

Yeah, people just leave their laptop on their desk so that the doors are locked all the time, so our members have access to the front door using an app on their phone, and then we also have our community manager or one of our associates sitting at the front desk to let people in and out. So there's not like the general public parading in and out of the building throughout the day. So your stuff is safe wherever you feel comfortable leaving it. And yeah, so people can just come and go as you please. It's not like working in a coffee shop where you know all of sudden you need to go use the restroom, and you're like do I pack up all my stuff and lose my table or whatever. You know you can kind of leave your stuff there for the day.

Ken White

But it seems to be growing at a great rate, and so the word is give it a shot right if you're a remote worker or somebody working out of the house.

Jeff Werby

Absolutely or if you're somebody who wants to network and meet other people because you have an idea to start a business or you've got a small startup, and you want to meet people who can help you and collaborate with, it's a great place to meet those people.

Ken White

That's our conversation with Lisa DeNoia and Jeff Werby of 1701. And that's our podcast for this week. Leadership & Business is brought to you by the Center for Corporate Education at the College of William & Mary's Raymond A. Mason School of Business. The Center for Corporate Education can help you, and your organization meet and exceed your goals with business and leadership development programs that fit your needs and get results. If you're interested in learning more, check out our website at wmleadership.com. Also, if you have any feedback or suggestions pertaining to our podcasts, we'd love to hear from you. Email us at podcast@wm.edu. Thanks to our guests this week, Lisa DeNoia and Jeff Werby, and thanks to you for joining us. I'm Ken White. Until next time have a safe, happy, and productive week.