



**Episode 9: Peter Shankman (CGS'92, COM'94),  
ADHD Empowerment Advocate, Entrepreneur & Author**

Host: Jeff Murphy (Questrom'06), BU Alumni Relations

Channeling his ADHD into a superpower has propelled serial entrepreneur Peter Shankman (CGS'92, COM'94) to incredible success. Perhaps best known for founding Help a Reporter Out (HARO), a company connecting journalists to sources, Peter has built and sold three successful businesses, authored five books and built a brand as a keynote speaker, podcast host, angel investor and frequent cable news contributor.

**Podcast Transcript:**

Jeff Murphy:

I'm Jeff Murphy from Boston University Alumni Relations and I'm your host for an interview series showcasing the career paths of our most interesting and accomplished alumni. Welcome to the Proud to BU Podcast. My guest today is author, entrepreneur, angel investor and podcaster, Peter Shankman. Peter started at BU in the College of General Studies and went on to earn a degree in journalism from the College of Communication in 1994. Peter's best known for founding Help a Reporter Out, which connects journalists to sources, and since then he's written books and built businesses centered on his ability to channel his ADHD into a superpower. Buckle up folks, because this is one of our fastest moving interviews to date.

Peter, thanks so much for joining us for the podcast. There's a bunch of reasons why I'm excited to chat with you, one of them is that you have a really successful podcast of your own. Would you mind starting by telling us a little bit about your podcast?

Peter Shankman:

Sure, yeah. I love talking about myself. Thanks for having me. My podcast is called Faster Than Normal and Faster Than Normal is the premise and concept that ADHD or any form of neurodiversity is a gift, not a curse. When I was growing up throughout the time I was at Boston University and beyond, ADHD didn't really exist. What existed was, "Peter sit down, you're disrupting the class disease." And that led to a very not great childhood. It led to sort of a walking on the knife edge of failing out of almost every school. I never actually failed out but came damn close. I was on academic probation for all five semesters of my time at that College of General Studies, not four semesters because I had to do a fifth semester where they actually transferred me into COM but still said, "Yeah, you're still kind of a screw up, be careful." When I got out of school and probably about 10 years into my professional career, I realized that my ADHD can actually be a gift and this faster brain that I thought was the reason that I had no friends and the social acuity of a turnip actually was the best thing that ever could have happened to me. And I was able to create a world that worked for me. And so that's sort of where I am today, Faster Than Normal came out of my desire to share that and to tell that story to people who are, who may be feeling a little different. To kids, to parents, to people who are just diagnosed with ADD, ADHD autism spectrum, anything like that where they have been told their whole life that they're broken. And my parents never told me I was broken, everyone else did. And so I launched this podcast to sort of prove, you know what? We're not broken. We're freaking awesome. And in the two plus years that

we've had the podcast, we have weekly episodes. Every episode is only about 20 minutes because ADHD, but we've had Tony Robbins, Seth Goden, Keith Krach, who founded a DocuSign, Dave Neeleman who founded JetBlue.

Jeff Murphy: And these are all folks who identified as ADHD?

Peter Shankman: These are all folks that identified as ADHD, ADD, dyslexia, autism, something along those lines. And they all have found ways to, like I have, to use it to their advantage to start multimillion dollar companies. DocuSign went public a few months ago and valuation close to a billion dollars. If that's broken, sign my [bleep] up. I'm all about that. And you know, I've had sort of that same success. I mean not to a billion dollars, but I've started and sold three very successful companies myself. And I think probably 98 percent of my success comes from my differently abled brain.

Jeff Murphy: And I'm guessing that you've heard from a lot of your listeners, but again, the reason why I was excited to talk to you, as we were discussing before and the point of this podcast is to give people a glimpse into the careers of folks who've had some success, have them share lessons they have learned along the way. My question for you is, can a podcast help somebody's career?

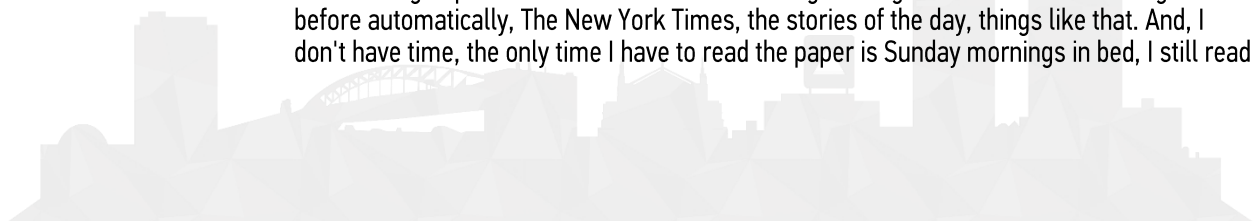
Peter Shankman: As running one or listening to one?

Jeff Murphy: Listening to one.

Peter Shankman: Most definitely.

Jeff Murphy: How do you feel like that's the case?

Peter Shankman: I used to date a woman about 10 years ago or so from the South and her mom's a lovely, lovely, lovely woman. Imagine Blanche from the Golden Girls, a little younger, just so kind. And ended every sentence with the word sug', just the sweetest woman. Much, much nicer than the daughter that I dated. We were at a holiday dinner at her house down South and I was commenting on something that someone had said and she looked at me and shook her head and smiled. She said, "You know, sug'. The good Lord gave you two ears, one mouth for a reason. You know why that is? So you can listen twice as much as you talk." Which was like sort of her southern way of saying, "Will you shut the [bleep] up already?" But I'll always remember that. We as a society, especially when we're looking to try to find a job and looking to start a career, we tend to use every moment of silence as an opportunity to talk about ourselves. And it took me way too long to learn this, but the greatest lesson I ever, one of the great lessons I ever learned was to shut up for a while and listen. And any time you have the opportunity to learn something, do not let it go. Whether it's a podcast, a blog, Twitter, or a Facebook post. Any time you have the opportunity to listen to something new and learn something, you might not learn anything, but you had 20 minutes, you were walking to school anyway, you're walking to class, you're walking to a job. So, you missed catching a couple of Pokémon, big deal. Get that you might find something amazing. And it's funny, I have a day that is all planned out by my assistant every day and I have very limited time. And, we can talk about my schedule later because it's pretty ridiculous. I start my day around 3:45 every morning. I get up that early, I work out first to get my brain chemistry going, but during the time I'm working out, that's the time I have to learn. And so that's what I'm listening to podcasts. That's when I'm listening to things I've downloaded the night before automatically, The New York Times, the stories of the day, things like that. And, I don't have time, the only time I have to read the paper is Sunday mornings in bed, I still read



the New York Times. I love the feel of print, but I get my information super early and it doesn't matter when you do it, but make sure you do it. And never, never miss the opportunity to get information. So if there are podcasts that you think might benefit you or even ones that you think, which is interesting. I'm a born and raised city kid, you look at me and you don't think like stock car racing or NASCAR or anything like that, but a couple of weeks ago I went down to Texas and I keynoted the Dallas Motors or the Texas Motor Speedway Motor Week and I was the opening keynote for all their advertisers. Sure enough for the three previous months I listened to, racing podcasts and surprisingly interesting but yeah.

Jeff Murphy: Let's get back to you. You mentioned born and raised in New York. How do you find yourself, on Comm Ave at Boston University as an undergrad?

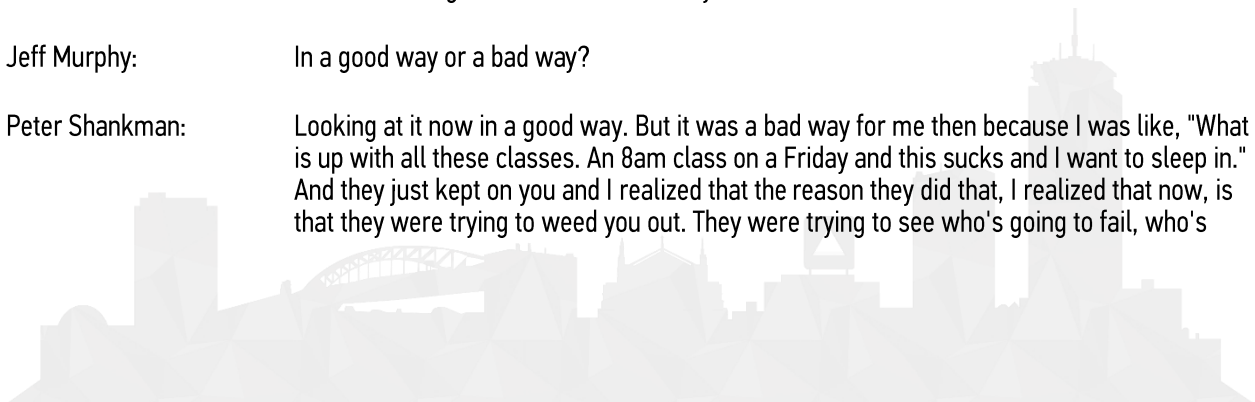
Peter Shankman: Short story they accepted me, but let's go for a longer story. I was not, like I said, I was not a good student. I went to High School of Performing Arts, the fame school. I got blessed with a very, very good voice. I can sing. I have 20 years of classical vocal training under my belt, which no one ever believes, but I am the guy who you want on the karaoke team. Thing was I didn't want to major in singing. I knew that I wouldn't be able to make a career out of that or maybe I could, but it wouldn't be fun and I knew from very early I wanted to have fun. I applied to a whole bunch of schools, didn't get into any city schools. Got into BU, Northeastern and a couple others. And I went and saw BU and I fell in love with it and I knew, because you see the schools then you apply. Went and visited and I'm like, "This place is awesome. Wow." I loved the fact that was on the street. Growing up in New York City, I didn't want to do a campus where it was like, the only cool thing to do is like pledge a fraternity or go to a party. I'm like, "I need a city," because I grew up in New York and so Boston was great. It was close enough that I'd go home when I wanted to but far enough away that my parents couldn't just show up unannounced, but it was a city and I love that. And when I applied, I'm like, "I know my grades are not good enough to get in, not by a long shot." So I'm going to apply to CBS or CGS on the off chance that they'll see that "Yes, I'm a screw up, but I'm a nice screw up." As I told someone, I have a lot of baggage but it matches and it's cute. So, the key for me is I got into BU, CGS and without hesitation and I'm like, "I'm going there," and it was a no brainer for me.

Jeff Murphy: So that's the other reason I was excited to talk to you because of your CGS experience. Tell me a little bit about those first two years and what the CGS experience was like. And I'd also be curious to know how that helped shape your future sort of career aspirations.

Peter Shankman: So I got my ass kicked at CBS. I mean, it was no joke. It was like navy seal boot camp. I mean, you walk in and they're just screaming at you and they're like, here's work, here's more work, here's some more work by the way. And we're all like, "Isn't college supposed to be like, fun?" "Nope, not for the first few years here. Sorry, do this project to that project." My record for not sleeping was our Capstone project at the end of our sophomore year. I was up for four straight days. That was a new record for me. I was having an interesting conversation with walls when at the time I handed that in. But you know, it felt like an extension of high school for me in a way.

Jeff Murphy: In a good way or a bad way?

Peter Shankman: Looking at it now in a good way. But it was a bad way for me then because I was like, "What is up with all these classes. An 8am class on a Friday and this sucks and I want to sleep in." And they just kept on you and I realized that the reason they did that, I realized that now, is that they were trying to weed you out. They were trying to see who's going to fail, who's



going to get out of here. Literally it was navy seals, right? They push you and push you and push you. And the people who ring the bell don't come back. If you could survive that you can survive anything. And getting into COM was my survival. And, I still have dreams to this day that I'm about to graduate and I failed a class and didn't realize it like freshman year. But to this day, I'm 46 years old and I still have those dreams. CBS shaped me in the respect that it taught me that if I did work really hard I could do the things I didn't necessarily love. And that's kind of a dual edge sword in the respect that, especially when you're ADHD. When you're ADHD, you can bust your ass at things and just not get them. I did not get math for the life of me. I still don't get math. I just can't do it. And I skated on academic probation for five semesters in a row and by all rights should not be sitting here right now. I had a dean, Dean Donald Dunbar, rest his soul who saw something in me and kept pushing me and kept me going. And you know, when I say academic probation, I don't mean like, "Oh yeah, I went down to a B-." I'm talking like a 1.6.

Jeff Murphy: Enough that you had to get to know the dean.

Peter Shankman: Oh yeah. I mean, and it wasn't half do it. It's, you will get to know the dean. Your [beep] will be in that chair, the Peter chair in his office. When I donated money to CBS a couple years ago, I asked if I could donate a chair like. I want to fund the Peter Shankman, gets your [beep] in here chair and they wouldn't let me do. But yeah, I mean for me it was really just about, they pushed me and pushed me and pushed me and I realized that I did have some talents. I needed to refine them. But I think getting out of CBS and into COM and making that and surviving that, was one of the first times in my life where I looked in the mirror and actually believed in myself. It didn't last, you know, I'm sure within an hour I went back to thinking I was full of crap. But, that hour, it was awesome

Jeff Murphy: So you went on to COM and finished with a degree in journalism. Were you thinking the whole time you might end up being a journalist?

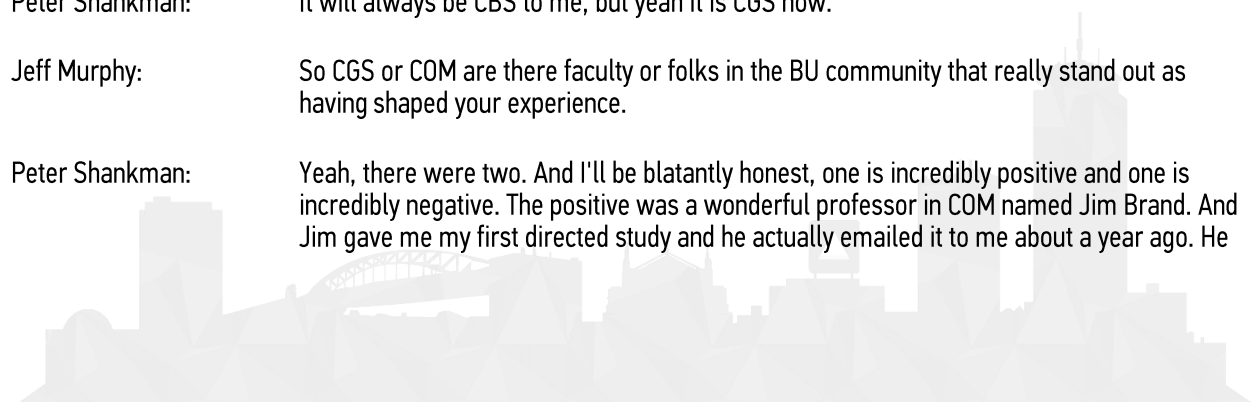
Peter Shankman: I knew how to write and how to take pictures. And, pictures I discovered in college, thanks to The Daily Free Press and sort of shooting for them and turns out that I was good at it. Writing has always come naturally to me. But again, that's the beauty of ADHD, writing comes incredibly naturally, the other side, math and science side not so much. So you focus on what you love and you do it really, really well. And it was hysterical because I get into COM and, you know, the first week, the first class, first assignments is like "Okay, I want you to do two pages." And I'm sitting there scribbling like, "Done." "Okay, yeah. That is due next week. You can go." "No, I'm sure it's fine." You know, I'm like, "All I have to do is write two pages and that's my weeks work? This is a joke." [laughing] After two years of being at that, at CBS, it's like this is like a Hawaiian vacation. It was amazing. My two years at COM were just insanely, ridiculously easy.

Jeff Murphy: So other people either from CGS, we keep talking about CBS versus CGS. It used to be CBS but it is now CGS.

Peter Shankman: It will always be CBS to me, but yeah it is CGS now.

Jeff Murphy: So CGS or COM are there faculty or folks in the BU community that really stand out as having shaped your experience.

Peter Shankman: Yeah, there were two. And I'll be blatantly honest, one is incredibly positive and one is incredibly negative. The positive was a wonderful professor in COM named Jim Brand. And Jim gave me my first directed study and he actually emailed it to me about a year ago. He



got back in touch and he sent it to me out of his files. It was called something like, "The New World of Journalism Will Be Run by Something Called the Worldwide Web." Or something like, "It Will Be Run by Something Called the Information Super Highway, Here's Your on Ramp." It was the worst paper title. Oh my God. It was so hyperbole. But yeah, he, he let me do my own thing. And that was, I got an A or an A- from him writing that paper. And it was the first time I ever realized that I could do, if you just tell me what to do and you give me a deadline, I'll get it done. And that was a massive wake up call for me because that was the first time I realized that I didn't have to be monitored all the time as long as I had parameters I could do what needed to be done. And, so yeah, Jim Brand to this day, one of the most influential people in my life. On the other side, there was a photography professor named John Robaton and a professor Robaton flat out to my face told me, he's like, "I really don't see any creativity in you. You should go for something like accounting. I don't even know why you're here." And it was perfectly within his right to say that. I don't think as a professor, I would have phrased it the same way, but okay. Fast forward a couple of years and I land my first job and just through random twist of faith, my first job in the early 95' after leaving BU or graduating BU, my first job was one of the founding editors of the America Online Newsroom. And it was it was early 96', summer 96' at the democratic and republican conventions. And the Democratic convention, or no, I'm sorry, it was New Hampshire primaries even before the convention. The New Hampshire primary so a bunch of us, myself and two other editors, we flew up from DC to Boston and then drove to New Hampshire to cover the primaries. And I stopped by BU and I went to see professor Robaton and I said, "Hi. It's Peter Shankman." He was like, "Yeah, yeah. How you doing? What are you doing with yourself?" I'm like, "Well, I'm the photo editor at the largest online newsroom in the world. You're still teaching two classes a week in the basement. That's cool. Hey, it's been good? You know, hope you're well." And through several years of therapy later, I learned that I don't necessarily have to carry that grudge anymore and I've let it go and I can enjoy the moment now. But yeah that was a nice moment.

Jeff Murphy:

You're talking about the early 90s and you're talking about the future and the information super highway. So in so many ways, I know I didn't have an email address and till 1998, so you're ahead of the curve on that. Do you leave BU knowing that you're going to go into this new media tech and are you already having entrepreneurship ideas at that time?

Peter Shankman:

Not even close. No, no entrepreneurship. But I knew that new media, internet, I mean I had an Apple 2E at home and I was programming, badly, but it's programming. And I knew that there was something there. And in Halloween, you know they say that you have those moments, the butterfly effect, that there's a few moments that define the course of your entire life. And had you not done that at that moment, at that second, whatever. October 1993, my senior year, because I graduated in 94'. October 93', I'm sitting in my room on Halloween night, of course I was, I had no friends and there's a guy who is in the dorm that I become friends with named Lesa Fari. And Lee, because we were roomies, he was like, "Hey, my mom just started working at this company in Virginia. It's really cool. You can get online with it. Here's a disk." And it was an America Online disk. And that got me onto A1. And, I'd been on America Online back in the late 80s when it wasn't AOL. It was called Apple Link. And then I totally forgot about it. And then senior year I had a modem, a 1200 baud modem, whatever. And I get onto AOL as ps photog because I was a little dark and, that started my, you know. A year later I was in something called the Melrose Place TV Gossip chat room. You can go look that up. But, I'm in this chat room and someone says, "You know, my company's trying to build a newsroom why don't you submit your resume?" And I did, and two weeks later I had no idea what the company was. I said, "Oh, sure, I'll be great at that with absolutely no experience in running." I learned that sarcasm doesn't translate well online. Two weeks later it was being moved down to Virginia and become one of the



founding editors AOL. And, you know, one of the things I did learn at BU that I continued to use in my life is the concept of, say yes and figure out how to do it later.

Jeff Murphy: Is that the same as fake it till you make it?

Peter Shankman: Yeah, pretty much. What's the line from the West Wing? "Have faith and faith shall be given to you." Well, it is technically from the Bible, but then it was said again by John Spencer in West Wing. And, that is truth, you know, fake it till you make it. Who doesn't want to go work for AOL, for the mothership and shit yeah, I'm gonna go down there. And then took this job and had no idea what the hell I was doing, but you know, had incredible bosses like John Barth and Steve Case and Teddly O. and very, very fortunate. I listened to every conceivable word they could give me and I sucked all that information up and came back from AOL two years later, back into New York, late 97'. "Oh my God, you worked at America Online and we want to hire you." And I took a job with a magazine and I lasted for about two weeks and that was the moment I realized that I don't know how to work for other people and I don't play well with others. And I went out on my own then and here we are.

Jeff Murphy: You and I have a friend in common. Kiersten says "Hello."

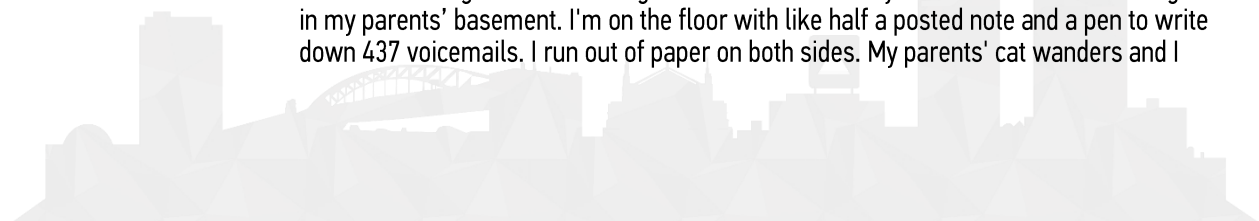
Peter Shankman: Of course, love Kiersten.

Jeff Murphy: Told me some things about you that I need to ask you about the sandwich board.

Peter Shankman: [laughing]

Jeff Murphy: Can you tell that story?

Peter Shankman: So I came back from AOL and I had all this all knowledge and all that. I knew that I could get a job. I knew I had all this experience, but this was before online job boards. The only online job board out there, something called Career Builder where they would basically copy and paste all of the jobs in the want ads and you would just apply. But primarily you were sending out resumes by mail. We've talked for 15 minutes and you don't know me, but you know me enough now to say, do you really think I'm gonna sit in my basement and send out resumes by mail back when I was 20, whatever? No, of course not. So I said, "Why should I go and find all these jobs when I can have the jobs come to me?" And I took my resume and I blew it up by four feet high by about two and half feet wide, made two copies and pasted them together on a poster board and tape and used rope around my shoulders and made a sandwich board of my resume. And I get up at five in the morning on what turns out to be the coldest day of 1997. Go me. Went into Manhattan, went to 51st and Park Avenue because I figured all the people coming off metro north, all the people coming out of grand central, they'd all have to see me. And I stood in the corner wearing my sandwich board and handing out copies of my resume to anyone who wanted them. I handed out close a thousand copies of my resume. I went home that night in my parents' basement. I froze my [beep] off. I had gotten a voicemail box number because I didn't want people putting my home number down. Then I had gotten sick. I had a cold. This is the stupidest thing I have ever done. I threw the sandwich board on the ground. I took a hot shower. I'm like, "All right, I'm gonna go to bed. I'll check the voicemail, but I'm gonna go to bed. This is [beep]. I can't believe I did this. What a waste of time. You know, I dial that number. "Voicemail box 2719. You have four." I'm like, "Great, All Day for 4." "437 unheard messages." I have 437 unheard messages. You can imagine the scene. I'm in my underwear. It's like midnight. I'm in my parents' basement. I'm on the floor with like half a posted note and a pen to write down 437 voicemails. I run out of paper on both sides. My parents' cat wanders and I



grabbed the cat. I start writing on the cat. You know, long story short that led to 79 interviews and 37 offers. And the job I took was with a magazine, a pretty well-known magazine. The irony though is that literally I lasted two weeks before I'm like, "I can't work." Because the reason I did so well at AOL was, again, they didn't give a [beep] how we worked. And that goes back to Jim Brand and the directed study, just get it done. That's all AOL cared about. All of a sudden now I'm like, "What do you mean to have to be in at 8:30 and punch in? And this is bs. I don't want to." And that was sort of a wakeup call for me that I could do things on my own.

Jeff Murphy: I know you're leaving here to go do a talk, a keynote for the College of General Studies.

Peter Shankman: As a distinguished lecturer, is the actual title.

Jeff Murphy: As a distinguished lecturer, yeah.

Peter Shankman: Let's just go on a rant, the guy who had five semesters of academic probation.

Jeff Murphy: [laughing]

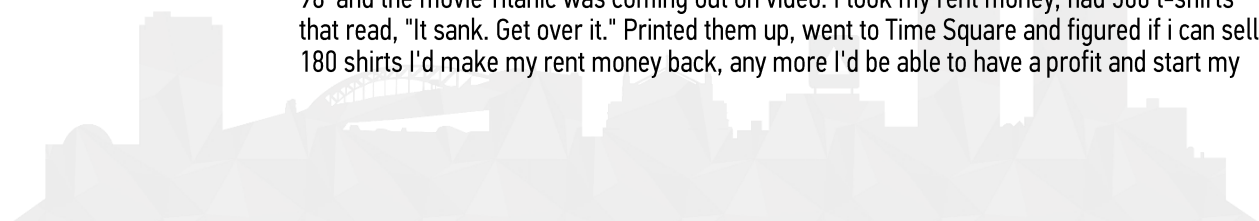
Peter Shankman: Guys, there's hope for you. Whatever you're doing that you think you're screwing up. There's hope for you. [laughing] Look at me.

Jeff Murphy: I don't know if that story will come up, but that was 20 years ago. What would you tell current BU students or recent graduates, what's the 21st century equivalent of your.

Peter Shankman: Of the sandwich board?

Jeff Murphy: Yeah.

Peter Shankman: There's always room for creativity. There's always ways to be different. Guys, here's the thing, we are in such a. The bar is so ridiculously low for good ideas and for customer experience and for awareness. Think about your last flight. How much did your last flight suck? Right? I always ask that someone says, "Oh no, I had a great flight." "Oh what made it great?" "Well, we took off one time and landed on time." That's what you're supposed to get. You're over the moon because you didn't fall into the Indian Ocean or get dragged off a plane by your nose. The bar is so low and that goes for creativity. Think about every movie that's been rebooted. Are there really no good ideas anymore? The bar is so low, I don't need you to be awesome. I need you to suck a little less and it's so easy to do that if you're just willing to step out of your comfort zone for a little bit and not care what other people think. That was probably the best thing I ever learned in my life was that the second I started not caring about what other people thought about what I did, I became free. And yeah, I'm going to go stand in the street with a sandwich board. And sure people are going to laugh. But you know what? I have been laughed at all my life but who cares? At least I'll make some money. And it's that premise that the only thing I'd say differently between now and 20 years ago is massively important today that you brand everything you do. So everything you do, no matter how tiny you think it might be, you never know what's gonna blow up. You never know what's gonna go viral. You never know what's going to explode and put you on the map. So make sure people have a way to get back to you and find out that you did it. In 98', after I left AOL, I wanted to start a pr firm and had no money and there was a summer 98' and the movie Titanic was coming out on video. I took my rent money, had 500 t-shirts that read, "It sank. Get over it." Printed them up, went to Time Square and figured if i can sell 180 shirts I'd make my rent money back, any more I'd be able to have a profit and start my



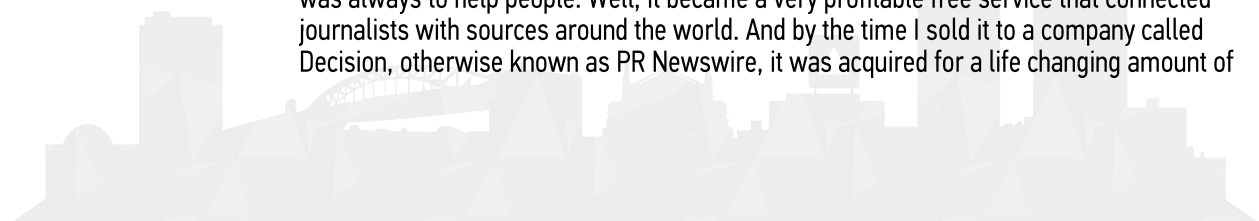
pr firm. I figured it'll take about a week to sell 180 shirts and I sold 500 shirts in six hours. I called the reporter the next morning and I leaked the story, I told her the story. She says, "That's funny. You selling these shirts online now?" I went, "Of course I am," as I'm fake typing right. Built the worst website in the world and she said, "Okay, we'll see what we can do." I forgot about it. Woke up the next morning at 5:30 in the morning. It was my hosting provider asking me if I started advertising. I said, "No, why?" He said, "So, normally you get about 100 visitors a day. Most of them are you." "Thanks." "You've had 37,000 unique visitors in the past two hours." Story ran on the front page of USA Today listing my website. If I tried to do that today, I would go into Times Square, I'd hold up my first shirt, some idiot with a camera phone would take a picture and within 20 minutes there'd be 15 Etsy shops selling my shirt. You've got to brand what you do back to you. Make sure you have your name, try to get your name on every single platform. We have no idea what's going to be, I don't think Twitter is gonna be around in three years, but I still have @PeterShankman on everything. @PeterShankman on Twitter, on Facebook, on LinkedIn, on Peloton by the way. If there any Peloton writers out there, follow me. But yeah, you got to do that. You got to make sure that you have your name and that your brand everything back to you so people can find you.

Jeff Murphy: I've only been chatting with you for about 20 minutes. Have you always been somebody who comes up with these great ideas or is that something that you taught yourself?

Peter Shankman: I've always been someone who's come up with those great ideas. I think that it wasn't until 2000 when I started my first, 98', when I started my first company that I figured, I was able to figure out how to put them into practical use. You know, I took apart the toaster when I was four because I wanted to see how it worked and putting it back together wasn't in the cards, but that was the kind of person I was. One of my mom's favorite quotes is when she told me, "Peter, nothing good ever happens when you paint the cat." I wanted to find out what happened if you painted the cat. You know, would the cat's fur be able to shake, could she lick off the paint? No, that doesn't happen. But you know, that was my whole life. Was what happens if? And the concept of what happens if, is the thing that not enough people do, right? People shut down after they hear what happens. "Oh, what happens? It will never work." But what if it does? What if it does? What if it's really scary, but it takes off, right? More ideas had been killed not because they're bad, but because people have been too afraid to start them. And you know, my whole premise is as long as what I'm trying to do doesn't cause an international incident, doesn't wind me up in jail or doesn't kill anyone, why the hell wouldn't I do it? "What's the worst that can happen?" "It will fail." "Okay, great. If it fails, I learned something and I'll start something new."

Jeff Murphy: So I don't want to boil down your 20 years as an entrepreneur to just a couple things, but I had heard about Help a Reporter Out long before I knew who you were, you founded that. Is that the thing that put you on the map? Is that one of the things that stands out as being one of your big accomplishments?

Peter Shankman: HARO was one of the big ones, definitely. HARO is one of the big ones. For me it was pretty awesome. It was one of my creations where I'm like, "Okay, I want to see. Like, I know a lot of reporters, I know a lot of sources." I mean again, when you are ADHD you talk to everyone, right? I have a Rolodex like the side of the mountain. If you're on a plane next to me, like unless you fake your death, I want to know everything about you by the time we land. It is just what I do. Only two people have ever faked their death. So knowing all these people, I would put this thing together and this started Help a Reporter Out, which the goal was always to help people. Well, it became a very profitable free service that connected journalists with sources around the world. And by the time I sold it to a company called Decision, otherwise known as PR Newswire, it was acquired for a life changing amount of





money for me and three years after I launched it. And so that was one of the major things that put me on the map. And that was sort of the business and customer relations side of things. That is a lot of my speaking. I speak to brands all around the world about customer experience and how to do things just a little better. But the faster than normal, the ADHD side of things, I published *Faster Than Normal*, the book last year and became best seller. That's sort of starting to take off as well and I'm starting to talk to universities and people in schools and businesses. Especially businesses who need to understand that 35 percent of their workforce and their customer base is going to be neuro atypical within the next 10 years. If they don't know how to either retain that talent or market to those people, they're kind of screwed.

Jeff Murphy:

Yeah. So one of the things that, I'm not in direct contact with students every day, but I know that BU students and our young alumni all sort of have this entrepreneurial spirit and think about being their own boss at some point. And, I know that you'll have folks lined up to chat with you after your address this evening. What are those lessons that you've learned? The advice that you have to share with folks who tell you they want to be an entrepreneur. You've obviously tapped into your own superpower, but what are the other things that people need to know about being an entrepreneur and how to be successful?

Peter Shankman:

Well, the first thing I would say is my motto is, there is a good book out there. It's a self-published book called *JFDI* or just effing do it by a woman named a Gabrielle Ribiera. She published this book last year, this year. And it's basically just go do it, right? If you're an entrepreneur, if you wanna be an entrepreneur, go be an entrepreneur. I had a running coach once who told me that if I wanted to run faster, run faster. I'm like, "What do you? Oh yeah, okay." So, you know, just do it. But here's the other thing, no matter what you're doing, there are two schools of thought with entrepreneurship, and one of them is wrong. One of them is the school of thought, and Gary Vaynerchuk subscribed to this theory, his theory is if you wanna be an entrepreneur, you have to work your [beep] off 24 hours a day and if you only have three hours between your regular job and after you put your kids to bed and you have three hours of sleep, don't sleep. Only sleep one hour and live your. [beep] that. That is [beep]. You're going to wind up dead, right? My School of thought, which I'd like to think is the right one, is you gotta take care of yourself first. If you are not putting your own oxygen mask on first, how can you expect to do anything for others? I've been in this industry for 20, I've been an entrepreneur for 20 years, literally 20 years, two weeks ago, and in that time I've lost three friends to suicide. All of them were entrepreneurs, all of whom thought they had no one to talk to. That's [beep]. We're killing ourselves. You know, have a tribe. Have a group of people who understand what you're doing because they're entrepreneurs as well. I love my ex-wife. We are still phenomenal friends. We a great co parents. She never got what it was like to work for herself because she never did it. And so I would come home and had a bad day. And she was very, she cared and she wanted me to be happy. But she would say, "You know, I don't understand how you could have a bad day. You work for yourself. You can go work anywhere." I'm like, "It doesn't work like that, you know?" And if you can't separate work, entrepreneurship from your life and it's okay to live, breathe and eat and sleep what you do. And it's great to be passionate about it. That's awesome. Passion will get you really far. But if you don't have the time to stop and say, "You know what? I need a mental health day, a mental health." That's why I get up so early. I get up at 3:45. From 4:00 AM to 6:00 AM I'm working out, I'm on the bike, I'm running, whatever. I'm getting that dopamine, I'm getting that exercise. That is how I take care of myself. And on days that I don't do that, I don't have that good of a day. Understand your triggers. I quit drinking because the speed at which we're talking is the speed at which I run my life. So I didn't have one drink. I had six because they were there and I wouldn't do anything stupid, but I wouldn't wake up as early the next day and I would feel like crap. And then it would start a cycle, right? If you're an entrepreneur, chances are you have that very

passionate drive and that very passionate. If entrepreneurship is for you, you're very passionate about what you do. And so you're constantly go, go, which is great, but you have to understand where your liabilities are in that. There are people in this world who come home from work and they decide they don't want to cook, so they order a pizza and they have two slices and put the rest in the refrigerator. That's called leftover pizza. I've heard this. I've never had leftover pizza in my life. If there's a pizza there, I'm eating the pizza, right? You have to understand what your triggers are and how to get by them and that's one of the big things that you don't necessarily get a lot of help from or a lot of learning about when you're becoming an entrepreneur because it's just not talked about. You have to understand that being an entrepreneur is lonely as hell and you have to have people who you can relate to, who you can go and say, "You know what? I think I have a problem or I think I'm having a [beep] day or I think I need someone to talk to." And if you don't have that, it's very dangerous to be entrepreneur.

Jeff Murphy: Peter we have run up against our time. I'm really thankful that you've been able to carve out some time for us in your schedule. And I know that BU has continued to be an important part of your life. You've made some sizable donations to the university. Thank you for doing that. And you've also been involved with the College of General Studies on the Dean's Advisory Board. Real quickly, why did you decide to do that and what has that experience been like for you?

Peter Shankman: I think the first 60 percent of why I did it was just to be able to say, "[laughing] I almost got kicked out and now I'm on the Dean's Advisory Board." No, I'm kidding. A lot of why I do it is because I don't ever want a student to feel like I felt my freshman year and my sophomore year when I was just like, why can't I get this right? Why can't I pass this test? Why can't I improve my grades? I know I'm not stupid. Why? What is going on here? What am I doing wrong? And that's why I'm here tonight to give this lecture as well. And I want, if one kid walks out and says, "Okay, maybe I have a shot." That to me is worth more than any keynote fee I've ever gotten in my life.

Jeff Murphy: Cool. If people want to learn more about you, see some of the books that you've read, written, what's the best way for them?

Peter Shankman: I am an open book and the one thing I promise you is I respond to every email sent personally. My assistant controls my calendar. I'm actually not allowed. You noticed you never talked to me about booking this.

Jeff Murphy: I did.

Peter Shankman: I don't have write access to my calendar.

Jeff Murphy: [laughing]

Peter Shankman: She took it away about nine years ago. No joke. I scheduled two dinners on the same night on separate continents by mistake and I'm longer have right access to my calendar. But I answer every email personally and I answer to all messages you can find me [peter@shankman.com](mailto:peter@shankman.com) is my email. Smartest thing I ever did was buy [shankman.com](http://shankman.com) in 1995. I am @PeterShankman on all the socials and I actually run a mastermind group for entrepreneurs where we have a tribe and that's at [shankminds.com](http://shankminds.com). And the ADHD stuff is [fasterthannormal.com](http://fasterthannormal.com). So, tons of ways to find me. Please reach out. I'm happy to talk.

Jeff Murphy: Thanks again, Peter.



Peter Shankman:

Cool.

Jeff Murphy:

My thanks once again to Peter Shankman for joining me on the podcast. We only had time to scratch the surface of Peter's incredible story, but I highly recommend checking out his podcast *Faster Than Normal* or visiting his website, [shankman.com](http://shankman.com) for information on everything that he's involved in. Thanks again for listening to the Proud to BU Podcast. If you like what we're doing, please be sure to subscribe, rate, and review Proud to BU wherever you download your episodes. I'm Jeff Murphy and no matter where your path takes you, be Proud to BU. The Proud to BU Podcast is produced by Boston University Alumni Relations. Our theme is from Jump and APM music. To learn more about Proud to BU, visit [bu.edu/alumni/podcast](http://bu.edu/alumni/podcast).

