

# FOUNDERS CLUB



## Founders Club Conversation – 11.5.2014

Announcer: Broadcasting live from the Business RadioX Studios in Atlanta, Georgia, it's time for Founders Club Radio.

John Coffin: Good morning, and welcome to the Founders Club, where each week we talk to the founders and leaders of great private companies. I'm your host, John Coffin. This morning, I'm going to take a deep breath, because it's going to take me a while to introduce our two guests this morning.

Johnson Cook is the CEO and Founder of Voxa. He's also the cofounder and director of the Atlanta Tech Village and a partner at Atlanta Ventures. Kel Landis has joined us from Raleigh, and he's the Co-Founder and Partner of Plexus Capital and also the author of the new book that just came out, *The Little Book of Do*. There isn't an exclamation at the end of your title, but I'm going to put one there. So good morning to both of you, and thank you for joining us here.

Johnson Cook: Thank you.

Kel Landis: Glad to be here. Thanks.

John Coffin: We flipped a coin. Johnson, I'm going to start with you, if that's okay. Tell us about Voxa. What's going on there? I know you've recently made a big launch and raised \$2.5 million to get this off the ground.

Johnson Cook: Right.

John Coffin: And we'd love to learn more about what's going on with you.

Johnson Cook: Well, we just are at our one-year anniversary. So it's an exciting week for us to be right at one year, and we've come a long way. We started with a little idea, and the idea has just gotten bigger. When you're really close to it, it might feel like the idea has changed, because when you're starting from nothing, it's really easy to change.

But the main idea of Voxa is that companies, specifically companies, not individuals, are investing tons of time in email. We spend about a third of our time doing email. I'm not sure that any of us know what doing email means. We respond as fast as we can, kind of. We ignore a lot of stuff.

We kind of try to prioritize, but really we're just prioritizing based on what the oldest thing sent, what we think is the most important, the most capital letters in the subject line.

We really think that there's an opportunity for companies to optimize how they're using email and all messaging. So we're all about unlocking that black box of that 30% of our time and the team's time to give visibility across the team.

So one example. The first thing that we do is we connect email servers to Salesforce.com. So if you've invested in a CRM, you probably expect to pull up that customer and know the last time that someone talked to that customer and what was said, but the reality is most people don't know that unless sales reps manually checked a box or pushed a button or copied and pasted a message in there.

So with Voxa, you set an organizational rule that says, "All emails from our company's server that are with customers are going to show up in Salesforce." Then we do some magic around adding contacts. So we make sure that if you're emailing with someone at a company that's a client, that person is not in Salesforce, we automatically create it.

So there's a lot of little nifty productivity tools out there in the sales world, but Voxa is one of the first ones that's really enterprise-focused. So a CEO, CSO, VP of sales can really set the policies around how do we use CRM and leverage it.

John Coffin: Is the connection to Salesforce the primary... is that the primary CRM you're dealing with? Or are you...

Johnson Cook: Yeah.

John Coffin: ... agnostic, so to speak, to other...

Johnson Cook: In philosophy, we are agnostic. In reality today, because we have a small team and we've only been around for a year, we are only supporting Salesforce right now. But within a year, we should add two to three other CRM support as well.

John Coffin: Okay. How have you built your team there? Are these folks that you... You're a serial entrepreneur, I know.

Johnson Cook: Right.

John Coffin: Are these folks that you've worked with before?

Johnson Cook: Yeah. So biggest lesson... I started my first company when I was 20 years old, and basically I just hired the team around whoever would come

work for me for no money. I think I learned the downsides of building a company for the cheapest available or first available labor. This time, we really invested in the management team and made sure that we had the right people at the core of the business.

So Chris Halaschek, PhD is our CTO. Multiple startups. Brilliant things that he's built in the past. Andrew Somoza, obviously Co-Founder of Vendormate, Achieve It most recently. He's a well-known sales leader in Atlanta. Then Brandon Cummings is our General Manager who is just like ... he is very young, but he's one of the smartest guys in the Atlanta tech village. So we've got all the... If you know Disc Profiles, Disc Assessments... Right?

John Coffin: Sure.

Johnson Cook: So you got the D-I-S-C. We have one of each personality on the team, which really makes it the solid team. Obviously, you got me, the D, who's just going to go full-steam ahead always. We got the I, the sales guy. Right? We got the S, the stable general manager who is going to take care of the customers. Then we got the analytical C, the CTO.

John Coffin: What a great way about building your team. That's incredible.

Johnson Cook: I should mention. I don't want to get... I'll get crap when I go back to the office if I leave out the other 11 people, because we have about 13 people on the team right now.

John Coffin: Fantastic. So one of the comments that you make about emails in general is that they're uncontrolled, unmeasured, and unmanaged. How true is that? It's just remarkable, the deluge that everyone gets. Where did you get the idea for this? And how have you kind of tweaked your vision, I guess, over the last year?

Johnson Cook: Yeah, it's been a lot of fun. The original idea was really around this very simple problem that stuff doesn't get into the CRM. So that was where we started. We said, "Hey. There's a big hole here." We were looking more at the CRM, less at email. We said, "Email is a big thing we can add to the CRM."

Once we connected to company mail servers though, we saw the bigger problem was not that it's not getting a CRM. It's that it's not getting anywhere. No one can report on it. So the fun part about that vision was less about the customers because the customers were saying, "This is great, but I really want a check-box to let me add this to support cases, or I want to add attachments."

They were kind of really asking for the very small incremental innovation. It was the investor pitches, we pitched over six months, about 105 investors. Probably about 60 to 70 of them are West Coast investors. They looked at what we were doing and said, "You guys have a solid team. You got a solid idea, but you've got to find the bigger vision. You've got to find the platform play. What's the billion-dollar platform that can go disrupt something," not just, "Let's help CRMs be better."

It was cool because that vision was there all along, and companies would eventually come to the realization and would ask us for that, but it was the investors who challenged us to look two steps further than we were looking right now.

John Coffin: So now, you're really... as you're going out from vision to plan to execution, you're really leading with that grand vision rather than the, perhaps, more...

Johnson Cook: We are. That's what we're wrestling with right now...

John Coffin: ... limited one.

Johnson Cook: ... because the sales team, this week, right now, we're saying, "Guys, here's the new vision. Here's the new pitch." They're like, "That pitch doesn't mean anything. I can't get someone to return my voicemail with that pitch." You know? We'll unlock your power of your email. No one is going to return that voicemail.

So they still... we have to find that balance of pitching features and what we call the playground pitch. When you see another parent at the playground, they say, "What do you do?" You need that one-liner that makes total perfect sense and is probably feature-based, but then you've got to back it up with the bigger vision of why would someone buy that.

John Coffin: So how are you, as the CEO, kind of helping your team connect the dots, so to speak, between that vision to plan to... Now, you're in full-blown execution mode as well.

Johnson Cook: Right. It's really one of the hardest things because, as CEO, I mean, this is all that's ever on my mind. I talk about the playground. When I'm at the playground, I'm sitting there thinking, "How do we close more deals next week?" That's all I ever think about.

So I'm always 50 steps ahead of the young sales guy who's making cold calls all day, just because he's not thinking about it at night, when he's out with his buddies.

John Coffin: Right.

Johnson Cook: But I'm always thinking about it. So what I realize is that I'm coming to these conclusions inside my head and talking to other entrepreneurs and investors, but I have to relentlessly repeat those to the team constantly. So every day... my goal right now is every day to find a reason to talk about the pitch and the vision and where we are and where we're going.

John Coffin: Now, I know that's not all that you think about because you're also the co-founder and director of The Atlanta Tech Village. Can you tell us a little bit about that and all the energy that's going on down there?

Johnson Cook: Yeah, it's really awesome. For me, personally, it's really become like the cool community, like the Homeowners Association really. I mean, we're building Voxa. Voxa is my life right now, but we happen to be in this building that... yeah, I was the managing director for the first year and a half of the village, had a blast doing that, learning about architects and permitting and the city and the state, DOT, and things that make me never ever want to do real estate ever again.

But back to software, and software is where I'll stay. But no, that has been incredibly rewarding. So the Atlanta Tech Village has a little over 200 companies, 200 startups in it, 100,000 square feet at the corner of Piedmont and Lenox, right across from Chipotle. That's usually how people know it. It has been an overwhelming success.

I think our goal... It's been a lot of fun because the goal for David and I and the whole team was not to make a ton of money as a real estate play. Our vision was to change the startup landscape in Atlanta and to make Atlanta a top-10 tech startup city, to really put Atlanta on the map.

So we have every, of course, commercial real estate guy in town, coming to us, asking for ideas and what did we do and why did we do it and how did we do it. I always tell them that they're missing the point of what we were doing. We'll talk to them about pricing and everything else all day long, but we weren't trying to fill up a building. We weren't doing it for the square feet. We were really doing it for the companies and what comes out of it.

Our success, the village, has the most impact on the city when we get people out of the building. It means they're too big for the village. Right? Like Bit Pay, great example. Started with five people in January of 2012, I guess, or '13, keeping my years straight. Five people, five Ikea desks. They came, said, "We just need a place to lock the door." Hooked them up, and now they have 20,000 square feet. They have a bull game. They raised, I think, \$30, \$40 million, something like that. Fantastic success, and it came out of the village.

Now, there's no money for us in that, obviously. That's what the real estate guys are like, "Yeah, but you're going to do their . . . you're going to go do their next deal. Right? Sign their space." We're like, "No, that's not how this works."

John Coffin: How does Atlanta Venture fit into all this?

Johnson Cook: Well, people ask if... Because they call us an incubator or whatever... Do we take equity in companies? We don't take equity in companies. We have a small fund set up that we do some early stage investing. Sometimes it's starting our own companies, where we just find an entrepreneur who's looking for something fun to do, and we give him an idea and a little bit of money and help him off.

Then we have an accelerator program that is really unstructured, not scheduled cohorts. It's really when we find a team that can use some mentoring and just a little bit of money. It's not a large investment. We might do that, just kind of as a way to help them along.

John Coffin: So what's really remarkable about this, Johnson, is you're really at the center point of creating this community of entrepreneurs and really great ideas. Congratulations, first of all. But how do you keep it going? Are you going to build another one of these? Because you're full, and you'll likely be full for a long time.

Johnson Cook: No way. No way. No. I think it's just going because of the community of people in there. I mean, we have really good people and a lot of them, and they're densely packed into a small space, which makes it very high energy. I mean, everyone says the first time they visit, it's so much energy in this place. It's not because there's cool ceilings and lights. It's really because of all the people in there.

I think it will sustain itself based on the core values that we built it on, and we only accept people who fit the core values, which is be nice, dream big, pay it forward, and work hard, play hard. When you put people in there, and you measure them, and you say, "Yes or no, you can come in," based on these core values, you're always going to have a perpetually sustaining community.

I think that we have some things that we'll have to figure out. A lot of people are telling us when you get these incubator type community centers, you'll have some squatters or some zombies, the startups with two guys that...

John Coffin: Right.

Johnson Cook: They're living off their wife's salary, and they could do this forever, and they don't really care if it grows. They're trying, but they're not going to really go for it.

John Coffin: They're really just looking for a place to come every day.

Johnson Cook: Yeah, and there are people who say, "Oh, you're pampering startups too much." Right? Free beer, free coffee, free lunch every Friday. This isn't how it's supposed to be. It's supposed to be you're starving, and you're in miserable closet office space somewhere that you're dying to get out of, and you're trying to get to that next level.

I think there's a balance there. Right? I don't think you should have to be miserable when you're first starting out. You got enough other stuff to worry about than having a desk that keeps breaking on you. Some people have proposed that we do like an "up or out." So every year, you either grow, or you get out. It's kind of a mandatory growth. I don't think we can do that, logistically, because there's just no space for everybody to grow.

John Coffin: Right.

Johnson Cook: We don't want to just kick people out because they haven't added head count, but I think we'll... It's... We didn't have a grand plan when we started. We knew there was a need, just like startups. We don't know the end vision. We don't know what it'll look like in five years, but every day we just do what we think is the next best thing for Atlanta.

John Coffin: Well, that's a... It's been a great success story. Congratulations to you and your partners. I'm going to shift to Kel. Thank you for coming all the way from Raleigh to be with us. Kel, tell us about Plexus Capital and what you and your partners are doing today.

Kel Landis: First of all, I may have made the wrong choice to go second, after all that energy there, but maybe I can offer a little older energy. The biggest and best news in my life is that I became a grandfather about a week ago.

John Coffin: Oh, congratulations.

Kel Landis: So I have a little boy in the world.

Johnson Cook: Now, you win. That's cool.

Kel Landis: Sometimes that's hard for me to believe, but it's very exciting. That is part of kind of my values too, that family does come first, no matter how hard we all work. But I was a banker for 25 years, and I think maybe our paths even crossed at one point. After retiring from the banking business as CEO of RBC Centura Bank, we actually came into Atlanta in the early 2000s. We founded a private fund complex, called Plexus Capital.

We are licensed as a small business investment company by the SBA, the Small Business Administration. They're kind of our partner in providing capital to businesses that need growth capital. That's what we do.

John Coffin: So you're now on your third fund. How many companies are you currently working with? And how much capital have you invested?

Kel Landis: So we started in 2006, which was right before the great recession. So we had a year and a half or two of good times, and then the world came to an end. We all... but somehow we kicked and clawed our way through that and invested our first fund. Then in 2009, raised and invested another fund, Plexus Fund Two, and now about two years ago, we closed on Plexus Fund Three.

Each time, we've gotten bigger with each subsequent fund, but we have invested now in about 65 businesses all over the country, most of them on the East Coast. We probably prefer that they all be a little closer to home. Atlanta would be one of our primary target markets where we'd love to put capital to work. So I'm really pleased to be here to hopefully be talking to the business community here about the kind of capital...

John Coffin: But in that emerging growth stage, where they're really gaining momentum, and you're providing debt. Also, a part of your investment is typically a small piece of equity. Correct?

Kel Landis: Yeah, we are helping businesses that are a little bit later stage, beyond the startup phase, cash flow, and we get a return. Our return comes from interest income, but also what you mentioned, equity upside that we get through either a warrant, which would be an equity stake in the business five years out, or sometimes we will write an equity check into the business, kind of like a private equity investment. So our return to our investors comes from interest income, as well as capital gains from the gain on the equity.

John Coffin: Okay. You won't say it, but I'm going to. Plexus Capital was named in 2013 the Small Business Investment Company of the Year, by the SBA, I guess.

Kel Landis: Correct. Yeah.

John Coffin: The Small Business Association. That is an incredible award, I guess. As you look back on the first three funds, what would you say are the cultural cornerstones of your business and why you think you've had that now formalized success, by being named to that great award?

Kel Landis: Well, I heard Johnson talk about values, and they rolled off his tongue just like ours do. We call it our CARE values. They're the cornerstone of how we operate every day. The CARE stands for: Care about our business partners. Always do what's right. The R stands for respect all of our business partners, and the E is to expect excellence in everything we do.

So we live by that. I think the way the SBA has viewed the... Every year, they give an SBIC of the year. It's a national award for the small business investment company. It kind of lives the vision of why that program exists and has a great relationship with the SBA. So I think we just try to do it right, and we were very honored to receive that award last year as validation for what we do.

John Coffin: You were kind enough to autograph my copy of *The Little Book of Do* this morning. Tell us about this book and what the genesis of that was and how you've become an author now and what you're doing with it.

Kel Landis: Yeah. Well, I have a day job as a partner in Plexus Capital, but really this was a passion of mine that's been cooking in my head for probably 10 years. Early this year, I just kind of finally had the inspiration to say, "I'm going to write this book about the notion of 'do'." When you pronounce that... When you pronounced it earlier, I'm not sure sometimes listeners can know what you're saying, but it's do, D-O.

John Coffin: Not D-E-W. Right?

Kel Landis: I say that the two-letter verb "do" is the most powerful word in our lives, if we will live what it means. It just means that the book is really about the notion that every day we all wake up with a choice to do what matters in our own lives, but our families, our businesses, and our communities. We don't spend our lives having a long list of "want to do's" or "one day I'm going to do's."

This book talks about ways to examine what to do and what not to do and finding the inspiration and the tools to do it, and then acknowledging all the benefits that come from a life of "do."

John Coffin: One of the great chapters in there is some practical advice about how to filter and prioritize what you have to do. Can you talk about that a little bit? Because you added on to a concept that Stephen Covey introduced probably one or two decades ago.

Kel Landis: Yeah.

John Coffin: Spend some time on that, if you would.

Kel Landis:

Well, you said that notion of the importance and urgency, two-dimensional matrix kind of helped you organize your life, and it did me too. It impacted me 15 or 20 years ago. It's the notion that there are things that are important, and then there are things that are urgent. You don't have to do everything right now. That might be one of my faults, is that I take on things more... I need to really force myself to think that way.

But what was missing from that two-dimensional quadrant analysis was what moves your passion meter. When I heard Johnson talk, I mean, you can tell that this guy has got plenty of passion. I think I do too, even as a grandpa. But the notion of trying to introduce a real introspective analysis of what really moves you to do and putting that in the equation as well, because the things that really move your passion meter, you're going to be a lot more successful at, not just whether they're important or urgent.

So that was what I tried to do, and so it ends up being a three-dimensional cube, called the "do wedge." It's just a way to have three axes that you analyze what to do and what not to do.

John Coffin:

Well, I would encourage everyone to get the book because that alone is really a valuable thing, from a time management standpoint, and will help everybody do better. One other concept that you include in this is impediments to doing, and the four major impediments that you highlight are fear, procrastination, analysis by paralysis, and time. I'd love to ask both of you, maybe starting with you, Kel, which of those four is the biggest impediment for you. And how do you overcome that?

Kel Landis:

Yeah, I talk in the book about there are physical tools to deal with these, and there are mental tools. So the mental tools are your attitude and your determination. That really is what pushes you through all four of those, to be honest with you.

The one thing I would say... I struggled with all of them. I think we all do. But analysis paralysis, we so often seek all this perfect certainty around what do the numbers say, but sometimes we get enough information to make a gut call, and we can analyze things to death. There's a time to act.

The other pet peeve of mine, and I'll yield to Johnson after this, is the one about time. When people say, or even when I say, "I don't have time," I've tried to take that out of my vocabulary because that really just means, "I haven't made time." The things that really matter, that fit on that quadrant of important and urgent and move my passion meter, if they hit all three of those, then I can make the time. We all can.

John Coffin: Jackson, again, fear, procrastination, analysis paralysis, time. Are there any of those that you... one of those that you particularly struggle with? And what are some tips on dealing with them?

Johnson Cook: Well, I can comment on each one. So I'll go backwards. Time... I had a great entrepreneur friend of mine who's very successful, ridiculously successful, about four or five years ago, just said to me, "Time is not a limiting factor. You're the limiting factor. Time is never an excuse for anything."

John Coffin: Right.

Johnson Cook: There's always enough time in the day, and that was what started me getting up a lot earlier in the morning, so that I could start reading because I never read.

John Coffin: So what time do you get up?

Johnson Cook: I try for before 5:00.

John Coffin: Okay.

Johnson Cook: So 4:30 to 5:00. Usually I can wake up naturally around 5:15, 5:30 without an alarm. So that works for me well. So I get a good hour in before the kids wake up.

John Coffin: Okay. I have to ask. So when do you go to bed?

Johnson Cook: Early. Oh, I have to go to bed early. I have to get my eight hours. So 9:30, 10:00 is when I'm like done.

John Coffin: Okay.

Johnson Cook: My wife is having a hard time. She's like, "No, there's too much to do," because she likes to get it all done in the evenings. So that's the constant battle in our house. I just want to go to bed, so I can get up and get my stuff done. She wants to do her stuff. So time is not a limiting factor.

Analysis paralysis. This is probably my weakness, as well as my strength, but analysis is not in my nature. I say, "Screw it. Let's go do it." If it looks like a good idea right now, let's go do it. That's the only way I get anything done.

Procrastination. Honestly the best way I've dealt with that is very practical, and it's just becoming an inbox zero guy. So my email is my life. Obviously I built a company around it.

John Coffin: Right. What do you mean by inbox zero?

Johnson Cook: So every time... I try to be sure by the end of the day or, worst case, first thing in the morning in my kind of catch-up time, that I get down to no emails in my inbox, like zero. So I either need to do something, delete it, reply, ignore it, whatever I need to do. I just need to deal with it.

Then otherwise, it might be putting something on my calendar to deal with it later, but I don't even believe in the "mute this email and make it pop back up in seven days." I need to deal with it right now because it's too easy. I know when I'm procrastinating, it's when I've got 10 emails sitting there, and I can't get past that bottom 10 because there's something that I got to do that I don't want to do.

Then fear. Fear is a big one for me because in my first 10 years, in my 20s, building a company, I think the biggest thing that affected me was just a lack of confidence. I kind of accidentally built a company, became an accidental entrepreneur, and I didn't really know what I was doing. It wasn't really an intentional decision. So I didn't really have the confidence that I was doing the right thing. I just was kind of doing what came next. It took me until about my 30s to get the confidence that actually nobody knows what they're doing, really.

John Coffin: That's exactly right. You know? Sometimes, so much of starting a company is starting a company.

Johnson Cook: Just do it. I was like, "Wow. I've got 10 years of really great experience." I mean, I can figure this out as good as anybody else, and I did it when I was 21 years old. So now, I've got a much larger network and much more resources to do. So just kind of man up and just be confident, not egotistical. There's a line there. Right?

John Coffin: Right. Sure.

Johnson Cook: Just be confident. If you just know that you've got this, own it. Then fear doesn't really come in there. You have to balance it still. You have to be aware that something can kill you, if something can kill you, but don't let it overwhelm you.

John Coffin: Now, Johnson, you're a very active writer as well. You blog a lot at your Johnson.com, Johnsoncook.com. Correct?

Johnson Cook: Yeah.

John Coffin: When do you find the time or make the time, to use Kel's terminology, to write?

Johnson Cook: So I discovered blogging right after I exited my last company, about four years ago, I'd say. That was really because I didn't have anything to do. I

needed something to do, and I was constantly trying to start the next business or do something. I had a lot of little false starts because I had to wake up. I had to do something that day.

A good kind of friend and a great well-known guy in town, John Saddington, is uber successful blogger. He said, "Dude, you got to just start your blog first," because I said, "I got all these companies I'm going to start." He said, "Start your blog first." It was like this outlet and this structure for me to be creating.

David Cummings has blogged every year, I think, for seven years now maybe. Every day. Sorry. Every single day. He's had two kids. I know for a fact he's had two kids, and even on those days, he didn't miss a blog post.

John Coffin: Wow.

Johnson Cook: For him, he put it very accurately, which is, in the beginning of the company, he was writing code. Right? I was shooting video and doing a little bit of writing code. You have this need to be creating always. But once you start kind of building a company, the CEO can't be putting his hands in the code all day long and messing up, I mean, at least the two of us. We shouldn't be. There's much better coders that can be building what we do.

John Coffin: Sure.

Johnson Cook: But we still have this need to be creating something all the time, and creating content and writing really solves that need. It scratches that itch. I get... I can tell that I get lower energy when I go a couple of weeks and haven't written anything, because I've got all this stuff in my head, but it's so kind of... It's good exercise, calming exercise, I think, to just sit down, put it in a structured format, and share it with the world.

John Coffin: Kel, you've done it in a traditional form of actually putting it between a front and back cover. What's next, as it relates to the book? Because, I guess, part of it is just getting the word out and actually really kind of actualizing your ideas. Talk a little bit about what's next for the book.

Kel Landis: Yeah, thanks. I'm glad you made those comments, Johnson, about blogging because that's probably what should be next here, as well as tweeting. I do have Twitter accounts and Facebook and all that, but it does take time. I have a day job, and I'm not quite as computer savvy as maybe the younger generation, but that maybe is next.

The other thing I'd like to do is try to begin a little bit of a do-movement, where people begin to wake up every day with this notion of doing and

achieving what they want with their lives. There may even be some applications for business training and some of that. I have some ideas about giving away money to people that do...

Johnson Cook: I'll take some.

Kel Landis: ... that do things, do special things through their own initiative, and maybe having the Do Awards, might reward initiative and action on good ideas.

John Coffin: Fantastic. Well, we'll look forward to the future of do. I know that both of you have been very active over the years in two respective organizations. Kel, for you, Young Presidents Organization, YPO. Johnson, for you, Entrepreneurs Organization, EO. I'd love your perspective on what EO, in your instance, Johnson, has meant to you and why you've been so committed to it.

Johnson Cook: Yeah, it's a... I think I may say it maybe too much because I think it might lose its impact, but it truly changed my life to join EO. Because like I said, I started my company in my apartment. I didn't know other entrepreneurs. I didn't seek out other entrepreneurs. I just did my thing, and I knew my industry, and I knew my people, but I never found that peer support.

I think that's why a lot of the confidence and kind of... I was just like trying to survive. It was always trying to survive. Once I joined EO, I started realizing, first of all, that whole thing about nobody knows what they're doing.

I also started realizing that in a structured setting, when you get a group of entrepreneurs together, and you put extreme confidential measures in place, people will talk a little about their business, but then ultimately they talk about what really matters, which is their kids and their health and what problems from their childhood and what they're really scared about and what they're really excited about. We call it the best 5% and the worst 5% that you don't talk about other people with.

I started to notice a pattern, in that the most successful entrepreneurs were the guys who had their personal stuff figured out. They were healthy. They exercise. They had family balance. They were intentional about time with their kids and their wife and vacation and everything else. That really was kind of exciting to me to realize that you don't have to look at it as work/life balance and this really... where you're always getting pulled in two directions.

You look at it as kind of a house, and you've got to build the foundation. Foundation has to be your health and your family and everything else. The rest of it is easy compared to that. It really is. Building a company is not that hard compared to making yourself exercise three times a week.

John Coffin: Right. Kel, what about you? YPO, I know, is... You've been involved for a long time. What did that mean to you, perhaps in the earlier stage of your career?

Kel Landis: Yeah. Well, they kick you out when you turn 50. So I aged out.

Johnson Cook: Graduate. Graduate.

Kel Landis: Graduate. But now, I'm in an organization called CEO, which is kind of a successor organization to YPO. But I think the important part of that, I think what Johnson said is true. The ability to talk to other people and businesses, in YPO, they call it forum, which is a smaller group of people. You get together periodically, and you share what's working and not working in your personal life, your business life, your life in your community.

But I think the power of any organization like that is network. Plexus Capital... The word Plexus stands for a series of interconnected parts or a network. I just think I've learned the power of networking, and it's just showing up. I call it swimming in the stream. YPO and EO and others like that just allow you to be with other people and learn from their mistakes and their successes.

John Coffin: Absolutely. Another organization like this that I'd throw into the mix for everyone out there is Vistage, because there's not an age requirement. It doesn't... You don't have to be an entrepreneur or startup situation, which I know is true for EO as well. But three great organizations that help executives and leaders grow. Really I want to shift gears and talk a little bit about money. You both...

Johnson Cook: Kel is giving it away. All you have to do is do something.

Kel Landis: That's right.

John Coffin: You're both very much involved in the investor community, both from raising capital and, Kel, in your instance, distributing it to others. Talk about the environment today and how that has changed perhaps over the last two or three years, as the global economy improves a little bit. Kel, thoughts on investments these days?

Kel Landis: Yeah. Well, there is a lot of money out there right now, a lot of private equity kind of money, chasing deals. When there's a lot of money, that pushes up prices. That's good for entrepreneurs that maybe can sell their businesses for a higher multiple, but there always needs to be good discipline about paying a fair price for a business. Because when you pay too much, or you over-leverage the capital structure, that really does nobody any good.

John, as a banker, you know exactly what that means. I mean, we basically lend money just like you do. We just do it with a higher risk profile and get a little bit of a higher return. So I guess to shorten that answer, lots of deals, lots of activity right now, but quite honestly not as much discipline out there right now as probably is prudent.

John Coffin: And on the attracting investors side, you've been very successful in your third fund. Are investors out there looking to... Is there a hunger to invest in funds like yours?

Kel Landis: Yeah, and I'm here in Atlanta today to talk to investment advisors and others, in addition to this radio show. Once I scheduled this, I'm making other calls on institutional money managers that might want exposure to what are called private investments. Our return profile is kind of a mid to high teens kind of profile. Whereas probably the Dow or just equities might have a 6% to 8% long-term profile. So you're kind of doubling your risk, but hopefully doubling your return.

So yes, I mean, it's an education process for us to share what we do, but I have this mentality also that anybody that I know, that I don't share with what we do, I'm doing them a disservice because I believe that much in what we do, providing capital, growth capital to small businesses. That's what we do, and that's why we exist. We just happen to make a good return at the same time.

John Coffin: And you just happen to be named the best at it from the SBA. So that's a great combination. Johnson, what about you? You've just been through the process. What observations do you have and advice do you have for those 200 or plus companies over at Atlanta Tech Village who might be next?

Johnson Cook: Yeah. It's a very different world than Kel's world, I think, in the early stage of fundraising and obviously investing, because there's not cash flow. There's not a business. There's an idea, and there's a team. Pitching an idea and a team is an interesting process. You have to... It's very relationship based, obviously, I mean, as any pitching is, but it's not so much about the numbers.

So you have to have a good vision, and you've got to have something that people will believe in, a plan, a history, experience, executing a plan like the one that you have in front of you, and the vision has to be big enough. That was the biggest thing we learned. Our kind of email connector for Salesforce pitch worked really well in Atlanta because everyone in Atlanta is comfortable with a single.

We went out West, and they all said, "Where's the big idea?" So you have to understand the geography and kind of where you are right in the world, but we also... This is what John Yates is saying around town, from Morris Manning every day now, is that the money... Because tech companies aren't IPO-ing right now, there's not a lot of IPOs, a lot of money is coming down market.

So you have a lot of growth equity guys getting into a little earlier stage, kind of private equity, almost looking a little bit like venture investing, and then some of the venture guys even doing some seed type investing. So everyone is kind of looking down, which we found to be really interesting.

We talked to a lot of funds that would not normally talk to a seed deal, but they said, "No, we really want to talk." They have seed programs. So it's an interesting time, interesting time. I learned a lot.

John Coffin: As you grow, what do you expect to... What kind of feedback do you expect to receive from your investors? And is that helpful in the process?

Johnson Cook: Yeah. So we had a good network. I mean, between the team we put together, we could almost self-fund it, or we could certainly get money. It was... The smart money/dumb money thing really meant something to us because we really could just get dumb money. That was not a challenge.

The hard thing for us was we were building a company that needs to sell into fortune-500 companies. So our question was, to the investors, "How do you help us get that?" Now, some of them, Andreessen and Horowitz, for example, you would say, "How are they going to help you? They do early stage consumer stuff." That's a name brand. Right?

John Coffin: Sure.

Johnson Cook: Like you go to Coca-Cola and say, "Andreessen invested in us," and you might get some meetings that you wouldn't otherwise. Where we ended up is with some amazing, I guess you'd call them, super angels here in Atlanta, so Andrew Dorman who's leading Ethos Capital. Andrew is Dave Dorman's son. So Dave was CEO of AT&T. Tom Noonan led the round. Tom obviously started ISS and sold it to IBM for a billion dollars, took it public and everything. Then Boland Jones through Premiere Global and then David Cummings, of course, because he and I kind of started it together.

So we've got guys who have been CEOs of major public companies, who have the relationships that they need to pick up the phone and they say, "Look. It's not about getting you the meetings, guys. It's about you being ready to not screw it up when you get the meetings." So our feedback and kind of guidance within is get your product ready and right now, for the

next six to 12 months, put all of our energy into the product and getting customer feedback from the smaller deals. Right? We have to get oxygen. We have to keep getting users on the platform, but the goal for us is to get into the larger companies.

John Coffin: So in your instance, investors can be a... are going to, over time, have a huge impact on your business. Kel, I know that's something that Plexus prides... you pride yourself in as well. When you partner with a company or a company that you're investing in, you bring a lot of value. Talk about that.

Kel Landis: We like to view it as a partnership, even though we have investors, and they're technically called limited partners, our shareholders. We view them as strategic partners, and we have lots of banks across the United States. We have 46 banks that have invested into Plexus funds. We have a lot of family offices, and these are wealthy people that have established a formal office to manage the family's money. Calling on some of them today as well, here in Atlanta, and there are a lot of them here.

We have institutional funds or institutional money managers that have invested in us. The good news is we work for them, but we try to educate them on how they can feed to us deals. Deals just means interesting opportunities for us to deploy capital. We ask them for deal flow, so that we can hopefully make really good investments.

John Coffin: Then on the flip side, when you're investing in a company, you're really having a constant dialogue with them around their strategy and results, et cetera. I'm sure you provide great perspective to the companies you're investing in as well.

Kel Landis: Well, we like to think so. We view them as partners as well, our portfolio companies, those 65 businesses that I mentioned. We have board meetings. We establish formal governance procedures in all of our little businesses. Even though they may be smaller businesses, we try to run them as if they're smaller public companies, where they have quarterly board meetings, monthly financials. We bring in new and independent board members many times. So all of those things are about us adding value to a smaller business, acting and becoming more like a real bigger business.

John Coffin: Helping them to... Using your network to leverage their success.

Kel Landis: Yeah, just like you do.

John Coffin: Great. Johnson, best business advice that you've ever received? I know that's probably a tough question. You've already talked about quite a bit of good advice.

Johnson Cook: Not a tough question at all. It's a no-brainer. As I was kind of between the last companies, my last company and what I ended up doing, I had a lot of different things I was cooking up and different people looking at working with. Actually the same friend who told me, "Time is not a limiting factor..." You kind of go back to people who give you good advice.

My question was, "How do I evaluate? What do I do next?" I mean, I've got short-term gain, long-term gain. There's so many different variables here. I can't imagine what spreadsheet will help me make this decision. He said, "Johnson, it's very simple. Who do you want to spend your time with? Who do you want to associate with? Who do you want to work with? It doesn't matter what you do. You decide what you want to do based on the people."

Ever since, that has been ingrained in my way of doing business. Everything is just super clear. It works for customers. It works for vendors. It works for employees. It works for where you want your office. I mean, it works for everything. Who do you want to bank with? Who do you want to work with? I mean, it's all about the people.

John Coffin: Great advice. Kel, what about you?

Kel Landis: You know, I thought about this. You sent this to us. Maybe the most powerful quote or just advice that I've gotten is that sometimes the less that you ask for, the more you will get. That's a pretty simple concept. You hear vulture capital. That's the opposite of what we think we want to be. As long as the deal is fair, and as long as you go into any business relationship, I've just learned that sometimes the less you ask for, the more you get.

John Coffin: Okay. Fantastic. We're moving into the speed round. This is where I'm going to ask you some quick random questions. Johnson, what did you want to be when you were growing up?

Johnson Cook: Air traffic controller.

John Coffin: Air traffic controller. Now, how have you activated that in your life?

Johnson Cook: I got my pilot's license.

John Coffin: Oh, congratulations. Okay.

Johnson Cook: I got about 750 hours of flying. I've actually pushed pause on flying airplanes with three kids and a new company right now.

John Coffin: Okay. Yeah. That's... We don't need anybody to be collecting insurance on you.

Johnson Cook: No. No, there's plenty of money to be had if I go down, but let's not use it.

John Coffin: Kel, what about you?

Kel Landis: For some crazy reason, I thought I wanted to be a dentist, and I would have been the worst one ever. I was in a chem lab at the University of North Carolina and dropped a crucible on the floor that cost \$200, and I finally said, "This isn't for me."

John Coffin: What about favorite movie, Johnson?

Johnson Cook: Oh, we did this before, Dark Knight. Batman. I love Batman, anything Batman, Bruce Wayne, all that.

John Coffin: Okay. Great. Kel?

Kel Landis: Well, I said Forest Gump earlier, just because of the attitude of that character and overcoming obstacles and positive attitude.

John Coffin: Excellent. Favorite charity or organization that you're involved with, Johnson?

Johnson Cook: I'm going to have to go with EO. EO is a nonprofit. So that does count, and I am the president this year of EO. So I'm putting a lot into it, trying to give back, because it means so much to me.

John Coffin: Excellent. Kel?

Kel Landis: Education initiatives of all kinds, but the two that people would hear would be the YMCA and the Boy Scouts, just because both of those organizations had a profound effect on my life, and they affect the lives of young people that become older people and, I would suggest, better people.

John Coffin: Excellent. Thank you both for joining us here in the studio. This has been a great conversation. Johnson, if you would, tell our listeners how they can get in contact with you or learn more about Voxa.

Johnson Cook: Yep. Voxa.com, V-O-X-A, Voxa.com. Follow us on Twitter, @TeamVoxa. My personal website is Johnsoncook.com.

John Coffin: Thank you. Kel?

Kel Landis: Plexus Capital. KLandis, L-A-N-D-I-S, @Plexuscap.com. My book has a website, www.Littlebookofdo.com.

John Coffin: Fantastic. Thank you both again. Join us again next week for another Founders Club broadcast, sponsored by Atlantic Capital Bank and powered by Business RadioX.