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James Robert Lay:

Greetings and hello. I am James Robert Lay and welcome to the 70th episode of the Banking on Digital Growth Podcast. Today's episode is part of the Digital Growth Journey series, and I'm excited to welcome Greg Martin to the show. Greg is The Entrepreneur's Banker. He is a certified Profit First banker and a strategic banking advisor as a commercial banker for Truist. Welcome to the show, Greg.

Greg Martin:

James Robert, thank you so much for having me and thank you first off, thank you for what you do on this podcast, really helping people like me and executives and people in the financial services world to get into the 21st century. So thanks for kicking us that way.

James Robert Lay:

Well, I appreciate the kind words and to flip it around, you and others like you, other leaders, you're the reason why I continue to do what I do. Because I really believe that all transformation begins with two things. One, by telling the truth, telling the truth to ourselves, where we've been, where we are, and where we can continue to grow. And then number two, transformation begins just with training and education, gaining new insights and clarity into what the future could be.

James Robert Lay:

So that's what I want to talk about, specifically around just your own personal transformation, your own personal growth, thinking about the future. I really can't help, but think of the role of personal branding as a banker in this post-COVID digital world is going to be more important now than ever before. And even saw this morning, an article that Jay Palter had shared. Jay was a guest on the show, in episode 51, talking about humanizing digital experiences. And the article he shared was titled, Investing in Your Personal Brand. And a quote that Jay had noted was, "Don't wait until business is slow or it's time to find the next job before you think about working on your personal brand. The time to mend the hole in the roof is when the sun is shining, not when the storm comes." So thinking about personal brand and just your own journey of growth, can we just first start off with, why? Why take the time to build a personal brand in this digital post-COVID world we're all navigating through together?

Greg Martin:

Well, first off, I'd like to know when Jay thinks that banking is slow. I've pulled it an all-nighter. I'm sure there's a lot of other bankers that can attest. First off, let me say, last year, especially during the PPP One rollout, entrepreneurs had it the most difficult, without doubt. They were struggling, and we needed to step up, and we did. But doggone, I have not pulled an all-nighter since I was at school. But during the PPP, it was all nights. It's never going to be slow.

James Robert Lay:

I don't think it is. And I think it's an important point, because this is really about intentionality. It's about creating space and time. But the only way we're going to create space and time is if we have awareness and clarity into why this is important to begin with in the first place. So thinking and reflecting on your own journey, why take that time? Why create that space in time when there is so much that we could be doing to really focus on building a personal brand?

Greg Martin:

Well, I think I'll answer that with a little bit of a story. I'm a bit of a Marvel nerd. I've got a 12-year-old, and so we nerded out on all the Marvel movies. And I think it was one of the Iron Man movies, but it was a vision that Tony Stark had of the future, and the future of all of the Avengers that were all laid out, and they were all defeated. So I had my vision, and my vision happened in 2018 in Austin, Texas, at a conference that was hosted by Precision Lender. It was the Bank on Purpose conference, and that's another great banking podcast. And their CEO, Carl Ryden and Jim Marous, who we're both friends with and know very well, they both said something.

Greg Martin:

And Jim took the stage and he said, "Here's what I think the future is going to be like, I'm going to sit in my hot tub and I'm going to be, 'Hey, Siri, you know that \$2 million building I've been looking at?' And because Siri is connected to your iPhone, she knows the maps that you're going, she's connected to your email, so she sees the email back and forth to your realtor. She sits on top of your bank, so she sees money coming in and she sees money going out. That's rent. That's utilities. That's salary. That's an owner's draw. That's a loan payment. She's connected to all your bank, so she can see your assets and your liabilities. So Siri's smart enough to instantaneously have a balance sheet and an income statement. And Siri's, and you're going to say, 'Okay, James Robert, congratulations. The Entrepreneur's Bank just has the best rate and the most flexible terms. Do you want to go ahead and set closing for April 13th? Remember, you can't do it on the 12th because Susan's anniversary, you have a lunch that day. So do you want me to go ahead and get the appraisal started?'"

Greg Martin:

And when that day comes, that's faster. That's a heck of a lot better user experience than me. You've got something that I, I'm not going back and forth asking multiple questions. They have the quantitative power to be able to say yes, almost instantaneously. When that day comes, then if the only value that a commercial banker is to clients is a conduit to cash, or a lunch, or a golf outing, if that's the only value that happens, then I'm dead. I'm worthless. I deserve to not be in that entrepreneur's fab five. I talk about being in the fab five, those five people that entrepreneurs surround themselves with push them to success. If all I am is someone that can give and take a commodity, i.e., an account or a loan, then that is... I don't have any value. So when I realized, that was where I think this world is going, that was my Tony Stark moment. About that same time. I started listening to Gary Vaynerchuk.

James Robert Lay:

Let's talk about Gary because, and I think when you look at your personal brand, and everyone right now go look at Greg's LinkedIn profile. This is important, because you brand yourself as The Entrepreneur's Banker. How did Gary Vaynerchuk, love him, hate him, he is such a polarizing figure, and I think there's some lessons to be learned even just with Gary's personal

brand, but how did Gary inspire you to get started down this journey, kind of like this transformative Tony Stark moment when listening to Jim Marous?

Greg Martin:

Yeah. Well, I think that as I was listening to him, and I struggled with it for probably... Well, first off, Gary's an acquired taste. So it took me a good month-and-a-half to be like, "Well, this guy's just full of it, and full of himself," to actually hear what he's saying and to listen and to see the truth in it. Then it was like, okay, well, that's great. That's great for an entrepreneur that owns a lawn care service, and they can do whatever the heck they want. They can say whatever the heck they want. I work in a very regulated industry, and I'm not anywhere near the top of my food chain. So there's a whole lot of layers of complexity that, if I allowed it to, could allow me to be defeated and say, "Don't worry about it. Just move on."

Greg Martin:

But the fact of the matter is, it's like, "Why not?" And the one quote that, I knew that this was important, and I knew that building a personal brand was going to be a way that, first and foremost, I was able to connect with the entrepreneurs that get the most out of me. And I think that's a problem a lot of bankers have. Bankers want to be all things to everybody, and that's just not the case. So I wanted to connect with the entrepreneurs that get the most out of me, that I enjoy, that do not beat me up over every single rate and fee and every little thing. I want to be respectful of that, but at the end of the day, banks provide value and service and they should be compensated for that. But I don't need a client beating me up over an NSF fee that they caused themselves.

James Robert Lay:

That's key, because now what you're talking about is repeated pattern and theme that I'm hearing from others. It comes down to being very focused and being very clear about who you, as a banker, can create value for. To your point, it's not about being all things to all people, and even a shout out to Jeffrey Kendall, who's the CEO at Nimbus. One of the things that he has written prolifically about and really speaking about is, and to use his words right here, niche is the new local for banks and credit unions. Niche is how you connect to the communities you serve and to create growth opportunities.

James Robert Lay:

So thinking about this, and I want to take, just get your perspective here, because you've been living this, what is one commonly held belief in this banking industry about personal branding in this digital world that people might have, but you passionately disagree with? Where might others be wrong?

Greg Martin:

I think that I'm going to speak from a banker's perspective, from a commercial relationship manager. I mean those men and women who are around the front lines, step-by-step with the entrepreneurs that we serve.

James Robert Lay:

Yeah.

Greg Martin:

I think that one of the challenges that they have is that there's fear. Go back to what I said earlier. I mean, I could have been afraid that... And I work for a very large, complex banking organization. I work for one of the big six. And there is a lot of regulation, and there's a lot of reputation risk that is associated with it. And bankers might be afraid that I go out and I say something, or if someone takes my advice the wrong way that it could be I could destroy their business.

Greg Martin:

Well, I would ask, what advice are you giving them? Because the advice that I give is pay down debt, hoard cash, be flexible, don't overextend yourself. If you go bankrupt doing those things, then we have got much bigger problems. So you have to be wise about it. You have to actually go and engage your HR department. You have to understand, okay, what are the social media guidelines that I have? And then you need to be very clear on that.

Greg Martin:

I cannot use, and I'll tell you a success story here in a minute, but none of my content, zero, I have never put out, and I never will put out, "Hey, if you want a loan or if you needed a checking account, come see me." I will never ever do that. And I will never do that, first and foremost, because that is not the point of me creating content. The point of me creating content is to empower and to serve the entrepreneur. And if I earn that right to be able to serve them, well, we can talk about that on the off measure, but I will never sell them. And the second that you slip that in there, it just means it's so needy and it's about you. And it's never about you. You say it, James Robert, they are the hero. You as an entrepreneur, as a commercial RM, need to empower them a thousand percent of the time.

James Robert Lay:

Right there, that's it. You talk about empowerment. Now I'm going to go to two other sides of that, because I look at this as almost a trifecta. Education leads to empowerment, empowerment then leads to elevation. Regardless of if they ever come back and do quote unquote business with you, you're leaving the world a little bit better place than you found it. And it's the mantra that I teach, help first, sell second. And that has to be believed internally and really throughout the organization. But I think if there's one thing that I'm hearing that's so important, you're not going to talk about a loan or a checking account with your content. Because that's where some of the regulations, and you can get clamped down on pretty quickly. It's not about you.

James Robert Lay:

You said something before, this idea of where people get stuck, it's fear. But you ask yourself a very important question. Why not? Why not go down this path? Why not go down this journey? And I think if there's one thing that you can maybe share with others is, what have been the opportunities, as a banker, that you have been able to either create, capture, or just further capitalize on by building your personal brand in this post-COVID digital world? You had a jump start on this. So I think this is where a lot of others, they can learn from you and really just be inspired. So what have been some of the opportunities here?

Greg Martin:

Well, first and foremost, the biggest thing that needs to be broken is your own paradigm. When I started this journey, it was, "Okay, I'm going to put this content out. I know that it's valuable. I know entrepreneurs need it. I have zero expectation of getting any business from it. Zero." And it was May, excuse me, it was July 31st of 2018 when I posted my first article on LinkedIn. And for the next two years, to have created over a hundred articles and videos, it's a heck of a lot of work, but my paradigm.

Greg Martin:

And if you had asked me on August 1st of 2018, "Okay. Greg, someone from Killeen, Texas, which is about an hour-and-a-half away from where Bryan College Station is, where I sit, if they came to you and wanted to do a loan, could you do it?" I'd say no. "Okay. Greg, what about someone that's over in Tennessee? Could you do the loan for them?" And I'd say no. "What about someone that you don't even know, that's in your town, that you met because you hosted them on a podcast that you host?" If they came to me and said, "Do you want to do a loan?" I'd say, "Well, maybe. We'll see."

Greg Martin:

And again, the purpose of the podcast is not about getting loans and getting business for me. It's about elevating entrepreneurs. But James Robert, I have done a loan for an entrepreneur that's in Killeen, Texas. I'm looking at doing a loan for someone's in Kentucky. I'm looking at doing a large loan for an entrepreneur that was on the podcast. And that breaks the paradigm of old school community bankers, where I'm going to be in Bryan College Station. I might be down in Houston, which about 90 miles away. I might be... But there's got to be a tie back to, to Bryan College Station. But why? Why? In this COVID world, I haven't gone and seen my clients that are three miles from me. So if I can sit there and have a good communication with an entrepreneur in Tennessee or Kentucky, how is that any different?

Greg Martin:

Now there are some, I will say that there are some caveats. It depends on what you're doing. If you're investing into some type of commercial real estate or something that is that area-specific, five years ago, when I moved back to Bryan College Station, there were students... Texas A&M University is here, and there are student housing complexes coming out of the ground, and everybody was financing and doing that. Well, we're in a market right now that you might say that we're a little bit over-saturated. And you would not have known that without having boots on the ground. So I've realized that there is risk not being on the ground. But if you have, you can get reports. I'm lucky enough that there's a bank, there's BB&T that literally is 10 minutes from this client.

James Robert Lay:

Right.

Greg Martin:

It's going to make them mad that I'm doing the loan, but it's like, "Well, look, whose fault is that? You were 10 minutes away from them. They came after me."

James Robert Lay:

Because it's-

Greg Martin:

You're breaking that paradigm

James Robert Lay:

It's basic human relationship of, I need to know you before I like you, like you before I can trust you. But this idea of know, like, and trust is being built in a different type of a fashion now. And I think further, when I'm hearing you talk through this, community. Community has been redefined. I literally was just having this conversation in episode number 69 with Dan Sullivan, from Strategic Coach. And technology, we were talking about borders. And you know how borders are starting to pop up. Even the idea of quarantine, if you travel from one country to another, you have a 14 day quarantine. Well, that's a border. But what digital is doing, digital is tearing down borders of what... and there's some paradigm shifts that are going there. I can't help but think and go back to episode number two, with Jim Marous. he's talking about this idea of, you've got to disrupt your own thinking. You have to transform your own thinking. And the only way we can do this is by not focusing on the limitations. Because this is really about first principles or principles first thinking. What are the opportunities, instead of worrying about the limitations.

Greg Martin:

Yep.

James Robert Lay:

So these are really great examples of how you and College Station, Bryan College Station, have been able to make an impact on a much larger playing field for a much larger community. But I want to come down to this idea of, back to niche and focus and how this has been helpful. Because you mentioned entrepreneurs, right? But even if I think about entrepreneurs, you can even start segmenting and subdividing that. You have attorneys, you have healthcare professionals, you have franchises. And I know one bank that I'm advising right now, they are really looking at building up a model around franchise growth. Can you dive a little bit deeper just into your focus of entrepreneurs and what you are educating them and empowering them through the content you're producing and sharing?

Greg Martin:

Yeah, definitely, and I believe a hundred percent that there's riches in the niches. It's there. Bankers, when you talk to your clients, and they tell you, "This is my perfect customer, this is the person that gets value out of me, and I can charge more because they understand my value," then you sit there and you applaud them. You say, "Fantastic, great job. You're increasing your margin. Your gross profit margin is going through the roof. Your profitability, your EBITDAs, your debt service coverage is going down," all these bank nerd terms we come in. And we applaud them, but we don't apply the same principle to us. So the book that I read that made this crystal clear for me, it was another, I'm a huge Mike Michalowicz fan, and obviously as a certified Profit First professional, but Pumpkin Plan is an amazing book that drills into it.

Greg Martin:

And he says, here's the difference. You have a doctor that goes through all of medical school and they are a general practitioner. And then you've got a heart surgeon who goes through a little bit more medical specialization. The general practitioner has 3,000 patients, that is the constant churn, that you see for 15 seconds, because the name of the game is for them to see as many people as possible.

James Robert Lay:

Absolutely.

Greg Martin:

They're not going deep. If your general practitioner moved to the other side of town, you probably would not be willing to go an extra five minutes to go see them.

James Robert Lay:

Yeah.

Greg Martin:

No, no, no. I'd go find somebody else. I mean, maybe if you had a long-standing relationship, perhaps, but probably not. If you have a heart problem, you will fly 2,000 miles up to the Cleveland Clinic, to speak to the number one heart person. Because that doctor, all they do is hearts. They know the problems that they're going to have. They're going to be able to anticipate issues with the surgery. They're going to be able to give you so much more advice. And you know what? That cardiac surgeon is working three days a week. The other doctor is working seven. The cardiac surgeon buys the other doctor's house to knock it down so that he can have more space, because he has value, and he's clearly defined that value and people chase after him. That is what the power of niching and finding riches in the niches is.

James Robert Lay:

Wow. There's so much truth to that, and stuff that I've experienced just myself personally over the years. And I think the more that we do this, the more that we learn about ourselves, coming back to this idea of all transformation starts by telling the truth first and foremost, to ourselves, the more that we uncover, what those truths are... Because it's so easy to think, "Oh, if I'm going to focus, well, I'm giving up all of this quote, unquote, other opportunity that's available out there." So how can one who might be thinking about this, but maybe struggling a little bit, because they conceptually get it, but they're still having some type of a block, saying, "I just can't go there yet," how can we move them across to the other side? To fully commit to a niche, whatever that niche might be, to focus on creating the most value for maybe a smaller group of people? But it's not about the transaction anymore. It's really about transforming people's lives or businesses. How do we help them overcome that mental roadblock there?

Greg Martin:

Okay. I'll say three things, and I'll try to make them quick. First off, I want you to be honest with me. If you're a banker, what do you feel at 8:00 on January 2nd? You feel great, "Last year was awesome. I started with zero. I got to build it all again this year. I got to hit all of my goals again this year." Wouldn't it be awesome if entrepreneurs were flying 3,000 miles to come to you to say, "I want you to do my loan," to chase after you?

Greg Martin:

Two, the thing about finding a niche is that you find a niche that gives you joy and life. If you are a fitness fanatic, and you are into Spartan names, or Tough Mudders, or something like that, then go be the Spartan banker. Maybe you love to bake. Be a baking banker, where you deliver cupcakes of bread. And then you're going to attract people. You're going to attract the things that give you life, that give you a sense of wellbeing beyond a transaction.

Greg Martin:

And then three, one of the most difficult things that bankers, the objections that we come up with is, moving the deposit account, because they're so sticky. And honestly, if I was able to make a fintech right now, I would make a fintech that makes it easy for the transition and the reallocation of all the automatic deposits over, auto drafts. That would be a fantastic fintech. We could probably sell it for millions. But anyway, that's really hard. So bankers have to overcome that. And as a concierge banker, like the attitude that I have, then we help with that. We help fill out the forms. We make calls. We do all that stuff. But that's still a struggle.

Greg Martin:

James Robert, since I became a Profit First banker, I basically say, "I can't charge you for my Profit First consulting, but what I do requires that you need to bank with me, because I still get paid by Truist, and Truist expects me to bring value to you, but bring value to the organization, as well. And so it's not fair for me to take my time away from my current clients. I won't charge you to be a Profit First consultant, but you have to move your bank accounts to me." "Okay, cool." Literally, that is how that conversation goes. Zero struggle, because they see the value.

James Robert Lay:

And you've taken the time, personally, you've made a lot, a tremendous amount of deposits into their own trust fund that sits between their ears. So whenever it comes to making that commitment to then create even more value through your Profit First consulting, it really is a no-brainer.

James Robert Lay:

Coming back to your idea of the fintech. I have the perfect name for that because it really, that is gold. And I would sell it not for millions. I'd sell it for billions, if not even trillions, because that's the value creation, if we can get not only the lending relationship, but those deposit assets. I'd call it, Control C, Control V, making it as simple as copying and pasting those assets from one account to the other, or cutting them from one account to the other.

Greg Martin:

Love is. Maybe you need to cut that part, so no one needs to hear that, at all. That's just our idea.

James Robert Lay:

We'll put it out there. I mean, if it becomes reality, then they know that they got it right here.

James Robert Lay:

But let me ask you, when it comes to this journey that you've taken, what are just some of the roadblocks, I think, for others to be aware of? You're a little bit further ahead, things to watch out



for that they just don't get tripped up, stumble and fall. If there's one thing that I can think of, it's really commitment. Because you've talked about over a hundred pieces of content, videos, articles, podcasts, and it's taken time. But when we look at the roadblocks, what are the things that people need to be aware of that they can learn just from what you've taken on your own journey here?

Greg Martin:

Yeah. I can kind of answer this from a philosophical, identifying who your market niche is and all that. But I'll, I want to get real practical. So if you're going to do this, just do it. It's not that difficult. LinkedIn was the first place that I put... Literally you just type your words and you post it. If you're not good at typing, then hold up a phone and shoot a video. Pelpina Trip, if you guys are not connected to her on LinkedIn, she is phenomenal. She will teach you how to use your cell phone to shoot all the videos, and her book lays out everything. So mad props to Pelpina, for teaching me how to do that.

Greg Martin:

You're going to have to invest a little bit in written content work, and you're afraid of being on video, just hit record, and do an audio, a one-minute segment, or two minutes, "Hey, here's some quick tips about how you can be more financially strong today," whenever that is. It's not difficult. Now, this is where Gary V lies to you. Because he says, "Just do it. Just record it. Just put it out there." And that's good, and that's great.

Greg Martin:

But of you want it to be professional, if you want it to sound good, if you want it to be something that has maximum value, because people aren't distracted by you stumbling over your own words, then you're going to have to invest in yourself. You're going to have to take time, and you're going to have to sacrifice. I mean, I built this entire brand. It's not fair for me to write an article for The Entrepreneur's Banker on Truist's time.

James Robert Lay:

Right.

Greg Martin:

That's not fair. So I do that all at night, and that means that my son goes to bed and I sit there and I'm typing away until 10:00. That means that on the weekends, I'm batching my videos, so that over the next two weeks, I can sit there and edit them and then have a class ready to launch. It takes time. It takes effort. Who cares, if you're consistently putting information out? And you don't have to be the number one on Google. You have to be out there and just do it, have the strength to do it. Don't be discouraged if you're not producing the level of content and the quality that James Robert is. I mean, he's got a lot of time at this, this is podcast number 70.

James Robert Lay:

70.

Greg Martin:

And you probably learned so much more now compared to... Like, when I look back at that first article, it was basically, why you need to have an entrepreneur's banker. I look at that, and it's like, "Man, that was really, really bad." But it was out there.

James Robert Lay:

I think with that being in mind, we're 70 episodes in. We've learned a tremendous amount. I'm happy to transfer just as much knowledge to others as you have today. But I'd like to just sum this up. Anyone can really make the commitment to do this. It's a commitment in yourself. It's really my hope. My hope for this industry, that financial brands create some space and time, maybe it's just an hour of day, for their bankers to start making this part of their own workflow. It all boils down to one thing. It's just cash. And I'm not talking currency, money, coins. I'm talking about cash as K-A-S-H. It's knowledge, it's attitude, it's systems, and it's most importantly, it's habits.

Greg Martin:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

James Robert Lay:

It's the continuous commitment to create content, to help educate, empower and elevate others. Greg, I appreciate all of the knowledge that you have transferred today, to inspire and empower and elevate others that are listening. If someone wants to continue this conversation with you, what is the best way for them just to connect and say hello personally?

Greg Martin:

Yeah, probably two different ways. One, LinkedIn. That's been the social media platform that I'm most active on. So I am The Entrepreneurs Banker in Bryan College Station, Texas. Or if you go to [theentrepreneursbanker.com](http://theentrepreneursbanker.com), there's a, connect with me, that you can reach out to me. That'll, get to my inbox, and we'll continue the conversation. I'm with you. I hope and pray that more RMs do this. There's a couple bankers out there that are doing this. Paul Long up in Washington state did an amazing job, Natalie Bartholomew who's with, I think it's Grand Savings Bank, she's got the Girl Bankers Podcast. So there are some bankers out there that are doing this much better than I. But if there's anything I can do to help you guys along this journey, please let me know. Because it's been tough for two years, and I could probably short circuit some frustrations that I have.

James Robert Lay:

Yeah. Shout out to Paul. Shout out to Natalie. Shout out to you, Greg. Thank you so much for joining me on another episode of Banking on Digital Growth. As always, and until next time, be well, do good, and wash your hands.