

## **CATCHING UP WITH...Visions 2024 Alumni Panel, Communications Media at Fitchburg State University (Part 2 of 2)**

*[Catching Up With...theme pops in]*

*[Opens with Cold Open]*

### **Matthew Krol (cold open):**

The thing that I wish I learned sooner is sort of knowing your own value and that's a tricky knife's edge to walk. I was PA'ing and an editor quit on an MTV gig. And they're like, "Matt, do you want to, do you want to apply for this job?" I was like, "Yeah, like that's a huge step up. What's the pay for this job?"

They're like, "Oh, it's the same." And I was like, "as my PA gig?" And they're like, "Yeah." And I said, "If that's the job, then that's the pay, then no."

### **Joe Aidonidis (cold open):**

No is like your most powerful negotiating tactic. You just never work for under your rate. Because as soon as you do, if you work for half your rate, they have you.

They're like, "we're paying you dollars, you do whatever we say," and if they're going to have that attitude, you might as well be making 100 percent of what you're worth.

### **Adam Fournier (Host):**

Welcome back to our special two part episode of Catching Up With. I'm Adam Fournier, and this is part two of the 2024 Visions Alumni Panel.

Visions is an annual event at Fitchburg State that showcases the best original student work in the Communications Media Department. The event features an alumni panel, a photography and graphic design gallery, a game design showcase, a theater showcase, and a film and video screening. This year's alumni panel features Joe Aidonidis, Scott Kurland, Matthew Krol, Dan Daly and Jasmine Cordeiro.

*[ 1min 30sec ]*

You can listen to our previous episode for part one, where our five Fitchburg State graduates talked about their college experiences, how they transitioned from college to internships, to getting their first jobs and their day to day lives, giving us a glimpse of what their typical workday is like.

Today, we'll hear them talk about their experience in the world of freelance, the importance of networking and how it helped them fuel their careers and what it means to be a Fitchburg State graduate. Thanks for coming back as we catch up some more with Joe, Scott, Matthew, Dan, and Jasmine.

*[Catching Up With...theme fades out ]*

### **Prof. Jeff Warmouth (moderator):**

So my next question is about meeting people and so much of what we do in communications media involves developing a professional network. Can you share some practical tips or advice on starting and maintaining a professional network? Do you belong to or participate in any professional organizations?

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Any professional network advice?

### **Jasmine Cordeiro:**

So I've recently started going into the professional networking lifestyle and it is scary. But you really have to put yourself out there and learn how, how to network. It is a skill that I don't yet possess. But if you don't possess the skill, like I do, of in person networking, there's always digital networking.

And that's how our company finds most of the people that we contract to do outside work. We're on LinkedIn, we're on Instagram. Just people. People in the local community, people in local organizations, don't hesitate to reach out to local places, local shops, local agencies, because

*[ 3min 0sec ]*

They might need something, they might need a skill that you have that they don't have internally.

### **Dan Daly:**

In theater, the best Biggest one is go see other people's shows, like go to every show that you can get to. And then when it's over, email the people that you liked their work. I cannot tell you the nber of times that I have gone to see something, sent an email to the designer, been like, "Hey, I just saw such and such a show. Really great job. I'd love to grab coffee with you."

And they say yes, because people like talking about themselves. So you know, reach out to someone that you are interested in their work. Say, I'm interested in your work. Can we chat?

The only issue with that is when you go into those conversations don't go in expecting a job.

Go in expecting to get known. Because, especially in sort of this freelance theater world, everyone doesn't have a job all of the time to give. So, all that you're trying to do is get your name out into the rest of the theatrical society, so they go, "Oh, I don't have a job for you right now, but my friend just said that they're looking for someone. Let me throw their your name towards them."

Work with them for a week and then see what happens. So it's really about going to see shows. Going to see shows.

### **Matthew Krol:**

A little bit on that note as well. I think so – something I was never comfortable with in this – is just straight out of from internship to getting my first freelance jobs.

There's very few actual correct opportunities to like go up to the people that are in charge or hiring and, like, try to become known by them. Like you're there to make sure the production moves smoothly. And if you're doing your job, especially at a low level.

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*[ 4min 30sec ]*

Oftentimes that means not being noticed. And I saw a couple of people that I interned with like, really push, like, for that, like, hard, and get punished for it. And something that I did accidentally, but God, I wish someone had told me because I would have done this more. If you're going to intern at a place with other interns, if you're not the only one, if it's two, five, ten – I think there was, I think there was twelve interns in my Viacom internship.

I was much more comfortable becoming friends with all of them. Sort of this lateral just sort of friendship and networking, et cetera. I wasn't trying to scheme. It was just like, I have no one in New York. I need friends. Oh, look, here's some people in a similar situation. And that actually turned into the best thing because yeah, my job, I was doing well and people understood that I knew what I was doing and what I was doing.

But then, rather than sort of being known by me, I now had this network of twelve-ish people who also like me, who also know I can do what I can do. So when they get hired and their boss says, Oh, we need someone for XYZ, they'll be like, Matt, I got more jobs through the friendships that I made with my intern class than I got in any other way.

And it's something that didn't hit me until I was actually thinking about what I was going to talk about here. And it was just one of those things where I was like, it's so simple it's brilliant. Like, and it's accidental and it's cool because you get to make friends along the way. So that'd be my, my piece here I think.

*[ 6min 2sec ]*

### **Scott Kurland:**

Half of what Matt said, but also the greatest networking tool. And this is going to sound very shocking is being kind and being nice to people. No one wants to work for a jerk. That's the best advice I had ever gotten.

And it came from the weirdest place ever. It came from me watching some of my other PAs watch one of the talent knock over a thing of oat milk in a giant box of Crispex. And they were just standing there. They weren't doing anything. And I grabbed a mop, I grabbed a broom, I cleaned it up. And they go, "oh, he's going after the talent. He wants to be friends with this famous person." And, no, I did not. The guy was embarrassed. He just knocked over an entire gallon of milk. Would you be happy about that? No. Would you be embarrassed? Yes. But I was nice to him.

I said, "Oh, it's no problem. We'll clean it up. No one can see this. I will say I did it." And from there I got asked to go into the writer's room and then I got to sit in the writer's room and they asked me, do you have a joke you want to contribute? And I said, yes, in my head. And I was like, no, but being kind to people, being nice.

That is the greatest tool you will ever have. Never have the mindset of, "Oh, I'm better than this person. I'm better than that person." My work is better than this. No. Because there will always be someone smarter, better, stronger than you.

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Just be kind. It's the greatest tool you'll have.

### **Joe Aidonidis:**

Be best. That's – no one's gonna guess what you want, so you have to tell people what you want.

You can just be like, I want a million dollars. You know, I, they do too. Every year for a few years, I would just Google “video guy near me” and I would just get a list of like 15 people and I'd be like, “let's get coffee.”

And yeah, I did that for years and whoever was new on the list. And I just stay in touch with those people. And I hired them, they hired me and, you know, kind of a subcontracting thing. They pass off work to me. You become a solution for their clients. I can't take this on right now, but I know Joe and vice versa.

So that's, that's really powerful. And I think the other thing is just the, after a while, it's like, you know what? I can just do that with other people and people who are a different generation than me, people who are, you know, are in marketing positions, people who just are volunteer coordinators. I'm just like, I just want to know what you do.

And – a lot of that spurs my own projects. Sometimes I'm just like, I'm making a film about this, you know, I'm funding it myself or like, “hey, when the time is right, I'll give you a pitch.”

*[ 9min 0sec]*

And they'll be like, “we will want to pitch next quarter or something. We're waiting on grant money.” And like, you just get, you just have to get into the room.

Like a lot of it. A lot of where I see people will kind of fall back. They're like, “I want to get my Instagram looking really good.” “I want to, I want to get a lot, and like, you're just going to get other videographers following you.”

My clients are in their 40s, 50s. They hang out and drink together at a certain place in the Berkshires, right? They, you have to get into that room. Because those are the people who are going to be saying yes to you. Everyone else is just going to kind of validate you.

So, like, don't live vicariously through others. Go be yourself and be a thing like go be in the world so people can be like that's undeniable entity, right.

And then reinforce that with your integrity and your skill and your kindness, which I really resonate with that. and then opportunity will come and just be prepared for it.

### **Prof. Jeff Warmouth:**

Nice. For for those of you that have done freelance work. And I know Dan clearly, but suppose many of the rest of you have done some freelance work as well. What has it been like for you navigating the gig economy?

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### **Dan Daly:**

I kind of love it, you know. It's, it's a lot of work. Not to sugar coat it at all, but when you're freelancing, it means that you are kind of in charge of your own hours, but that also means you are in charge of your own hours.

So, you know, you can really decide what shows you're working on and how you're doing them. When you're going to do the work for the thing.

*[ 10min 30sec ]*

And if you want to go to the beach, you can go to the beach on a Tuesday afternoon because you want to go to the beach on a Tuesday afternoon. But if you go to the beach on a Tuesday afternoon, then you have to find another time to do that work. So when I am navigating it, it sort of when you start off, there is a lot of the handing out your resume, really hitting the pavement, trying find people that you like working with.

But then over time people start recognizing that you are good and that you are someone that knows what you're talking about and that you're someone that is exciting to work with, that has cool ideas that went to Fitchburg State, so they know you have great training behind you.

So over time you don't have to deal as much with the passing out your, your, your papers. and more just people come to you asking for it. But with that, you have to then constantly be sort of looking at your work and understanding how much your work is worth because you are not just an artist, you are also a business, you're not just a business, you're also a human being.

So you're having to try to figure out how much money you're charging for all these different things that you're doing. You have to figure out how much time you're spending on all these different things to make sure that you're still giving yourself time to, , you know, have a life and see a friend and grab a drink.

So, it takes a lot of finessing to make it work, but it's also a lot of fun.

### **Joe Aidonidis:**

I would almost categorize my company as freelance, I think. You know, it's really every day you are negotiating your pay every day you're looking for another opportunity. And the thing that worked eventually is serving others.

*[ 12min 0sec ]*

Like, if you are very outward in terms of your energy and being like, I want to have your vision created and I'm going to adopt it and like, really support your mission, people respond to that. And that means that you're like, hey, I want to do this. I want to make A, B, and C. Well, if D E and F are out there and that's your opportunity, you better get good at it. You know, like you have to adapt to like where the opportunity is and everything else, like the technical stuff, like you'll get good at, right?

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If you just do it, do it, do it. You're going to get good at editing, shooting, all this stuff. Really the, the thing that people keep coming back to you is you, you know, it's like you are, people always say, oh, your personal brand.

It's not really about your personal brand. It's just you just being, you know, easy to work with someone who's like really devoted to the craft. I think there's like kind of two types, like we're all blue collar. I would say, you know, we, we are blue collar people.

Fitchburg state is blue collar college, and there's two types of blue collar workers:

There's the guys who complain and try to do the least amount of work they can and, you know, complain that they don't get a juice box at break.

And then there are other people who find a lot of devotion to their craft, find a lot of, kind of self confidence in it, who love it. And, you know, when you bring that to the table, especially like, you're getting brought in to solve a problem that probably that institution cannot solve on their own.

And you have a good attitude, and you have expertise, and, you know, you create and meet expectations.

That is a great feeling and you, it just self reinforces as you do it. So. It's really about like taking yourself out of the equation a bit and being like what needs to be solved And like how do I fit into that puzzle?

How can I serve the best I can.

### **Scott Kurland:**

So I did freelance when I was in my 20s And I had one rule and it was If i'm not gonna get paid, I hope i'm getting paid in food.

*[ laughter ]*

You laugh but Daily Show has the best food. But yeah I know I knew that when I was doing freelance that I'd just be a PA or I'd be driving this person here or that person there, and I wasn't going to be making hardly any money, but I wanted to make sure that, you know, I was working hard and I was still eating.

Because I didn't want to get the phone call from my mom. Are you eating? But I also realized that I had an eye for detail. I'll say so that got me unit production manager or, you know, script supervisor, because I'd be like, "Oh, stop that cup is two centimeters off." And the director would be like, "oh, thank you."

And the grip would be like, "who cares?" I learned, you know, being in freelance that I was good at making sure stuff was in its right place. And I'm very. Thankful for that.

*[ 15min 0sec ]*

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### **Matthew Krol:**

Sort of, it's a little bit of a similar boat being that I did most of my freelance in my twenties and early thirties. And the thing that I wish I learned sooner, actually playing onto something you said, is sort of knowing your own value, and that's a tricky knife's edge to walk.

Because – so, I, I started to do a thing later into my freelance career where I would just keep working, take the garbage job, do the thing that's the low pay, et cetera, to a point that I knew I had enough to survive if the next garbage job that I took or I was applying for, they were going to try to lowball me, I could say no, and I wouldn't be, like, you basically, like, filling up a coffer to a point where there's at least one or two safe moves you could say no to.

I actually, will never forget this, and I will not blow up this person's spot, but when I moved, when I was, I was PA'ing, and an editor quit on an MTV gig and the producers knew that I edited my own stuff and they're like, "Matt, do you want to, do you want to apply for this job?"

I was like, "Yeah, like that's a huge step up." And I go and I talked to the executive producer at the time. They looked at my reel, they looked at my work. They're like, "yep, great. You got the job."

And I was like, "Oh my God, this is the best thing ever." I was like, "So what what's the, what's the pay? Like, what's the paid for this job?"

They're like, "Oh, it's the same."

And I was like, "As my PA gig?"

And they're like, "yeah."

And I said, "no, it's not."

*[ laughter ]*

And they looked at me like I was crazy. And I – I kid you not – the executive producer looked me dead in the face and just said, "Well, that's just how we do it in New York."

*[ 16min 30sec ]*

And it was at a point where I had done enough garbage work where I could say no to this thing.

And I was like, "I'm sorry, respectfully, that is not how it's done in New York. I have editor friends, like, I know this is not the thing. So if that's the job, then that's the pay, then no."

And I walked out of that office expecting never to be hired for a thing ever again. Two days later, I got that editing job.

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And it was the most, even like talking about it now, I'm like, I have this weird, like fight or flight response. So it's, it's knowing your value, but also knowing that you've set yourself up through doing a lot of the hard stuff or the stuff you don't really want to do. So you can take those swings in those moments.

### **Joe Aidonidis:**

Can I piggyback on that real quick? I love that because “no” is like your most powerful negotiating tactic. You just say, no, I'm not going to do it. And they'd be like, oh, great. We still have a problem that, you know, and like, there's usually someone who's like trying to fix it for the boss. And they're like, “ah, I can't go back to them with a no.”

So that's a great way to negotiate pay. You never take a – never give an estimate you wouldn't take yourself, right? So you have to be on both sides of the deal when you're trying to pitch it. Like, “I need this to live. And I think I would take this in your shoes.”

And what I think you were kind of getting at is like this idea of free or fee. You just never work for under your rate, because as soon as you do, if you work for half your rate, they have you.

*[ 18min 0sec ]*

They're like, “we're paying you dollars. You do whatever we say.”

If they're going to have that attitude, you might as be make, be making a hundred percent of what you're worth.

### **Jasmine Cordeiro:**

I think I'm going to play a little bit of devil's advocate here – cause yes, knowing your worth is very important, but when you're starting in the industry, you don't get to ask for that much money.

You get to ask for how much your junior role gets to ask for. And as you gain experience and as you gain your portfolio, that's when you can start being like,

You're going to pay me more because I know what I'm doing and because I have a track record to prove it.

So you got to start somewhere and sometimes it's not at the top.

### **Scott Kurland:**

So you also have to be able to sleep at night. because the opposite of knowing your value is knowing what you don't want to do knowing where you don't want to work right out of the Daily Show. I got a phone call and an offer for a job working for a company that I did not like.

I did not like their message. They didn't even know my work. They just knew that I was a body who could work for them. And I said, “no.” And then they offered me



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more money. And I said, “no.” And then they kept offering me more money. And I knew I wouldn't be able to sleep at night.

If I had taken the job because it was like working for the Empire. Let's, let's just put it that way for my Star Wars geeks out there. And then I had to be like, “you have to stop saying numbers.”

And I had to block that number and it is the best decision. So knowing your value, knowing your morals. Knowing that you're able to work a job and be able to sleep at night and not feel like you're selling out and doing something that you're not comfortable doing. No one ever tells you that.

### **Dan Daly:**

Can I grow off of that a little bit? So I have something called the three legged stool that someone taught me a long time ago about this idea. There's like a fancy wording for it, but I forget the wording. So it's basically whenever you're looking at jobs, you, there's three things you should be looking at.

You should be looking at if it's paying you well, if you are meeting people that can get you other jobs, and if it is work that you're excited in doing. And if it has two out of those three things, say yes to it.

I also have like a secret fourth leg that is, like, if it aligns with your moral compass or not. Cause there's many times where I will, it'll hit all three of those things, but then something is wrong morally with it. this job, so I don't take it. But I'm just thinking right now, like, I do a lot of work with the National Queer Theater where we do the Criminal Queerness Festival where we bring playwrights from around the world to New York to produce their work. Sometimes for the first times because they live in countries where being gay is outlawed in some way.

And they pay nothing. They pay very, very little. But I get to meet some of the greatest queer playwrights from around the world, and I get to do work that is really, really, really exciting.

*[ 21min 0sec ]*

So I can't necessarily put in as much work as I would for the job that may not be as exciting, but is going to pay me a lot more.

So it's always this dance, particularly when you're starting out about where do those three legs are support me in how I'm getting a job.

### **Jeff Warmouth:**

We have a lot of audience questions that are great. Unfortunately, we don't have much time, but I want to pick one and just get a quick – maybe just in a sentence or two because I think this is a great question.

What does being a Fitchburg State grad mean to people in the industry?

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### **Matthew Krol:**

Fitchburg State is not the college that like, you know, in conversations with people that I've talked to in the industry is the one that comes up the most. But what I will say is that every time it does and that someone knows it and recognizes it, it is always in a positive.

And in every other situation with different colleges, it seems like there's always someone that's like, "oh, no, not that" or whatever.

But every time that I cross the path with someone who has gone here or has experienced this place, they trust you. They trusted me. They trusted all of us early, and I think that trust does pay off.

And I think that that shows in the work that the grads do. And I don't know, I just every time it's brought up, it's always in a positive.

### **Dan Daly:**

So in the theater world, Fitchburg State is actually really well known in the Boston and Worcester theater scenes. and it's known for people that are, are willing and able to work, but not just work, but solve problems.

*[ 22min 30sec ]*

There's a lot of times where I have been called up to design a show in Worcester or elsewhere, and they go, oh, thank God you work at Fitchburg, so you know how to solve all of these things that we have messed up in the past. So because in Fitchburg, you're doing it all in at least the theater department.

We were hanging the lights, building the sets, painting them, doing the production management, doing the stage management, doing it all. So when something starts to fall apart, we can catch it. So in, in Boston and Worcester, that's sort of how it's known. In New York, it's not known as well. But that's because there's just not enough people that have graduated yet.

So I'm trying my hardest out there to get us known in New York as the place for theatre makers to go.

### **Jasmine Cordeiro:**

So I don't, I think Fitchburg is pretty well known in the central Massachusetts area and, and whenever I get an intern request for one, I'm always like, "oh my God, it's someone from Fitchburg State!" And we actually took on an intern from Fitchburg State and we have such a great connection 'cause we both went here.

### **Joe Aidonidis:**

So many young people have worked with, or people who like, have high school age kids who are like, "where should I go for film school?"

I'm like, "Fitchburg State." And they go "Pittsburgh?"

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And like, no, it's an amazing school. And, you know, I wish I could see who actually takes me up on that advice, but I'm just like, "I just learned so much and made so many connections."

And like I work in a lot of higher situations. I'm like, there's something really specific about being at Fitchburg State that is very work oriented.

*[ 24min 0sec ]*

And I think that is something that like, if you are going to have a career, you got to be work oriented. So that is something I'm like, If you were ready to work and, like, learn how to work, this is the place to be.

**Scott Kurland:**

Exactly what Joe said. I mean, it's true, because I know people who went to other film schools and they didn't get to touch the camera equipment until final semester of their senior year. Like, no, you get thrown into the deep end, you get thrown into the water right away, and you either sink or swim.

And that's what it is: You either sink or you swim.

*[Catching Up With...theme fades in]*

**Jeff Warmouth:**

So thank you so much. Please join me in a round of applause for Jasmine, Dan, Matt, Greg, and Joe. Scott and Joe.

*[ applause]*

*[Catching Up With...theme continues ]*

**Adam Fournier (Host):**

Thanks for listening to the conclusion of the special two part episode of Catching Up With....

If you want to attend an alumni panel in person and meet graduates from the Comm Media Department, you can attend the next annual Visions exhibition, which is open to the public for anyone and everyone to enjoy.

Admission is free, and so is the food. You can find more info at [fitchburgstate.edu/visions](https://fitchburgstate.edu/visions), where we'll post about the next event and where you can find previous student works from previous years of Visions.

Once again, I'm Adam Fournier, and thank you for joining me.

*[ 25min 30sec ]*

*[Catching Up With...theme fades out]*

*[ Perseverantia network theme fade out ]*

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**Josh Cronin (student)**

This is Joshua Cronin, a junior here at Fitchburg State University. I'm the creator of *North Central News*, along with Zoe Chrisostomides. And you're listening to *Game Perseverantia*, the Fitchburg State Podcast Network.

*[ Perseverantia network theme fade out ]*