SUBSCRIPTION ENTREPRENEUR

HOSTED BY ERIC TURNNESSEN, FOUNDER OF memBermouse™

What Really Goes On Behind The Scenes Of A
Growing Membership Community with Rachael Dietrich

"Data doesn't lie. And the members are a very strong form of data. So, if you're a good observer, and you're good at asking questions, and good at being curious — another core value of Front Row Dads — then what comes of that curiosity is a good amount of feedback and incredible insights from your target market. So, I lean into our members on a regular basis. And that is where I get best feedback."

INTRO:

You're listening to Rachael Dietrich, my special guest on today's episode of The Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

I'm excited to share this episode with you because Rachael is the operations manager of a growing membership community called Front Row Dads.

Although their community is not limited to fathers who entrepreneurs, a large contingent of their members are. Front Row Dads offer online courses, monthly challenges, in-person retreats, and more to help these fathers become "family men with businesses" rather than "businessmen with families".

In our conversation, we explore the specific things they've done to significantly grow the community over the past 3 years.

Rachael goes into detail about their approach to:

- New member onboarding
- Community management
- Member retention
- And more

If you've ever wondered what really goes on behind the scenes of a successful membership community, this episode is for you.

And before we get started I want to mention that Rachael was introduced to us by a member of the MemberMouse community who also happens to be a Front Row Dad.

His name is Ali Jafarian. He's the founder of MemberDev, an agency that helps businesses build membership sites. He has been a guest on the podcast a couple of times and he's been a good friend of mine over the last 8 years or so.

As of the day I'm recording this, I just received an email from him about an accelerator program they're offering. He doesn't know I'm going to share this but I'll just read a few tidbits here as I think I may be of use to some of you.

So without further ado, let's get to my conversation with Rachael!

I'm your host Eric Turnnessen and this is the Subscription Entrepreneur Podcast.

Eric: Hey, Rachael, welcome to the show.

Rachael: Hey, Eric, how's it going? Happy to be here.

Eric: Thank you so much. It's my pleasure. So, have you met Ali before?

Rachael: Yup, I've met in person, I think twice. And then, one time, I actually stopped in Denver to see my best friend and he lives there. So, I picked up some plants and soil, and I dropped it off on his front door, because I know how connected to the earth he is. And I just did it as a surprise, little thing for him and his family.

Eric: Nice.

Rachael: Him and I get along really well. And even when we have calls for scoping, it usually ends up in talking about something personal, because he's just like that, he's so authentic. And that's one of my core values is just authenticity. So, I can get real deep. He's killer, met him a couple times, and I'll see him in the fall at our next retreat.

Eric: Yeah, I think like everywhere that's non-authentic is not a fun place to be.

Rachael: Yeah. I mean, authenticity is even a core value of the Front Row Dad's group.

Eric: But what does that mean to you, authenticity?

Rachael: It's suspending judgment of myself and of others. It's showing up with full expression, which full expression to me is like moving freely in a space where you're not telling yourself the story that someone's judging you.

So, if you can eliminate that story from being told to yourself, then it's likely that you'll show up to a space where you are just boldly saying what you'd like. Of course, there's an element of being considerate of others. And I think if you show up fully expressed, then usually it gives the person on the other end permission to be authentic as well. It's like a leading by example, sort of thing.

That's how we create the magic in the community is just by setting the stage for guys to show up fully with each other, suspend judgment, be authentic, be curious. Then, from there, it's just flows so organically. We just set the stage for that. And then, they do whatever they need to do. It's actually, very little managing when it comes to that part.

Eric: Beautiful. And it's such a high value plays to be doing that. Because what better interaction to bring that to the forefront, then between a parent and their child. If the parent gives himself permission to freely express and experience, the child learns that, and then there's less for them to undo later on.

Rachael: Yeah, we had this one challenge in the group, we gave the guys a scorecard. And they wrote down the things that they wanted their kids to catch them doing. So, it was basically, they created a list of behaviors they wanted to model. While we help in giving the guy's examples of ways to model behaviors, they're actually going home and doing that.

So, that was really profound challenge that we gave the guys. They came back and they're like, "I was sitting down meditating, and it's because I want my kid to find themselves in a place when they're stressed, they just sit down and sit with themselves. And sure enough, as I was meditating, my kid came over and just sat in my lap and was quiet with me." I was like, "My gosh, it's working. It really works." That's great.

Eric: How do you come up with the challenges?

Rachael: The challenges, we try to tap into the community first. So, we'll pull. Jon, he's such an ideator, that he'll come up with a handful of ideas for challenges, and then we'll pull the group on what interests them most. We try and have it associated with the pillar of the month. We have six pillars in our group. And if it's, say, like the month of vibrant health, then we'll try to have a challenge that's associated with that.

So, we'll pull to the group, "Hey, guys, do you want to do like a 30-day daily sweat and sweat everyday sort of thing? Or do you want to do a fast challenge, like a quick one, a two-day fast, 24-hour fast, something like that." And the guys will give feedback. We'll just run with one of them. But the beauty is that, we can always if we sway in the direction of one challenge, we'll just keep the other challenge in our back pocket and try it again. We're so big on experimenting, never afraid to do something once and then pivot and try different challenge.

Eric: So, it sounds like a big component of the community is, you have these different styles of how you engage with the dad. So, there's stuff where they get together physically. There's stuff where you do stuff online. There's tasks or challenges that they're given to do at home.

Rachael: Yeah, that's really the gist of it, live events. So, in-person, and this has changed over time too. I think when it first started, it actually started in 2016 with an in-person retreat, and it was just a handful of guys. I think it was about somewhere between 16 and 20, like Jon's closest friends' kind of thing.

And then, I think one of the guys was like, "This could be something, how can we continue these conversations outside of this event?" And I think that's where, and I wasn't with the community at this time, but I think that's where Jon's brain went to, "Okay, we're going to need a CRM. We're going to need a Facebook group, something to host communications, both to the member and between members." It went from in-person events to having a Facebook community. And then, you introduced part of the tech stack, like being able to collect payments and whatnot.

And then, when I came on, we made it a little more complex. And we're always ebbing and flowing right from simplicity to complexity. But we made a little more complex by adding in Telegram chat threads, by closing the open Facebook group, and only having a private Facebook group. I think we'll get into the membership community that we created.

But at the end of the day, it's those events. And then, communication channels, whether it's Facebook or Telegram. Those are really the two main spaces that the members communicate, and we've got all of our internal ways of managing those systems.

Eric: And then, they continue the thread and engage with the material on their own in between those things.

Rachael: Yeah, so there's a resource library that anyone can go to and access past event content. And then, the Telegram thread, those conversations live on, so they could totally scroll back through.

Eric: Do you see any similarities in terms of how recent a data is? Do you get a lot of dads who are like just a new dad, for the first-time dads whose kids are a certain age? Or maybe, it's their second kid or et cetera, maybe later? Is there some pattern in terms of who you're seeing being drawn to this?

Rachael: There's not in terms of kids ages, number of kids. I wouldn't say, and I have all the data. I wouldn't say that there's a trend there. There is a trend though, and the type of dad, we do promote pretty intensely to the kind of dad that is a hard charging entrepreneur.

So, some guy who identifies as being a businessman with a family and not necessarily a family man with the business. That's our tagline. And so, I think that saying alone really resonates with the guys that we want attracted to our tribe. Because once they get into the group, they all share that. They are all trying to move from this idea of being a businessman to being a family man, and putting family first and having that as the common thread, totally outweighs any other common thread.

I think having someone really aged kids or being at a similar point in your professional career with another dad, definitely helps conversations that feel more relatable, I guess. But the real

common thread that all the guys have is, they're just trying to show up better for their families while sustaining a thriving business, but not at the sake of their families.

Eric: Which I imagine has a lot of challenges to it.

Rachael: Yeah, one challenge that we see in attracting this type of guy is that, when they get into the group, they got here because they're excited about finding like-minded dads, who are also struggling with putting family first. And so, it's been a huge, once a challenge, but opportunity to make sure that as soon as they get into the community, they're getting connected to another member.

And they're having the conversations that they don't just have at a backyard barbecue, because if they're not, it is oftentimes that they will leave to spend their time in another community or they will leave because this is in everyone, of course, but perhaps they leave because they're getting sucked back in to that work grind.

So, by having pillars and by having core values, and by creating a space where we all share the same vision or all these dads share the same vision. It's helping to keep them aligned with what matters most. But yeah, big challenge for the team is like making sure they get connected. And then, knowing when it's time to maybe say goodbye because... And no community, you just keep everyone always.

So, it's also having a positive offboarding and asking the guy the right questions as he's leaving, because some guys have said, "My work is getting too busy. And I would just gently push back with like..." But how can we support that for you? How can we help to maybe reframe? Or how can we get you connected to someone who's having a very positive work life balance experience that could shed some light on how you could manage that better.

So, those are some challenges that we face as a team, and that I think our members face coming in. They're not getting connected. They might leave in default back to working a bunch.

Eric: I think that's such a powerful area to focus on. And I think, it really applies to any community. Ultimately, I think people are in it for the connection. They want to find like-minded people engage. And so, I feel like when you're putting a lot of attention and effort on making that happen as soon as possible, that is likely a critical part of the success.

And also, the sooner somebody has that experience of connection, the more likely they are to share it with somebody else, and that they've had that good experience, which then is only going to increase membership of like-minded people.

Rachael: Totally. Yeah, or the number of members who come in because they're referred by other members outweighs members coming in through other channels like the website or podcast gets quite a few guys interested, actually. But it turns out, if you're looking at the guys

who are staying, and you're looking at the guys who are going, it's oftentimes we find in this community that the guys who stick came in, because they knew another member.

So, they come in with that relationship already. And then, yeah, it's up to our team to have a solid onboarding process. But one that doesn't give them too much information upfront, like I remember, when I first came on, I was so excited. And I think, I over communicated to our community about events. I think our systems just shoved a lot of information into the onboarding process for our new members.

And what we found was, I got this feedback from one member specifically, when he left without the exit survey and was like, "I felt like you were just trying to give me too much. And I didn't have the time or bandwidth to go through it. And so, I felt like I was missing something," because it can't be the case that you over communicate to your members.

And we found that it seemed like almost as bad to under communicate as it was to over communicate, because when you ever communicate a message or content, and people don't have time to digest it, then they feel like they're missing it, not getting the value from the community. And then, they could leave.

So, after that feedback, we definitely dialed in some communications. And that's something we play with on a monthly basis, changing up our communication styles. And we just have to pay attention to the data and what people are clicking on and guys are engaging with.

Eric: Can we go into maybe just a little bit lower-level detail on that, because I know that this is an area that everyone has to do in an online businesses, find this balance in the appropriate level of communication. So, some way that maybe something that you can share that might be helpful, how did you find that balance? Like in terms of particulars, what has worked for you better?

Rachael: We started off, when I came on and June of 2019, we introduced definitely more content, more communications, and installed things like a postcard that went out, and a monthly newsletter, and some content like that. But what we did to make sure we had a good pulse on what guys were liking and what they didn't like is, we did this really detailed member survey.

And Jon and I spent hours refining this survey, and trying to make it as simple and user-friendly for our members to take it, even gave them the option to just call me, or click. I'd rather have Rachael call me, do you know how to do this over the phone? But it was questions like, "Are you receiving the postcard?" And the answer would be like, "Yes, I love it. Yes, I could do without it, though. No, I'm not receiving it, and that's okay. And then, no, but I'd like to."

And so, basically, anyway, someone answered that. It'd be able to get the message across to us of the effectiveness of that communication tool. It turned out that we did away with postcards,

because most guys were like, "Yup, I'm getting it, it looks great. But I don't think it's necessary." That kind of thing. So, that's an example.

Eric: Which is great for that particular example too, because then that saves you money to send them out.

Rachael: Right. That survey, we've been doing that each year. And then, each year we get to go back and change that survey because we're always introducing new tools and communication channels. So, we introduced the Telegram threads as a means of our guy's communicating over topics specific stuff. We were able to say like, "Do you have Telegram downloaded? Are you a big tech person? Do you enjoy being on Telegram? Or is it just another software that you have to learn? Or is it just another tool you have to learn?"

Because some of the guys in our group, they have their own tech stacks. It's hard for them to get traction with another app, another tool, or trying to be on their phone less because they want to be with family more. So, we have to get a good read on our guys of, "Are you liking Telegram? Is it better than Facebook?" Because it's a little more dedicated. Facebook can be like a junk drawer with their different channels to go down.

Eric: It's like going to the mall. It's like you have your restaurant you like in the mall. But in order to get there, you have to be in the mall.

Rachael: Right, yes, and all the stands down the center reaching for your attention.

Eric: So, you mentioned that you put a lot of focus on the initial goal of getting people to be connected as quickly as possible. What or do you feel are the two most effective things that help you to get them quickly as connected as possible when they're getting on boarded?

Rachael: Yeah, this is something that we've played around with. I think what Jon and I have landed on, through getting lots of feedback from the guys is an email series that each email is short. It's got a call to action in it. It's clear and each email gets stripped. I mean, for us it's about a day apart. And that's their first week. And then, in their first two weeks, we have found it to be essential that they get to talk to another member.

So, what we did is, we set up a new member orientation call once a month, so that at any point if someone joining during the month, they're getting that contact through the new member orientation to other members within 30 days, of course. So, email series with clear calls to action, the new member orientation. And then, this has most recently proved to be highly effective, is a new member chat thread.

So, as soon as they get into the group, it's not like, "Welcome to the group. Here's the Facebook group, or here's the Telegram threads with hundreds of guys in it." It's a welcome thread that guys get cycled in and out of, when they joined, and then 60 days later, they're removed. But they have that in common. So, not only have they joined because they want to be around like-

minded guys, and they want to be family men with businesses posted with the other. They are also surrounded by guys on a similar timeline of the customer journey.

Eric: That's a great idea. I love that idea.

Rachael: Yeah, so aside from that, one thing that I think the guys appreciate, based on the responses I get is, right when they join, we've set up an automation through text line, which is our texting service that takes their phone number from when they sign up, and it sends them a message from me. And the way I like to write even in text is the way I like to talk.

So, when they receive this message, it feels personal. And it's like holler at me, if you need anything, I give them that permission to ask me something, write that in there. Because I think when guys are signing up for our membership, they've got their phone handy, and it's nice. But immediately when they sign up, it's like, "Oh, here's my connection to a human." And I tell them, I'm like, "If you send me a message back, I will get it, I'm a real person."

So, usually guys will respond. And like, "Welcome to the community, blah, blah, blah." And they're like, "Thank you so much, excited to get going." Those seem to be the key parts of the onboarding sequence for sure.

Eric: For a number of reasons, I can see why that's very successful. Because I mean, for certainly one, that's a very uncommon experience in a good way. You're not going to get that level of care received when you sign up for things. So, I feel like that certainly is going to have a positive impact on retention and people feeling like they understand what they're doing. They're feeling comfortable.

So, a question I do have is, how did you end up doing this? I mean, you seem to have a very comfortable approach and vision to organizing these things. Is it something that you did before you with Front Row Dad's in some capacity?

Rachael: No. Can I tell the story about how I got involved with Front Row Dad? Because I think that a magical segue into why it's all worked so well for us. So, I started my professional career in the fitness industry, that worked really well for me. And I felt like I was in my zone of genius, because I had the opportunity to as a personal trainer, and I worked in rehab a bit, had the opportunity to manipulate and experiment with the physical body, like my clients.

And so, their body was the system that I got to work with. The system that I got to refine their biomechanics and whatnot. So, when I met Jon at a lifetime fitness, he comes up to me, he comes up because he had just seen an interaction that I had with another member. And he acknowledged me and shared his admiration for how I handled that member. And he's like, he just jumps right into, "Hey, I have some work that needs to be done. And I really like your energy and your personality. And if you got a couple of hours to spare this Friday, come on over and we'll see what we can create."

And it started off packing welcome boxes. But it very quickly moved into a full-time position when the gym shut down for COVID. And then, he took me on full-time, and he gave me more account accesses. He led me into active campaigns. I was poking around the CRM. And then, I realized just to make the segue from the fitness industry is that, I enjoyed and I still enjoy what I do with Front Row Dads, because it's really similar in essence to experimenting with biomechanics as a system, because now my system is the community.

And it's just like, "Okay, I went from working one on one with someone to create a space where they can work on their physical, mental and emotional health." And now, I'm just doing that on a bigger scale with our members. So, I'm helping to create the space where members can improve their physical, mental and emotional health. And that in turn impacts their families.

So, it feels like there's a great deal of continuity between my involvement with the fitness industry and where I'm at now. Because at the end of the day, I'm just building and refining a system, and I've loved it.

Eric: Yeah, it's a great way to look at it. So, it's like, in a physical body, you recognize where tension is being held and what needs to be released. It reminds me how you talked about earlier how one of the first things you needed to do in order to improve your systems is, putting things in place to receive appropriate feedback. How are you going to hear where the tightness is are where the things aren't flowing? And there's only one place to get that from. A lot of people try to take a shortcut and make assumptions.

Rachael: Yup.

Eric: But only the members can really tell you.

Rachael: Right. Data doesn't lie, and the members are a very strong form of data. So, just like clients and personal training, if you're a good observer, and you're good at asking questions, and good at being curious, another core value, Front Row Dads, then what comes of that curiosity is a good amount of feedback and incredible insights from your target market.

So, I lean into our members on a regular basis. And that is where I get best feedback. Of course, right, from them, because we're also running extremely successful businesses. And what I've learned most through being part of this group is that, I don't have to reinvent the wheel, because our guys are out there doing big things. And we can just model that and tweak it to be in alignment with the Front Row Dad's vision and values. No, we don't have to reinvent the wheel.

Eric: Also, go into fitness metaphor, I think a lot of times, it's similar business. People have this vision of where they want to be. They have this poster on the wall, "Oh, I want to look like that. I want to be like that." Now, when it comes down to it, not everybody recognizes that it's a journey of steps each day, taken each day. It's not like, you show up to the gym, you pay your fitness instructor, you go a few times, and then you've reached your goal.

So, in terms of, we're talking now, in terms of a bird's eye view, looking back all this accomplishment, but it sounds like you're revisiting this stuff on a weekly or maybe daily basis to accomplish the goal, right?

Rachael: Yeah, it's also important to revisit what you've created and where you've had success. Because in our experience, if we get too fixated on what's new, and we're always looking ahead, we forget what's true, what has been proven effective.

And so, yeah, reliving the growing pains of like a transition to Mighty Networks is really important. Because perhaps in the future, there will be another pivot in our tech stack. And we just need to be mindful of what worked and what didn't. So, yeah, we're oftentimes reflecting and looking at the data. And that seems to be really helpful.

Eric: So, since we're on the topic of the tech stack, we spoke earlier about this, I mentioned you were using Mighty Networks, some different cart tools, Stripe, SamCart, ThriveCart, because there was some processing fee with Mighty Networks that you could bypass using those things. But then, there was some limitations with that, that you discovered. So, can you talk about that a little bit?

Rachael: Yeah, I guess the limitation. And by the way, Mighty Networks is a great platform. And that's why we originally got involved with it, because it seemed to capture the tools that we needed in one place, taking payments, member profiles, had the ability to have an online chat space and activity feed.

It was like, the perfect environment at the time for us, because we wanted to move away from Facebook. We wanted to eliminate SamCart and ThriveCart. So, it worked for us at that point. And then, fast forward, I think it was over the course of six months, we were unsuccessful in our ability to get traction with the members and their engagement with Mighty Network.

So, what I mean by that is, guys we're still posting in the Facebook group, because we didn't close it down. So, we could observe where guys are engaging most. Actually, we didn't close down at first. When we did close it down, we just still weren't getting lift off in Mighty Networks in terms of engagement and dialogue.

And even when we posted about upcoming events in there, we just weren't getting good event turnout. And then, when we talk to a few guys, we realized they just don't want to learn, like Facebook is so familiar. They don't want to learn a whole new platform. So, there's a big limitation. They're not getting traction.

And then, from an operation standpoint, Mighty Networks stopped being a good fit. When our guys were expressing all these desires for customizations, like can my member profile... Mighty Networks might have advanced to this point now, but when we were with them, member profile wasn't super robust or wasn't robust in the way that we wanted it to be, I guess.

So, we have the certain level of customization that we wanted. And we even reached out to them. And we're like, "Hey, could you add this feature?" But sometimes that works. And sometimes, that doesn't. So, when we realized that we wanted a very custom site, and our guys were hungry for more customization. That's when we realized we needed to pivot.

That took a lot to migrate because we had only just moved into the Mighty Network space six months prior. So, now you're asking your members to make another big migration. And you'll lose guys at each point. We moved away from Mighty Networks. We couldn't move their payment automatically.

So, when the Mighty Network subscription ended, if we didn't capture or renew someone to another cart, which ended up being MemberMouse, we lost them, if we weren't able to get in touch with them. I think Mighty Network is a good fit for a lot of communities, it just stopped being a fit for us.

Eric: It's definitely the interesting thing with technology. It's something that a lot of people can be unprepared for, about how much it plays a role. And this whole idea of listening and checking in over time, what works at one point for a number of months for a number of years may stop working at some point. And if you're listening and pay attention, you will naturally ask the question, "Okay, is this a big enough problem where we have to make a change?"

And the thing is, when you have these growing pains as a business with success, you have all these scaling challenges. And as soon as you have numbers involved, it's harder to turn that like you talked about, you lose people. It's just a natural aspect of having a large group of people. I'm visualizing in my head like herding sheep, if you've got a big flock of sheep, yeah, you have to move them maybe one or tool wander away. It's just part of the situation.

Rachael: And as the herd of sheep size changes, so changes your course in your tech stack. We went from, when I came on, we were at 70 members, and having a WordPress website, Facebook group and active campaign worked. And then, we doubled in size in under a year, so the 140 members is when we got involved with Mighty Networks, because our group diversified.

Our guys stopped being the same kind of guy. So, the needs of our guys diversified as our guy, whoever started that makes sense. And then, now we're at when we move to MemberDev and MemberMouse was at about 180, I think closer to 200 members. And maybe, 50 to 100 members from now, we're going to have another pivot in our tech stack.

I definitely see something in our future with utilizing forums like online forums, because Telegram, you can't automate. Telegram is a pretty private, encrypted space, so there's some things you just can't automate using like Zapier, some API. So, when we get to the three 500 members, it doesn't make sense to have someone working full-time like adding and removing people from the Telegram group. So, we pivot there, I'm sure.

Eric: How did you take to getting involved in all this technology stuff? Because it seems like given what you said, your background was in fitness, so you weren't... At the time of starting with the Front Row Dad's familiar with CRMs, and membership solutions and payment processors and carts, and all this stuff.

Rachael: Yeah, I think my interest in tech comes from my interest in productivity. Obviously, has the ability to automate, to create efficiencies. And I didn't game growing up, I was a sports person. I really wasn't into technology growing up, even through college wasn't into tech. But I think I got really interested in tech when I became remote, partly because you have to. That's what my job needed for me.

But also, because tech is so incredible. And its ability to get you to where you want to be faster. And there are some struggles that come with that when it comes to building a community. Just because there's this new tech tool, you have to be very mindful of how it might affect the quality of, and authenticity of the conversations being had like you don't want the space to feel automated. You don't want your members only receiving communications that are like a mass email communication.

So, I like tech, and I got into it more and more, because I was realizing that it can help us to scale. And it can help me to help Jon grow this mission quicker. We just have to be mindful of maintaining the quality of the group as we grow.

Eric: Yeah, it's really another member of the community in a sense, because in order for us to grow, there's increasing amounts of work to be done to support any community. As the numbers of members grow, you need more people to make food, more people to do the farming, all this stuff. And it's the same with a growing company, there are more tasks that need to be done as the numbers grow. And technology fulfills that role.

So, as entrepreneurs, we, I think, at least for my journey, it was always about keeping an eye out for when it's time for me to pivot my role, to relinquish responsibility for something I'm doing either hire a person or hire a technology to take it over. And there's a lot of practical ways to approach that in terms of, okay, what's the cost and what's really needed. But I think, anybody doing an online business has to be willing to hire technology, interview technology, think of it as a part of HR in a sense.

Rachael: And we're experiencing that right now, where my task load has become so swelled. Once I've built the system, I'm now maintaining it, which isn't necessarily keeping me in my zone of genius to just be running an SOP, running a playbook. And so, we've actually just brought on an admin assistant to take over some of those playbooks.

And, yeah, there's definitely that growing pain, which is a beautiful growing pain to have, because it just means we get to expand the team and learn about new texts. But yeah, I'm

really excited to bring on this admin assistant, and then see what new space is created for me to continue evolving into.

Eric: So, you guys have a vision for where you want things to be in a year or two years from now?

Rachael: When it comes to the number of members, I'd say, that's probably our most important metric. We are at 260 members now. And by the end of this year, we'd like to see ourselves at 350. And then, with the updates of some pieces in our sales funnel, we're making the assumption that in two years.

We could be at double that because of updates we're going to have this year, because of a new, all-inclusive event we're putting on at the end of this year for members and non-members. There's some things in the works that we believe are going to get us to 350 at the end of this year, for sure. And then, double that next year. That's the vision.

Eric: Given that you mentioned that referral is such a strong channel for new members for you, are there specific techniques you have for encouraging and empowering your members to do that?

Rachael: Yup, absolutely. And this is something that's still evolving over time. Because I think on a weekly basis, I get a message from a member that says, "Hey, I have this friend, how can I connect him?" And I'm paying attention to who that's coming from. I'm paying attention to what their friend already knows, or doesn't know about Front Row Dad. And that helps us to develop the channels that we have for a guy to refer another guy.

So, one of the main things that we do, when we host big events like our half day summit, that happens six times a year, an online event, we give our level two and level three members the ability to bring a guest. And we make that process very simple. It's a form. It's an invite a friend form, and it's, put your name here, what's your name, what's the friend that you're looking to bring in, and what's their email.

And then, that friend gets a personalized email that includes the members name, because it gets mapped over from the form. It's like, "Hey, your buddy, Matt said you might be a good fit for this event. Here's what the event is about, here's a little about us. And here's how to get registered." And so, we bring in quite a few new guys into the space through being a guest at an event. That's one way.

And then, another way is that, we've actually created a personalized referral link on our membership dashboard. So, when a guy goes into their account, on the homepage, they see a link that says, "Invite a friend." And right above that link is a leaderboard with some stats. So, it's like I think a lot of our guys, or number guys, and they're competitive. And they want to see their name up there.

So, I'm sure that link is shot out to many friends. And so, that link takes you to a page and on that page is a personalized video from our founder, Jon Vroman. And he shares a little bit about our events, a little bit about our brotherhood, and he invites the person seeing it to our next event, then he also includes membership options.

And then, I need to edit the page a little bit to include one of our podcast episodes that talks about what is Front Row Dad's, because what we find is that, when a guy wants to get his friend involved, that friend could be at a couple of different stages in his level of interest. He could be at the stage where he's like, he's ready, he's pumped, he's heard it enough times from his friend that he just wants to dive in. Okay, boom, he needs a join link.

There's the other kind of friend that has never heard about Front Row Dad's. He's maybe inundated with all the communities, he's a part of. And he's perhaps in a place where he's has to be more selective about where he puts his time. And so, he wants to learn more about front row dad's through like a free method, before committing to the membership community.

And in that case, we're going to offer the page to point them in the direction of a podcast episode. They could just listen to and hear testimonials from current members. So, that's the two major ways that referral link. And then, educating our current members on how to invite guys into the group.

That's actually, the key is giving them the copy, giving them something to say, giving them the exact location of where to plug a friend in. In the case of inviting them to an event, it's like sending them an email that says like, "Here's your invite link. Here's what you can do with it. And here's how you can pitch Front Row Dad."

Eric: That's something else I wanted to ask you about, which I thought was really good idea that you guys do, and I don't hear about a lot of people doing this. Is your exit process, what are the things that you do when... You called it off boarding. And it seemed like you indicated that there was a way that you might perceive that, "Oh, this person is not a right fit." And you may decide as the community to suggest that maybe this isn't the right fit. Did I hear that right or no?

Rachael: Most of that, yup. I would say, there's no strategy from our teams. And removing someone from the group, they'd have to be proactive in leaving. It's just a difference of say, when it comes to the opportunity, we get to off board someone.

There's two ways we could go with it. I could converse with Jon and we could see that member's previous engagements with the community. We could ask them some questions on why they're leaving. And it might lead us to pushing back on them a little bit more and trying to do a save, trying to save them.

And then, I think there's also a moment where we have to realize that they might not have been a good fit for the group. And what that looks like is, if they come into the group, and they're just looking to take, take, take, maybe they have ego coming into a call. There's a certain kind of member that we want to attract. And there's a certain kind of member that maybe, we're not looking to attract. And we're very open about it.

We have it on our page, who's not a good fit for this group, and who is. And guys who have a big ego and who come in and who are not really open to listening deeply. And sharing from experience just might not do well. So, therefore, we might try a little less to save them because we accept that it's okay that this just isn't the group for them.

Because the two main things that make you successful as a member in this group is, showing up for others when they're getting their ass kicked. Because when you're getting your ass kicked, you would hope that someone shows up for you. So, it's a give and take, but it's taking just as much as you're contributing.

So, if someone tips the scale on the take, take, take, and they're just constantly sending us feedback about how the community can be better, but maybe they're not leaning into what's good about the group as much, that might be an indicator that we should part ways.

Eric: That makes sense. And ultimately, I think all the members who are there are, in a sense, relying on your judgment to do that and maintain the container that everybody is in. And it's a delicate balance. But ultimately, that's part of the offering, especially when you are creating a container for people to have such transformative experiences, and maybe share things that they're not used to sharing or feels uncomfortable. It requires a safe container. And you need to be sure that you can guarantee that as much as possible for the members.

Rachael: Yeah, and a big way that we do this, the big way that we set the tone or set this container is, we've outlined what we call our ethos of engagement. So, this is different than pillars, different than our core values. It's more so language that we share with the guys on a routine basis of how we want them to show up for each other. Can I share them with you? Because these are pretty awesome.

The first one is, you do you, transparency leads to transformation. No time for BS, let the drawbridge down. And by the way, we say these at every event at the beginning of the event to set the tone. And then, second one is, speak up, share more than usual. If something's on your heart, just say it, don't hide behind humility.

Third one is, face your fears, address that which you most want to avoid. Next one is, hold space, more questions, less prescriptions, listen deeply and suspend judgment. And then, no unsolicited advice. This one is really important, share from personal experience and/or the experiences of others. Because a quick short story on that, we had a member some time ago, do some self-promotion in the Facebook group.

And you can tell that it's not well received from the community, when there's no engagement whatsoever. There's no likes, there's no comments. So, when we see something like that, it's a red flag. And we'll address it with the member. But it's also a really good indication that our members aren't enjoying this engagement from these other members.

So, we definitely stress, no unsolicited advice. The sixth one is 100% confidential, nothing's ever repeated, every conversation is private. And then, the seventh is, yes, and instead of saying but, be real, not right, respectfully add to the combo. And then, the last one is, own the experience. The outcome is co-created based on how everyone chooses to show up, step up and speak up.

So, this really like you have a member read this at the top of events. It all snowballs from there. The members dive in deep, once that tone is set. Once they're given this certain level of permission to face your fears, once they know it's a safe space because we've stressed that everything is confidential.

So, I think every community should have some form of this ethos of engagement document that they are regularly inserting the verbiage into different communication channels and emails.

Eric: They're very powerful list. And I think, you could spend a whole podcast just talking about that. Do you guys have one where you talk about that list?

Rachael: Yeah. So, the Front Row Dad's podcast is a thing. And that is definitely where a lot of dads get interested in our group, because Jon Vroman is the host, and he brings on members, he brings on experts in their space, and the conversation is always around how have you been successful in being a family man first? So, that podcast is very powerful. And he has such a strong ability. Jon does to integrate our community's values and ethos into the conversation, which is really cool.

Eric: I wanted to ask you two more things. One, you mentioned earlier in the conversation, how you offer your onboarding process that you have existing members, talk to new members, is that some sort of volunteer basis for members to say, or any of our members interested in playing this role?

Rachael: Yup. So, Matt Sprang, leads our new member orientations. And when he gets exposed to new members through that call, he has a volunteer for that con. He always positioned himself as a member too, not just like someone who's leading this call, but he'll always suggest like, "Hey, guys, you can catch up with me after if you have questions. Or if you just want to talk with someone, I'm a member, and I want to chat with you."

And so, we've got a handful of members who have raised their hand and have said, "I want to be a part of helping guys to get connected." And so, when it comes to the onboarding process, we have about four members who have been with us for probably like, around three years that

are in the new member spaces, like the Telegram thread. Some of the guys come on the orientation call.

So, the new members are seeing veterans and they're hearing from veterans talk about their experience and talk about what made their onboarding experience successful. Yeah, we've got a lot of guys who are ready to see this thing blow up. And that is what is so magical about this community is, if we don't have to put all this pressure on the small team that we have to create and evolve. We just have to tap into our members, and give them a space to step up. A lot of these guys, they want to lead, want to be leaders, and they want to see it grow, and they're willing. And so, I'm very grateful to them for that.

Eric: Yeah, I'm certainly, grateful that the organization exists. I am not a father myself, but I could certainly see the value and benefit of having an organization that helps fathers really be there for their children, because they are as the bumper sticker goes the future, the better that they're cared for and supported. That only means good things. I definitely hope that you achieve your goals consistently. And you have more and more dads coming on board.

Okay, and final question as we wrap up here, kind of going back to the entrepreneur, I really appreciate you sharing the details about the organization itself, because it's really cool to hear about it. And I'm sure a lot of people will appreciate that and find it interesting.

Going back to the kind of entrepreneurship side, given the experience you've had in running a membership business in a way for the past, I can't do the math in my head, how many years?

Rachael: About three and a half.

Eric: Okay. Do you have any advice for people who might be starting a journey thinking about a membership site, just some key lessons that you've learned or something maybe you wish you knew when you started this back then?

Rachael: Yeah, and I actually, have the opportunity currently to start from the ground up with another company that's looking to create a membership community. So, it's really cool, because I'm actually in this space where I can apply things and what I've learned.

And I think the key is to pour into a nucleus of people like a core group, like with Front Row Dad's, it was those group of guys at the retreat that Jon just poured into those guys, and they brought their friends in, it was all very organic. So, I think the key is not to rush into scaling. It's not to rush into having the full tech stack in advance, having the tech stack that will suit a 300-person community right away.

I suppose, if you're more of an expert than me in this space, because I wouldn't identify as an expert, then maybe you can get ahead of it in that way. But I would just encourage someone just getting started to identify the people who want to be a part of your vision and who care about the vision and work through them, lean into them.

And then, the technology becomes important as you grow and as you need to start automating, and offloading and freeing up your time. But I think you can do that as you grow. I don't know that we're invest in technology right out of the gate. I don't know that you do. I mean, we certainly didn't. And we're here now, and we're still evolving. So, yeah, that would be my recommendation, pour into your nucleus, your core people who care.

Eric: On that second point you made, I would say, yes, that is an accurate reflection. I've seen people basically do the analysis-paralysis thing, spend way too much time investing in too much too soon, where it's not necessary. It's better just to take the next step.

Rachael: Right. And whenever you're taking the next step, just making sure that you're looking back and doing a bit of reflection on the analytics of what worked and what didn't, and in its most simplest form, because when you try to get into building some crazy tech stack right out of the gate, I think it's possible to make a lot of assumptions about what is going to work.

Eric: And then, you get attached to them, because you put so much work into it.

Rachael: Yeah, or you saw some other big company do it, and you're like, "Oh, this is definitely going to work for us because this person's community did it." But guess what? That community's avatar is probably different than yours, the person they're attracting is probably different than yours, could be more of like, they might have had more money going into that adventure than you did.

And I just think not getting ahead of yourself, trying to remain organic with it all, pouring into the people who care. And then, doing a good amount of research, though I think is healthy. When you want to get interested in tech stacks, like reading up on it, doing a demo, seeing who else is using it, that's for sure been helpful with us. I think we did that to Mighty Networks without enough research.

Eric: There's also a good point that you made when talking about Mighty Networks is, a tool is only the right tool, if you have the situation that requires that tool. So, Mighty Networks, I know people who use it, that's a perfect tool for their business because they listened to their customer, they determined their customer avatar, and that Mighty Network supplied the correct answer for them.

So, it really goes back to your point that you've made a number of times is, how important it is to listen to what our members are saying because we're their ambassadors, ultimately. We should be listening and responding to what they're saying in terms of how we provide them with what they need. Because when we do that, they become the ambassador or evangelists. They evangelize stuff for us themselves, just because they have a great experience, and they're being heard.

Rachael: One thing that we didn't have in our first year, or even into our second year of the community existing were frameworks like core values, the pillars. We had some, they've evolved over time. We didn't have the ethos of engagement. And now that we do, those frameworks serve as a filter for everything we do.

So, yes, we're asking our members for feedback, we're surveying, we're modeling other companies that are doing certain parts of our system well. But most importantly, when it comes to taking an idea from being an idea to integrating it, however you want to evolve your community.

It's critical now that we are running this idea through our frameworks and making sure that it supports our core values. For example, if we wanted to build out online forums, we'd ask ourselves, does this encourage a guy to be curious? Wouldn't encourage our members to have authenticity? Have forums have been successful in creating a space where members can feel vulnerable? Or maybe not so much, because it's still an online thing. And maybe, that vulnerability is best had and an in-person event. So, maybe, we don't pursue the online forum out of respect for our core value of authenticity. And maybe, we try and drive another in-person event into our schedule.

So, having those frameworks, and you don't have to have them right away, because I actually think they evolve as your membership community evolves. And then, you hopefully, arrive at a point like we did, where our core values they're dialed in.

And when we speak about them at our events, everyone on the screen is glued to the camera as someone speaking it because it resonates with them, because we've taken the time to ask our guys, as we're drafting up, for example, like a core value, we bounce it off of a couple of guys and say, "Hey, does this resonate with you? Does this accurately represent the value that our group should be demonstrating?" And so, having those frameworks also really helps to filter ideas and whatnot?

Eric: Yeah, that's a great point. It makes me think of giving your company a personality, so that you can more easily identify with it yourself. And also, people can more easily identify with it. But yeah, that's a super useful tool. Last question, do you know this one? Something has changed within me, something is not the same. I'm through with playing by the rules of someone else's game. You know this one?

Rachael: Yeah, what is it?

Eric: You need to listen to that. It's Defying Gravity from the Broadway show Wicked, but it's the same woman who sings, who's Elsa's voice.

Rachael: No.

Eric: Yeah, it's a great song. And the message is great. I feel like you'll cry when you listen to it, Defying Gravity.

Rachael: Idina Menzel is perfect for that role. Oh, that's cool.

Eric: I have a tip for you, too, Rachael. This hopefully, will save you some time and energy in the future. Do you know like the user agreement that you read out on the show? Like the ethos community agreement?

Rachael: Oh, yes.

Eric: That is a great email to send, and the closing phase of a launch where you basically say, "Would you sign this? Or would you agree to this?" And you just take that and you list everything out. And at the end, you say, "If you resonate with what we're about to hear, we'd love to have you in the Front Row Dad's community, here's where you can go to complete your enrollment." And you don't have to write a whole new email. It's already written.

Rachael: Yup, we need someone with the mind that... Whatever mind that idea just came from, we need someone like that who can...

Eric: And can't talk or crazy.

Rachael: I just mean, like, it's so easy for me to get caught up in the operations that what an awesome opportunity that is right there to repurpose that content in the way you just said, that's killer. I love that.

Eric: And also, amazing mind. A mind that would rather not have to write all a lot of email from scratch.

Rachael: Man, that's so good. I definitely, don't use the ethos as much externally to promote and recruit as I do internally. So, yeah, we actually have a really full waitlist right now. I'll go and write up my next email, and I'll incorporate that in, and that's really sweet.

Eric: Awesome. I really appreciate you coming on and sharing all this stuff. It's been great. As we wrap up here, can you just share real quick where people can learn more about Front Row Dads and how they can engage with you?

Rachael: Best way to learn more about Front Row Dad is probably, to get plugged into the podcast. So, you can find that on Apple podcast, or Spotify, at Front Row Dad podcast. And there's also the website, frontrowdads.com that will share a bit about our membership community.

And then, to stay connected with me, I would just say, plugging into Front Row Dads or plugging anyone in the Front Row Dads will in some way, stay connected to me. It's where I'm pouring

most of my energy into, and I want nothing more than to just grow this community. And so, if someone getting involved with it, gets involved with what I'm creating. So, hope that helps.

Eric: Perfect. You are doing a great job with that, not only do the numbers say so. But also, just from the people that I know who are members of Front Row Dad's, and talk about, and share the great work that you're doing. So, keep it up.

Rachael: Thanks, Eric.

Eric: You're welcome. And I really appreciate you taking the time to speak with me.

Rachael: This was great. I love talking about this group.

OUTRO:

Thank you so much for listening to my entire conversation with Rachael.

I hope you're walking away with some valuable ideas and insights you can use to start or grow your membership site.

Many thanks to Rachael for coming on the show and sharing so freely from her experience.

To get links to all the resources we talked about in this episode, you can head on over to SubscriptionEntrepreneur.com/181.

There you'll also find the complete show notes and a downloadable transcript of our conversation.

If you enjoyed this episode and would like to hear more engaging interviews with successful entrepreneurs, experts, and authors, be sure to subscribe to our podcast on iTunes, Spotify, Google Play, or Stitcher.

We have a growing library of engaging episodes with many more to come.

And before we wrap up, I'd like to give a quick shout-out to Kinsta. They're a WordPress hosting company who understand the unique requirements of a membership site. If you're in need of a powerful and reliable host for your next project, I highly recommend looking into their services.

Thanks for being here and we'll see you next time!