

Something Extra EP 008 – Hunter Mueller

Lisa Nichols: Hunter, I'm so excited to have you on the podcast today. You and I have known each other for 6-7 years and gotten to be friends and I'm so excited when you said yes that you would be on the podcast.

Hunter Muller: Likewise. Thanks for the opportunity.

Lisa: Let's talk a little bit about your upbringing. Can you talk to us about that?

Hunter: Sure. It was kind of a magical experience growing up in Westport, CT. A bedroom community of New York City. About 50 mi outside of NYC. We settled in there in the early 60s. Picked a lot. My folks built the house that we lived in for quite a few years. It's just a beautiful town, right on the water, great sports, and great kids. One of those magical opportunities where the neighborhood, at the end of a day there would be 40-50 kids running around the neighborhood late at night playing games, sports. Everyone moved in to the neighborhood at the same time and settled in at the same time because it was one of those developments post world war 2.

Lisa: You still love the water today, don't you?

Hunter: Yeah. I'm a big sailor. I love to race snow boats as well as a motorboat. It's great to be on the water.

Lisa: There's something very serene and peaceful.

Hunter: It's one of my passions for sure.

Lisa: You have a lot of passions. We'd be talking about some of those. Maybe. Talk to us a little bit about your education. Tell us about what did you end up majoring in and then I really want to start talking about your career. You've been an entrepreneur probably about your whole career. So talk to us a little bit about your career.

Hunter: It's fascinating when I look back over the decades and the different segments both elementary school, Junior high, High school, and even college. Overall I wasn't a great student. High energy level, attention deficit kind of position. It made it really quite challenging to be really exceptional in the traditional education model that we've had in the US of the past 50 years. There were times when I really excelled. I excelled typically when I really liked the topic. There's no mistake there but what it really forced me to do is to force me to understand, to learn, and to educate myself, did a lot of reading and self-discovery on my free time to really understand, decode myself if you will, of a software program. Really tried to understand what made me tick. What really got me interested and excited, enthusiastic and passionate about a specific area, themes, or topics.

Lisa: Did you kind of hone in on a few things? I think I could probably say a few things. I know you love innovation. You obviously love technology. Right?

Hunter: Innovation technology for sure. That was kind of later in the self-discovery process. Early on, it was this notion of athletics. Achieving high levels of performance in athletics. I probably tried almost every sport growing up as a kid. A couple of sports truly excelled at a regional, national level. What it taught me was an interest, and excitement, enthusiasm for winning. How fun it is to win. Believe it or not, over years and years of studying it and we're studying top motivational experts, top athletes, top coaches, and top business leaders. It really came to this point of view, whatever you do in life, you're going to spend a lot of time working. Huge amount of time. Working in or planning to work or thinking about working. It hit me in my 20s. Better love what I do for living because once you find an area that you really love what you're doing for work, work becomes easier. It's more engaging, more stimulating, higher energy relative to the topic that you're working on, or area that you're working on, the people you're working with. Whether it's a product or service, right? For me, early on, it was around leadership and motivation and coaching folks. Coaching organizations. Coaching people to think differently, think better, think stronger about where they are at today and the future. In essence, a little mini motivational coach in my mid 20s working with executives in the Fairfield County, CT / NY area. The big break for me was 2 big breaks. The biggest person the most impact that I ever had in my life was my father who was a Harvard Alum, went Harvard Tufts, GE, left GE in the ad department, he and 2 other guys went to NYC in the mid to late 50s and started an advertising agency. Muller Jordan at the time Hareck. Based on relationships created, mid-size agency in the city, perhaps one of the most interesting industries in the 60s-70s-80s. In the truest sense, he was a mad man. I kind of grew up with that. I only saw the show once on TV. Didn't need to, I lived it. He'd make for some profound advice, at different points it would be almost like executive

orders. It would say, he pushed me gently, guided me into a school that had an insane ability to help you dream differently and think very bold and big and that was Babson College one of the first colleges in the country to have entrepreneurship, it was a major. I don't think you can really teach entrepreneurship, either you got it or you don't. 2, I found fascinating about Babson, again, the lower level courses I dreaded. Ironically dreaded the computer room, we'd get more of that in a minute.

Lisa: That's funny.

Hunter: This is funny right but what I found fascinating was the policy classes. The marketing classes. The classes that you're talking about thinking of the world differently. Thinking like a CEO. That's when I kind of really understand that I'm very different than the world and very gifted once you find that gift and see it, the issue is. My experience is was with almost sometimes embrace it, and sometimes you run from it. Once you really find that unique aspect of yourself, it's really to lean into it. To work with yourself, coaches, some people now say have your own personal board to help you refine you in different areas. But to lean in to it and to really set big goals with big ideas. Really, stretch yourself and stretch the thought leadership we have and the opportunity currently and into the future.

Lisa: When you started HMG strategy group, let's talk about that a little bit. First of all, talk about the mission of HMG strategy group and when you started that. Did your dad speak into you when you were looking to do that?

Hunter: Go back a couple years, a few years earlier. I said Dad, I want to come and work on Madison Ave with you. Advertising is cool, sexy, and it's kind of fun, interesting. Certainly, that would be a great starting point at that time. It was 100 million dollar agency in the 80s. That was a pretty big number, he turned and he said no way. He said, this is a declining industry, pre social media. It's consolidating. He really didn't love it. He just did because he knew how to do it. He was good at it. He says you need to go into technology. It was kind of like the movie the graduate. Plastics. Everything was going into technology. My very first job out of college was for California Computers, ironically I do a ton of business now in California. It's probably our number 1 market in the world. Constantly back and forth up between the east coast all over the world. Northern California and Southern California as well. The next big break was 4 years later when I went out on my own to start my own little consultancy as a leadership coach. My very first client was Gideon Gartner at Gartner group at that time. Gideon was known for being the #1 analyst at Oppenheimer covering IBM. He came up with the idea, study one industry and then

dissect the business model. Let's say the deal that IBM struck with the oil industry. Then you can sell that model to all the other oil companies' across the industry. I went to Gideon and said, that's kind off fascinating, and its research down level. I think the tech platform, the tech leader, is really going to make a measurable difference today and into the future. Right about then, the world was CIO came into the scene and I became one of the first early on coaches for CIOs when I said Gideon, you need a CIO practice he says no, we're down level. I gave the idea to one of his competitors. Well, we're down level, go work with the chairman and make it happen. This was 1989-1992. Now if you look at it often, the CIO reports into the board cordially. At least on cyber but the response will shepherd the tech platform forward. If we learn anything from Facebook, Apple, Netflix, and Google. Technology is everything. Data is everything. It's the oil that makes the economy go. It's fascinating when you spend time, as much time I do at Silicon Valley. It is where the innovation is today. Where was 10 years ago? The shocker that I have on this one is my belief, if we go back 10 years from today. I was with the Facebook guys, they were saying it's all about mobile. It's all about data. Everyone looked around and go okay, that's interesting. That's exciting. You look at the fang stocks, where they were 10 years ago, the stock you could have bought all day long in Aug 2008 for 25 hours was Amazon. Amazon went across the Trillion market cap about a month ago. It's going to continue to march on and I think there's a boardroom in the world right now that it is afraid of or concerned of, who's going to come in and disrupt themselves. How can we learn from all these tech companies out there and around the world? Around leadership around the tech platform. How to love your customers both personally as well as digitally so you can drive a competitive advantage against your competition.

Lisa: You brought up an interesting point. I was just talking to Mary Hager, the CIO for Ameren a couple weeks ago. Her quote was "all roads lead to technology" and I do think that's true. Every company needs to be thinking that way, right? That's interesting about your dad. You have your dad to thank really for saying no, you need to go into technology. Were you receptive to that immediately? Or did it take a while to get on board with that?

Hunter: I was a slow developer in my 20s. As I indicated, somewhat challenged in school and studies. What I was fascinated by the potential of innovation and what one can do with rethinking the future. Rethinking the possibility but my angle was different in terms of it being processors or computers. It was about how to get people to think differently. To be more creative. Embracing technology the classic model people processing technology of embracing technology and innovation and leading leadership qualities and skills into the marketplace. So you can really define and protect core, which is important, and we do that now by looking to

ourselves. How can we disrupt our core to make it really safe and look in adjacency and completely new business models and ideas all at the same time in order to keep the company successful and healthy? A leisure company in the US, history in the US business, GE had a big idea about 10 years ago put a lot of time and money at it and it failed. The stock is 1/6 of where it was, several years ago. Really, a sorry situation. There are now reorganizing again under another CEO. Their 3rd CEO in 12 months. I think it was all about really trying to define a space where I can make a difference. One of these books about professional development, personal development. Leadership and so forth. Surrounded myself with all sorts of mentors and coaches that I thought were brilliant. The issue with coaches and mentors, often in times you outgrow them. Often times they don't have enough time to really dive into the details or the relationship to meet up your expectations. That's kind of tough. Where you read some really solid educational books about professional and self-development and hget that 360 on yourself and set some goals and try some stuff. One of the books years ago that really impressed me and I can't remember why I picked it up. Probably read it 10 times, but this is like, a young kid 25-30 years old. Scott Pecks, the road less traveled. Timeless ideals and principles. The time, it got me to the position now where right now arguably we have the largest technology independent network in NA which might mean in the world. The collective network or group of technology executives, hardware software services, numbers 6 trillion now worldwide. That, our network matters when we come up with the position of where the world is today and where it's going. I give you an example. Just completed my 5th book about a year ago. Started my 6th with Wylie my publisher. All those publisher believe in the US kind of proud of this attribute or achievement. #1 technology author for a while. This was my next new idea because back to the 10 year bracket and I think the next 10 years are going to be short, it'd be much more innovation and much more impactful in the next 5 years than the last 10. This idea, the world changed so much from 08 to 2018. I think this next 5-7 years is going to be a whole different world in terms of innovation and opportunity for people to get. The next new idea is, we're studying across the whole industry and we're getting input across all industries, all levels within it. Tech executives, c-suite. About where are they placing their bets on technology. What's going to matter in the next 18 months that's going to point them, us in the right direction for the next 7 years? My future's enterprise state 2025. Where we will be in 7 years. Where you need to place your bets right now. Who do you need to be talking to? What do you need to be working? I talk to CIOs all day long. I just talked to a CIO of 16 billion dollar company yesterday. Saying, Hunter, we really don't have someone to help us filter out. Where are the top technology opportunities and who are the top partners and vendors that we need to be working with and cut right through all of it including all of the pay to play, or vendor influence, or buying into it, kind of a model or coverage

area. I said, that's what we're working. My company. We're that neutral independent source of truth and openness and clarity and honesty.

Lisa: It's almost like a angie's list, seriously or a trip advisor right? So, you're going into your network and you're asking these questions and then you're going to aggregate that information.

Hunter: Think about at home, When you really have a pressing issue, where do you go? The doctors will say don't do this. People go to the web, they google whatever ailment it is. Then you hear all these crazy stuff then you freak out. Then you look at the remedies and you freak out when you look at the side effects of the potential remedies. It's this notion. Here's the real big ideas. When you rather much listen to an expert practitioner that just went through the experience that you went that you're going through right now. Not really an advisor. Not really a consultant. Somebody who just. At your level in your kind of industry, go into that same experience, whatever it is. Whether business or in your personal life. Isn't that a better data point.

Lisa: It's huge. Yes, I'd much rather do that.

AD: We'll take a break and we'll be back with Hunter Muller.

Lisa: So Hunter, what do you think the something extra was in your dad that made him who he was?

Hunter: What I remember of my dad Frank, he grew up in Denmark. Copenhagen. He's great grandfather was sergeant general. The government was in kind of an interesting position, right? They came to the states, immigrated, and went to Harvard as I mentioned earlier. What's really fascinating about him was he was really intensely focused on relationships. And the importance of being a sound person, a man of your word, really strong quality values of relationships. He likes to compete, he was big on yacht racing. He was a big dreamer. He loved to think big. For himself, for his family, and for his clients being in the advertising world through the 60s-70s. Grew his agency to about a 100 million building which was pretty interesting back then. The time, the big idea when he was trying to step back from the agency, he brought in a woman. Jane Moss, she was at Wells Rich Marine and she was the account executive of one the perhaps the most significant ad campaigns in the world that I could think of, at least in the NY area. I love NY. In terms of branding platform or campaign. It's still testing the time as well as all over the world. Then, it kind of was of the catalyst of getting all larger packages companies like

Pepsi and coke to develop global brands. His whole thing you're lucky to find 5 great friends. I'll give you the best coaches and experiences and teaching and fields to run in out and figure it out and play it out. He couldn't do it all for us. We'd have some really deep discussions about life in this and that. It was just 30 minute discussions. And he let us go. He let us pretty much do our own thing. With a lot of thinking big into back to a guy like Ted Turner. Ted at CNN was a big visionary developing CNN right? It's a communication platform. It was very unusual. Cable news. When we remember 70s when that whole model broke. We had some time with Ted with soundboards and circuits. I always see my dad with some of those qualities. Ted was a huge big guy, big personality. My dad had a big personality. Very passionate. Passionate about Family, Life, Sports, and his kids. That's kind of that piece. When I think about my own life what really has worked when I'm the most successful. It's really having a clear vision of where I'm at. Where I'm going. Doing that honest reflective assessment of what are my strengths and weaknesses. Who I need to surround myself to bolster those weaknesses and what are my character weaknesses or gaps in terms of areas that I need to refine or finish in order to get to the next level. My model is very complex. I can't lean on a software app or a piece of technology really. We're a network. Loosely defined technology executive network based on common interest, common trust, common belief, common ideals, and common passion around looking to make the world better and bigger and different. Where I get the most joy is helping a tech executive elevate their game. Elevate their career. Really make, not to make 1 step function changes in their careers but really help them make monumental leaps for their careers. With their current company. Team organization and set themselves up for greatness. In terms of the next opportunity. I've seen 2x, 3x, and 8x deal where tech execs have done incredibly well just networking in and around the network. That was another sage idea my dad had was the spoke of the wheel theory. If you really want, you got to give back. You're connected to a community of all levels. If you really want to be a winner. Hanging out with people that are doing things, that are excited and they're moving forward in interesting places, things, and talking about things that you're interested in. You really balance that out. You want to have some differences in the people. Diversity. If you're on the same spoke, chances are you're going to find success because you'll help each other.

Lisa: I see that in you hunter. That's exactly that quality of relationships being important. You've carried forward in what you're doing with HMG strategy group. I once heard that I can't quote who this was but I once heard the quote that you're the average of the 10 people that you hang out with. Interesting quote but it's true. It's the people you surround yourself. You know what your strengths are. Then you surround yourself with people that can help plug the holes if you

will. I see that in you. I see that you've taken that characteristic of your dad forward with HMG strategy.

Hunter: The other piece to it. If you're a leader and a hard worker and you're driven which clearly I am and have that. Believe in yourself and your qualities true people nice on the way up. It's important to take care of yourself on all levels. Physical, mental, spiritual, what you eat. That piece is probably the most important piece in the whole model. If you don't do that. Some of our greatest brightest people in the history of our country haven't had a time out because they didn't take care of themselves.

Lisa: That's an important piece. I know you're big into fitness. Talk to me a little bit about HMG adventures. Big snowboarder, snow skier.

Hunter: I love skiing. My kids love skiing. They ski a lot. I ski about 50 days a year. Mostly in New England. Sometimes out west. There's the other pieces. Find that area in your life. In your free time that really fills you up on all dimensions. And spend time in that space playing at whatever level you're at. Now in my 50s playing has different dimensions for me it's skiing out west. Skiing fast in the east. Spending time in the mountains. Talk to guys like Tim Cook. He talks about how he enjoys the mountains. I love just being in the mountains. It's relaxing kind of a separate idea. During the summer spring and the fall. The beach is great. It's nice to be in the water as well.

Lisa: There needs to be balance. Sometimes I feel like doing those things really help your creativity too though. I mean your creativity go out the roof when you do those things like what you're talking about.

Hunter: That's completely true.

Lisa: Tell me of what you think, Hunter. We've kind of touched on a lot of these things but what you feel like is the something extra that every leader needs.

Hunter: It's a vision of a better future. I just came back from London. It's truly fascinating. The world economy right now in my own opinion, is flying. I've never seen such a robust, global economy being Heathrow, London last week. And NY area where we live. On a plane every week. It's really how to make the world better and bigger and more connected. It is one idea. It can be both on personal relationships. Through digital platforms. It can be through social media

platforms. As a leader, you have to be open and ready to give back. A chunk of your time. We surround ourselves with a bunch of different causes that help our inner city kids in the 18 to 23 range. Help them get out of the ghetto or lesser manage the situation that broken homes and get into corporations so that they can get trained. Year up is one of the organizations empowers one of the organizations that we work with. Do a lot of work with all over the country. You have to attract to retain great people and we do that, you got to be really generous and nice to your people. Which is really hard because when you're the CEO of a company, the pressures and demands on you daily and weekly are different than say an employee. There's more complexities. As you're outward facing in with your customers. In my instance a global brand, global customers. Working with both end users and both companies across industry as well as tech companies across the stack. You have to really have a code of ethics on how you really work with people in a fair and open balance way.

Lisa: I agree. Organizations are made up of humans, right? Engaging with those humans in the right way is critical. They're 2 things too right.

Hunter: They're 2 things too right, One thing is we know in the bible as I think, so shall I be, right? That's one piece. It's kind of interesting. Then you go over to more corporate kind of idea if you will. The late peter, talked about culture is everything.

Lisa: I just quoted him yesterday in a talk, yes. Cultural is strategy for breakfast.

Hunter: Like my dad said, Work hard, play hard. Take care of yourself. Take care of your friends and family. Give back and have a passion. I'm really proud about probably most of my life is my 2 boys. They're so healthy and happy and strong and independent and smart. More so than I was at their age. I think it's kind of interesting the way you can learn through the generations of past long ideas and coaching and so forth and I see my kids at 13 or 15. There's travel in the world and loving life. It's just really fascinating.

Lisa: That is. That's success. It really is. So talk to me a little bit. Is there something that you're really excited about right now that you want our listening audience to know about, if so, how can they plug in to that?

Hunter: In the business space, when I think of our industry around tech and innovation. Where we are as a world. You can either be afraid of it or kind of just let it happen or you can study and try to think it through or you really can be actively, demonstratively, looking to figure out what

matters? What's significant for you in your industry, in your company, in your position in life? Whether you're a business person, a CEO, or a whether you're a person just living life, not a company. What I'm most passionate about is my media model. I said the 2nd pillar of my company. With a million impressions a week, we're beginning to build an audience that really is significant it matters in what we're doing. Researching now with the new book. Enterprise Future State 2025. The technologies and the innovations that are going to change the world over the next 7 years. We're doubling down in that area. Clicking down and really looking at it across the industry. And we are already through our early on findings we publish 3 times a week. MWF. You can go to HMGstrategy.com and sign up for that newsletter on Monday, Wednesday is the research note, Friday is the tech news digest. Passionate about that and the quality work that we're doing. We're disrupting our industry. My company, little company, it's not so little anymore, I feel like we're making a huge difference because we're really putting something out there. The founder of Gartner, Gideon and I met and he was one of my iconic inspirations I should say. I met with him three years ago and he heard about the progress that we've made. He says, Hunter I want to do a roll up and want you to be part of this and I want to go out to the valley and raise some money and do this together. I said, wow, that's really flattering. This is the godfather of our industry.

Lisa: Right, everyone subscribes to Gartner.

Hunter: Right. He's on his own for some time but to work with him. I said, I can't do that. I just think our visions are too different with the model in 2 different space. I didn't say that to him then. But, anyways, I think we took the right path. We're doing incredibly well. Stayed independent. Even to this day, it's been quite a task but I still own 100% of the company with an incredible growth trajectory. Doing over 100 experiences. 32 conferences. Probably 30 webinars. 30 dinners throughout the year. We really have a position in the marketplace and a connective network. Thousands of phone calls and hundreds of advisor calls through the year that we really are pulling together, I think the most compelling agendas in our industry around leadership. Innovation. Disruptions in a customer centric world and helping the tech execs, leaders, elevate the game into the c-suite and the boardroom in a safe and secure way. Cyber security now is so important.

Lisa: Yes it is. I would encourage our listening audiences to go to the website because there is some amazing resources out there and especially if you're wanting to grow as technologist. If you're wanting to grow as a leader. This is a great place to spend some time. Hunter thank you so much for being on the podcast today it was fun.

Hunter: Really appreciate the opportunity. It's always good to see you and looking forward to spending some time the next couple of days with you, Greg, and the tech leaders in the St. Louis community.