



channel mastery

154: Earl Hunter

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- Kristin: Welcome back everybody to another episode of the channel mastery podcast. I'm so excited to introduce Earl Hunter to you today early as the founder of black folks, camp two, and is an experienced business leader across multiple outdoor active lifestyle industries. Earl, we are so happy to have you
- Earl: Right on. I'm glad you guys, uh, allow me to join and I'm looking forward to, uh, to share with you guys all the amazing things about what we do and how we get it done and, and how the industry can, uh, can do better.
- Kristin: Awesome. And you bring such a great background, which I'd love to start talking about, you know, with you introducing your background, but the first place I met you was actually at Overland expo West out in Flagstaff.
- Earl: Yeah. That was an experience because I think we both, I don't know if we both were new
- to it, but I was certainly it because I had never, I had never seen anything like that. That was my first time seeing the earth roamer or anything in that particular space. And, uh, and so it was a, it was different, but it wasn't, um, something that I wasn't used to being though, particularly in that particular space of the outdoor industry. So it was cool. It was cool. I liked it.
- Kristin: Well, tell us your background at SylvanSport and some of the other, uh, professional attributes that brought you to found this awesome new organization that you have.
- Earl: Well, good. I'm glad you asked. And, um, again, uh, you know, I, um, I tell folks all the time, I never knew anything about the outdoor industry until I got in, got to SylvanSport. Um, and I, I was, uh, uh, Gucci Louis Vatton wearing a Tahlia suit, wearing sports car driving executive who, uh, didn't have any thought process and never even wanted to be in the outdoor industry at all, because I knew nothing about it. And really, I didn't know anything about it because of course my culture and where I came from, we were never even shared the information about the outdoor industry. And so my background, you know, in, within Sylvans what, which is an Epic particular time, uh, was the vice

president of sales. Um, they were a, a small company, uh, that may pop up campers. And my job was to take a company from 800 to \$15,000 in sales, uh, to where I left the company in four years to 17 and a half million dollars.

Earl ([02:09](#)):

And so my, my job, I felt like my job was done, uh, in that particular space. But once I got into the outdoor industry, I figured that my, my, my, actually my Le my legacy just got started based on what I saw in the industry and why the industry needed to be improved, to be Frank with you. Uh, and so for me, uh, where we are right now with our company, black folks, can't tune next too. Uh, like I like to explain the folks that means as well. Uh, and, um, and that, it also means the fact that, uh, black folks do camp too. Right. And so, um, we are, uh, uh, awesome organization. You know, we, we, our job is to remove fear, to add knowledge and to invite more black folks into the outdoors. We don't sugar coat that we don't even sugar coat.

Earl ([02:54](#)):

The fact that why we need to do these things, we don't sugar coat, why the industry needs change. And we certainly, and we certainly don't sugar coat, the fact that we don't twist arms, which was hard. Right. And so, uh, my, my, my beginning in this particular space, uh, um, really was, um, very, um, very exciting, you know, I, uh, being one of the only black executives in the RV industry, number one, uh, was, uh, was something that I, uh, that I, that I understood. Um, but again, I, we spent at our company, black folks came to, we spend 20% of our time talking about the reasons why black folks have not been really in the industry or in the lifestyle. And we spend 80% of our time, how are we going to improve it and how are we going to change it? Right. And so we're a marketing consultant company on one end, but we are a, certainly a world changes, uh, in the entire space. Right.

Alice ([03:46](#)):

That's awesome. So you just mentioned you being one of the few black executives in the industry. Um, can you expand on what that was like and what your experience was like there?

Earl ([03:58](#)):

So, you know, um, you know, the RV industry, uh, they pick at a time, um, for me, um, you know, I'm a kid, you know, I grew up in all black, everything, all black high school, all black elementary school, all black everything. And, um, you know, I grew up basically, I grew up in the bricks. And so my experience living in those particular areas, but also transitioning from that and going to a PWI, which predominantly white institutes, you know, it, it allowed me to have that thought process of, I can have the communication. I can roam. I can do business with anyone. Right. My previous work before the outdoor industry was in international sourcing. So I was traveling to Asia, a lot, understanding different coaches. So I've maximized the thought process and how you actually communicate with different folks, but the outdoor industry is a little bit different.

Earl ([04:45](#)):

And the reason why the outdoor industry is a little bit different, um, it wasn't that I was treated bad at all. It was that it is that, that when you're the only one, uh, in some spaces, um, it, you're not treated bad, but sometimes your voice is magnified, uh, from a, uh, from a, uh, uh, area of, uh, where most folks don't think of as passion, which I believe is passion. A lot of folks sometimes want to tone, block you a bit, right? Because my, because they've never seen anybody like me before in that particular space, or they hadn't even experienced anybody that looks like me in that particular space yet, you know, I was

actually succeeding in that space. And so the way that I succeeded in that particular space was I was loud. I was proud and I wanted to get it done.

Earl ([05:30](#)):

And so the bottom line is for me, uh, whether, you know, being a black male in that industry, wasn't going to stop me from winning and being a black male. One of the only black males in this particular industry is not going to stop us from winning as well. Is there, matter of fact, it enhances me because I believe for the, the bottom line is, you know, I've never sugar coated. Why there weren't black folks in the industry, and I've never sugarcoated why we need to get more black folks in the industry and also in the lifestyle. And so with that being said, you know, I'm a very candid individual when it comes to the reasons why we're not in the outdoors while we're not in the outdoor industry, right. I'm a very candid and how I talk about that because, um, we need to change this.

Earl ([06:10](#)):

We have to change this. If we don't change this, what we have right now, the outdoor industry, the outdoor lifestyle and America, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves. Particularly in 2020, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves, even for a company like black folks, camp two to even be in existence in 2020, we ought to be ashamed of ourselves. Right? Well, I can say that we can be ashamed of ourselves a million times, right? And I can talk about the past a million times and reasons why black folks don't go camping. I can explain to you why we should go camping. And I do that in a lot of spaces, but again, we spend 80% of our time focusing on how we are going to improve that narrative, right? Because we have to improve that. Particularly there's some lives on the line. There are some, there are some lives they're children, children, children, that have never been in the outdoors and they won't ever go in the outdoors unless the industry gets behind this and changes, it's their job to change this. Right? So I'm, I'm excited to be a part of the industry to help change it.

Kristin ([07:09](#)):

Well, that's fantastic. And I really respect your passion, and frankly, I can speak on behalf of all of our brands. We really need somebody just like you, who has a strong voice understands. Exactly. I think that what I'd love to kind of hear, and again, I, I totally agree. This show should be about the 80% of the ideation that you're working on, but I do have a question around, um, just identifying because you had a firsthand experience with it, and I think it would be helpful for our audience. If you could talk about some of the systemic issues that you have faced as an executive in the outdoor and RV and Overland markets.

Earl ([07:48](#)):

Well, I tell you, you know, personally me as a black, black male in the industry, I haven't really had any issues in regards to how I do business, but I had had issues. And in fact, when you don't see people that look like me in the industry, when I speak, sometimes it comes across as he's being erratic or he's being mean, or he's being too pushy and things of that nature. But if you understand the culture and understand how we are, you know, then you know how we get down in regards to wanting to win. And, and let's be Frank with you. You know, my mother is always told me, my grandmothers have always told me I had to be better. I had to do things better. I had to do things faster and stronger. And because in, particularly in regards to white folks, right.

Earl ([08:28](#)):

And so what we do in that space, and you're, you're driving that, and you're thinking that in your mind, right. It doesn't mean that I think I'm better than you. It doesn't mean that I think, um, any, uh, you're, you're less than me. My job is to go out and be the best that I can be. And so if that seems like it's being overpowering, overbearing, I don't think that's my fault. I think that's probably the fault of the individuals and the reason why we should have more black folks in that lifestyle, in the industry. So let me just of kind of get to the, uh, to the brass. This, there are reasons why black folks haven't been in the industry right there, a reason why black folks have not been into the, uh, into the lifestyle, you know, particularly in the South, there's a lot of generational fear, right?

Earl ([09:06](#)):

The outdoors was, and still is probably one of the most feared places in regards to black folks, right? The, the, the woods, um, generationally my grandmother would tell my great grandmother would tell my grandmother, my grandmother would tell my mother, my mother would tell me, do not go in those woods. Right. And that was, uh, that was a star real reality, do not go in those woods because the bogeyman was in those woods. Right. And if we really want to be honest and I, and I'm all I always am when I, I don't want to sugar coat, this th the white, the, the, the, the, the bogeyman, well, white folks, right. Particularly what our ancestors thought. Right? And so when you have that particular, uh, notion, those thought processes passed down a year, over years, over years, over years, now you have a problem with fear.

Earl ([09:53](#)):

The second reason is because we don't have any knowledge, right? The majority of black folks, particularly in the South or wherever, we don't know where tents are. We have no clue exactly how to buy them. We don't know how sleeping bags, we don't know a 20 degree sleeping bag versus a 40 degree sleeping bag, zero degree sleeping bag. We didn't know anything about rock climbing. We don't even think about, uh, uh, trail running, uh, kayak and RV, mountain biking. Yet black folks are some of the most athletic people in the world. And no one said, wow, these folks, these folks don't do anything. And the X games, we don't see them at. All right. The third thing is, and it's probably the most saddest part of it. All. It was drives me nuts because I look at the outdoor industry is at \$880 billion industry. Let me, let me re let me play that again.

Earl ([10:39](#)):

\$880 billion, right. And they never said to themselves, well, Hmm, black folks only make up 13% of the us population. Yet. They have a \$1.3 trillion spin. Why aren't we asking for black folks money? Why haven't we said black folks, please, please, we're begging you for your money. I said this and a, in a news, a, in a snooze news article, the outdoor industry is the only industry that black folks have to beg the outdoor industry to advertise and market to us. Why? Right on a one enemy, you know, as a, an executive and understand numbers, I can understand that the industry said, look, we're going to spend 80% of our dollars promoting to 80% of the people that buy our products, which would be white folks. Right? And so then they said, well, what if we take the 20%? You say, well, we're going to take the 20% of our dollars and we're going to market to everyone else.

Earl ([11:36](#)):

Well, I think it's probably 95 or 97, 3%. It may have jumped up a little bit since COVID, or maybe since Mr. Florida's killed, but just keep it real. In that particular space, there was nothing really done in that particular space to really drive this. There was some advertising, maybe there were, there were a couple

of commercials that missed the Mark. And I know that because I watched these commercials just totally missed the Mark. That being said, I can understand why the industry may have, may have not wanted to venture into the space of wanting to market to black folks, particularly in that business. But that's no excuse though, because what happens is when you want to make more money, you find ways to make more money. You advertise not pander. You advertise just like every other company does to go get the black dollar.

Earl ([12:25](#)):

So many folks say, what are you, or what is black folks Camp too. We are that company to help consult companies on how to really market and advertise to us because the bottom line, the same areas, these beautiful national parks, these beautiful state parks, these beautiful areas that these, the outdoor industry sells all their beautiful products and their nice gear and their skis. And all these mum bikes, these \$10,000 mountain bikes, and these \$200 to \$300, um, hiking shoes, black folks pay for that land, right? So why wouldn't you want to invite them to enjoy the very same land that you make money on? And they can enjoy as well. Right? We paid for it just like everybody else. Right? And so there's been so many folks have said, well, the reason why black folks don't go camping and don't go in the outdoors because they don't have any access.

Earl ([13:21](#)):

That may be true. In some space, we have money to go to Disney world. We have money to go to all these other places. And you have to ask the question, why haven't we gone into the outdoors? And the reason why we haven't gone into the outdoors, because we have fear, we have no knowledge and we haven't been invited. Right? And those three things right there. If you look across the board at anything that we've done in particular business, you have to remove fear. You have to add knowledge and you have to invite votes simple as that.

Kristin ([13:51](#)):

And that's absolutely so well said. And, and the purpose of your company, Earl is huge because a lot of executives in our space or budget handlers are very much living in fear of the call-out culture. And you exist to help buffer that you exist to show them the way.

Earl ([14:10](#)):

Well, it's not so much assuring in the way my job is to, to, to ask the question, are you very smart? That's the question I have to ask you, right? I mean, other companies have been very smart. Ford has been very smart. Cadillac has been very smart. The Nike's of the world have been very smart, but look at the outdoor industry as a whole man. I mean, you can't just give away backpacks and give away shoes and things of that nature. Thanks. You're going to change it that way. You don't change. You don't push the needle that way you don't move the needle of center. What you do, you have to educate folks. Right. And what we do as a company, we created a platform where we educate folks. We want folks to be so educated. So they then can make an educated decision on whether they want to go into the outdoors or not.

Earl ([14:54](#)):

Right. Because we know that all black folks, just like all white folks, all Hispanic folks, all Asian folks, and all other folks, all of those folks, particularly those races in the United States, they're not going into the outdoors. Right. But we have to do as the end, as an industry, we really do have to question ourselves because the fact of, we have to make sure that everyone, at least everyone, or are most groups,

understand that they have the opportunity to go into the outdoors, right? We have to give them education so they can make a fun decision. How do I want to spend my dollar? They want to buy, do I want to spend my dollar going to, uh, other destinations? Or do I want to say, you know, I'm going to go buy me a tent and I want to go buy me a sleeping bag and I want to go sleep.

Earl ([15:41](#)):

And I want to go enjoy the recreation and the outdoor industry that I actually already paid for. Right? And so the, the, the bottom line is black folks can too wasn't. This is the beautiful thing about our company, black folks. Can't too, wasn't created just to get black folks to go camping with black folks that will perpetuate what the industry already looks like. Black folks can do was created to get black folks, to go camp and enjoy the outdoors with any and everyone. So when we get around the campfire, which is in our logo, we believe which is a unity blaze. We believe once we get black folks, white folks, green folks, yellow folks, all folks around that campfire we'll have start, start having some amazing conversation. And we'll find out that we had to spend 80% of our time, 80% of our time focusing on our differences rather than 80% of the time, this book focuses on our sayings and that my friends changed the world. I noticed to be true because I've seen it happen. Right.

Alice ([16:38](#)):

I love that logo. And I love the message in the logo. It's awesome. Um, so black folks, folks, camp two is not a nonprofit. Can you share your business model?

Earl ([16:49](#)):

Yep. So we're not a nonprofit, but we do have a nonprofit arm. Right? We have another nonprofit arm. Well, the reason why when I started the company, I didn't want to necessarily be a nonprofit is because I didn't want the industry to think that I wanted something for nothing. Right. I didn't want them to feel like, Hey, you're doing this for me. You're not doing this for me. You're doing this for yourself. And you're doing this to help folks who do not know anything about your industry, learn about your industry, right? Learn about the industry, learn about the lifestyle. So then they can make an educated decision if they want to be a part of the lifestyle or not. Well, since it hadn't been done and most industry folks have said, well, I think we know how to do it. I think we're going to do it.

Earl ([17:27](#)):

Well, we never saw him do it. Right. We haven't seen him do it. Right. We've had, we seen some say, look, we want to go this route. We've seen some that say, we want to really partner and go these and do, do these things that you were saying. But for the most part, no one really has really put the gauntlet down and said, look, we're going to be intentional about what we do. And we're going to drive that. Now there's few. There's a few that I know that have. And there's a few that I know, understand this thing. They understand where we're going, but I got to tell them and I'll tell anybody else, this is not a sprint. This is not a sprint or a one-off. This is, this is a marathon, right? And so black folks camp too, we're standing in the gap, right?

Earl ([18:09](#)):

What we do again, we're educating black folks. We're removing that fear from them. And we're also inviting them to enjoy the outdoors, coming from a voice, coming from folks that look like them, right? So hopefully that would deteriorate a lot of the fear on the other end, what we do to the industry. We consult with them to show them how the best way to display their product, the best way to show their cup. So these customers, how to get it done the best way to not only, not necessarily changing their

products to fit in this particular space, but to take the same products they have right now and introduce those products to these particular individuals after, after, and simultaneously, while they educated them about the outdoors. And so what we do is we're saying to the industry, help us educate black consumers about the outdoors.

Earl ([18:59](#)):

And in turn, black consumers will be educated about your products and they will want to purchase your product. Again, our job is not to twist. The industries are, our jobs is not to twist black folks arms. Our job is to twist both of them. It's hard to want to actually go in and enjoy the lifestyle. And everyone wins when you do that. But it can't be one sided. It can't be just black folks. Can't to get black folks to go in the outdoors. Oh yeah. That's amazing. And then the industry says, w they look over there and say, Oh yeah, that's pretty cool. Now we can go get the money. Now that's not going to work like that. Right. You can't, you can't do that. You have to jump on the boat and you have to paddle just like everyone else. It's a matter of fact, it's a matter of fact, I get, you know, if I'm talking to individual, particularly white folks, uh, and they always ask me, particularly, I have to come out, come out of a DNI meeting.

Earl ([19:53](#)):

They say, Oh, your organization is amazing. How can I help you? What can we do? What can I do Earl? I said, well, you probably can go get you some black friends and taking of right. Oh, we don't have any black friends. What is the best time in America to go find something? Right? And, and, and again, when you do that, because guess what? I had to find me some white friends to teach me backpacking. I never been back back in the day of my life until April of this year. I was always an RVU. But these guys who actually who I reached out to, and they saw me speak at the outdoor economy conference, they said this to me, Earl, we're going to take your advice. We're going to remove your fear. We're going to add some knowledge. And we're going to invite you into the outdoors. Guess what? Ladies, I'm addicted to backpacking absolutely addicted.

Speaker 4 ([20:40](#)):

Awesome. And doing that, just like it removes the separation of, instead of

Alice ([20:48](#)):

Black folks are doing this and white folks are doing this. It's like, it's got to mingle and overlap instead of just operating as separate.

Earl ([20:55](#)):

Well, listen, they don't do an industry, the most segregated industry in the world. I mean, if you just, if you put your cap on it, just think about the it's the most segregated industry in the world. And as you know, 2020, I don't think anything wants to be segregated anymore. So why don't the industry gets in front of this? Right? I say the same thing. It's not to just to you guys. I said it to national parks. I said to camp grounds, I say the same thing to, um, to anybody in the outdoor industry. Why would you not want to get on the offensive side of this? Listen, I played football, right. And I know, and I played at a pretty high level. And I know for a fact, the offense always know their play. The defense is always trying to figure out the plate. So why not get on the offensive side of it? So you can. So then folks won't really throw these daggers in you to tell you why you haven't done this. Why you haven't done this, just do it.

Earl ([21:47](#)):

You should just go ahead and do it. And if you don't know how to do it, contact us and we'll show you how to do it. We're listen. We're not, I'm worried this by y'all company, you can hug us and tell us how

great we are as a company. And we really are behind you. And we're going to, we're going to forge your Instagram. We're going to get on there and we're going to do all these things. No, you're not going to do that to us. What you're going to do is you're going to bring us on board and allow us to teach you how to do the things you either, you have not done. You don't know how to do, or you don't want to do. And if you don't want to do it now we've got a problem, right. I don't really know how to help you there, but if you don't know how to do it and you haven't done it, we can help you do that. If you don't know, if you don't want to do it, then you're going to have to, you're going to have to deal with that on yourself. Right? Right. We have a, we have a ton of seasoned, seasoned folks in our organization. We're not the biggest company in the world, but we get it done. Right.

Kristin ([22:40](#)):

So I have a question for you about this. Um, you have, I'm really curious to hear your take on this and how you make this come to life. Return on inclusion. It's a new spin on ROI. I'd love for you to enlighten us on that. And then maybe give us an example, um, of, you know, something palatable that like the audience can grab onto

Earl ([23:03](#)):

Black folks. Can't too. We coined that phrase return on inclusion. We coined that phrase, just like we tell everybody that, uh, you can't spell community without the word unity. Right? And so with that being said, you know, this is what we listen. Give me, give you a quick example. The state of South Carolina, which is my home state, where I'm from, they understood that they wanted to get more black folks in the outdoors. They understood that they had a problem. He understood. They said, Hey, listen, we have tried to market. We have tried to advertise to more black folks to join state parks because we want them there. We want them to join state parks. And we know in the past we have not done enough. And they contacted us. Well, actually I contacted and we made a pack. We made an agreement. We said, we're going to launch in phases.

Earl ([23:51](#)):

However, we're going to invite more black folks into the outdoors, right? And we created this model that we can actually use over and over and over again, as we always say, this is not a sprint, this is a marathon. So we want to be able to be very sustainable in our space and how we do these things with content, uh, with, uh, with print, uh, I'm sorry with content print, with, uh, copy. And also with the fact that most black folks until really this year, you think about it to see black folks on the top of the mountains and around waterfalls and things of that nature. The reason why I know that's not me. That's not much content out there is because companies are contacting us for the content, right. And who here we are coming to just start it in 2020. So we knew they didn't have the content cause they did.

Earl ([24:38](#)):

They would actually would have already had about now. But the other thing is this, you know, when you, when you are intentional, like South Carolina was as a, as a state and South Carolina in the deep South, we all know the, the issue South Carolina and other States have had in the South in regards to all types of things, racism or whatever it may be. When I talk about spending 20% of our time on the past and 80% of the time, how are we going to move forward? It's the same thing I said to them. And we have to get past these things. And the way you get past these things is that you put things in place to change them. You can't just keep talking about how are you going to change it, right? You can't keep talking

about how are we going to change it. We feel bad. It's a shame. Listen, no, it's a shame. Right? Let's change it. And when you don't know how to do it again, come it's like ours will help you do it. Right? Speaker 4 ([25:28](#)):

So for brands, I think a lot of them are in the stage of that 20%, like reflecting, maybe thinking about it and talking about it for the first time. But, but you're, you spend 80% of your time talking about what's next and how to do that. So how can brands get to that stage? Or what is that steps of brands?

Earl ([25:47](#)):

Well, first of all, um, you know, I ain't golf, there's a lessons. And then their tips, they're both the same. One of them costs, which is lessons and the other one tips. So I'm gonna give you a few tips and then I want those brands to give us a call so we can give them some lessons. And so the bottom line is this brands have to be intentional brands have to say, do we want to make more money? Yes. Do we want to add more jobs? Yes. Do we want to be a very, uh, inclusive, uh, do we want to promote inclusion in the outdoors? Yes. Do we want to really take our company and have a very, very diverse, um, uh, marketplace, diverse, uh, um, uh, uh, company in regards to our employees. Yes. Right. And so when you start thinking of that and start thinking of that space, you're going to have to, then you're going to have to bite the bullet.

Earl ([26:38](#)):

You going to have to say, look, what we're doing, what we have right now is not what we want to be, unless you do want to be that way. Right. But I gotta be honest. If you want to be that way and you want not to invite black folks into the outdoors, you don't want to sell them your product. Go ahead and tell me so I can go ahead and tell them, because right now that's not what I'm saying. I'm saying to black folks, listen, we need to be in the outdoors. Right. And what I'm saying to the brands, you need to educate these folks to actually help them decide they want to buy your product to be in the outdoors. They're coming to the outdoors because we're pushing them. There. Brands have to make a decision. They have to make a decision. Even if they don't know how to get it done, they have to make a decision.

Earl ([27:24](#)):

How do we get this done? And don't. And then, and then the thing about it is don't go screw it up. And then until then come and then come hire us to clean it up for you. Let us consult you on the front end and tell you some of the things you should be doing. And shouldn't be doing maybe in the front. Do we know it all? No, we don't. Do we have facts versus opinion? Yes, we do. We spend a ton of money last year on facts, understanding algorithms of black folks in the outdoors. Why they don't go, when will they go the way the brands need to look the way the products need to look and things of that nature right now, our goal is to meet with brands, to share with them our knowledge and for them to say, you know what?

Earl ([28:07](#)):

We're going to go down this path because what the alternative is for them not to do anything at all, because we've heard that so many times, we just don't know what to do. So they hadn't done anything for 20, 30, 40 years. Right? What does that get you? Well, that gets you, is folks saying that you don't want black folks in the outdoors. That's what it says. You may not say that, but that's what it says. And no one, by the way, brands, if you listen to this Earl B Hunter Jr. Black folks, camp two, my job is not to twist your arms might not. Cause it hurts when you twist somebody's arm. My job is to twist your heart.

So you can say, Hm, man, we need to get our comment zeros up here. And there's a way to do it, right? That's one.

Earl ([28:49](#)):

Secondly, you have to have some empathy once you figure out well, now that you know that most black folks, particularly the South have not gone into the outdoors because of fear, because of fear of the very same folks, man, that have been harboring the outdoors for so long, you know, I'm going to really just dive into this one point right here. If you think about this in regards to the tax dollars that we spend black folks in regards to the outdoors, we've been funding, white folks lifestyle. If you, if you really look, this is, this is it's unbearable to me that the outdoor industry has not said, we gotta, we, this is, uh, this is shameful, right? Again, I speak with passion, right? I speak with passion because my legacy is tied to this. Aside from anything. I have two young children. If they had eight and 10 years old, if I had not taken my son around the country and share with him about camping, I took my baby to 49 camp Browns. We were gone for three months, 20 States from North Carolina to British Columbia. And we saw one black family camping in New Mexico. How disturbing is that unbelievable? No one is no one cares about that. They would have been shaming themselves. Huh?

Kristin ([30:20](#)):

Well, I, um, I also just saw an article that ran. Um, I don't even remember. I think it was last week, but it was about how like drug stores and chains are trying to position themselves for health and wellness. Okay. And so obviously like our country and the world has been conditioned to take a pill and, and COVID has shown just an incredible amount of people wanting to get outdoors because they don't have access to their gyms or to team sports or anything else. But there's also an internal as a marketer and a salesperson, you know this well, there's that internal reason they want it. Right. And there's a piece and there's so much there in terms of like promotion of wellness. And I would love for you to bring what you know about your audience into that conversation. Because I think that would help a lot.

Earl ([31:06](#)):

This is amazing. I mean, let me tell you this. So, you know, um, this is what drives me mad about the outdoor industry right now. Everybody's saying, Oh man, the industry is booming right now. 88 is right. But it wasn't really, you know, the industry really making it boom. Right. You know, so COVID has caused a lot of this, right? In regards to health and wellness, my own story, man, I've lost 37 pounds and I was an athlete and I understand, I know how to lift weights. I know how to get myself in shape. I was just not really wanting to do all that. Right. But when I had an opportunity to go in the outdoors to go backpack, to go to the two pack, the 80, right. To, to pack up the town, to see all these beautiful waterfalls here in North Carolina to go on top of these mountains, pack 10, 12 miles.

Earl ([31:52](#)):

Right. And I had a goal. I had a goal I need to get to, which is on top of the mountain. It wasn't like going to a gym. To me. It was like going to a paradise. And while I was in this paradise, I was smelling the fresh air. I was seeing the scenery. I was getting this health and wellness. I was getting all this listen, black folks. The, one of the biggest, two of the biggest health concerns of black folks with diabetes and heart disease, right. Diabetes and heart disease. Well, the fact that the industry has really never invited us into the outdoors and really share with us some of the health features of the outdoors. Again, that's lives depend on that. Right? And so the moment, the more we introduce more blind folks and the more people of color, the more anyone to the outdoors, we're going to, we're going to serve at a mighty

purpose, particularly in wellness, particularly in a mental, the mental state, particularly in emotional States.

Earl ([32:50](#)):

And so this weekend, it's funny because I had an opportunity to go to, uh, a, uh, organization. It was, I was learning that business, understand that, how to help them, uh, in regards to the, um, we'll, um, I'm sorry, wilderness therapy, right? And after I learned and understood this, and I sat there being the only black male, I sat there and looked around the campus and he and her, what these people were saying, I was actually at a new hire training and they were showing these new hires. And I was thinking in my mind is new hires are coming to, uh, give some wellness to the young kids were really the new houses getting wellness themselves, right? Yet there were no black folks in that portion to be new hires because black folks don't know they could be hired in the outdoors to do wilderness therapy because many of them are afraid to be in the outdoors now.

Earl ([33:42](#)):

And now isn't that a shame, right? And so, I mean, this, this is a, this is a perpetual problem that we have to change. Again, this is not a by ya'll man. This is a real return on inclusion type situation. And so for me, again, the health features of it is, is amazing, right? And this is not being a, a person who has to go backpack 10 miles, just get out and go walk in the park, right. Get out and go and go walk in your neighborhood. Right. Just get outside and see how beautiful out the outside is. And then, but don't be, you, you shouldn't have to be afraid because you don't have any knowledge to venture into other spaces, um, to really, um, to really have recreation in the outdoors.

Alice ([34:27](#)):

So the trip you took with your son, your son, and both kids, or just one

Earl ([34:32](#)):

Just took my boy, my son, I needed to, uh, he was seven years old at the time and I really needed to bond with him because in the beginning of the podcast, I said to you guys, is that, uh, when you help a company go from 815 grand in sales to 17 and a half million dollars, right? W what normally happens is particularly being the only salesperson you're on the road. When I was gone a lot, I was gone so much. My son, I thought I was on vacation. That's what challenged me. He said that to me, he said it to me. He said, dad, you know, uh, he said, you go on vacation every, every week, man, you, you said, you're going to take me to Mount Rushmore. You didn't take me. You got to talk that talk and walk that walk. I was like, all right, well, June the last day of school, I took him.

Earl ([35:09](#)):

I took him, mom. I packed him in the truck. And not only did we go camping, we, we also, I showed my son that I wasn't on vacation. I showed my son while I was out traveling. We was opening up dealers. I showed my son some adversity when dealers told us, well, we don't want to sell your product. Well, we, I said, sir, listen, we can't allow that to deterior us from our goal of selling, uh, campers and feeding families back at home. So we got to go to the next. So my son saw perseverance for me. Right. And I, and all parents can't show their children what they do at work and how they feed their family. But I was real gracious and real, uh, real happy that my son was able to see that from me. And now when I'm out on the road, my son don't think I'm on vacation. He thinks I'm going to feed the family, which is great. And he had a great experience right. In the outdoors.

Kristin ([35:59](#)):

Totally. So how, how did you talk to him about the lack of diversity you saw and what was that like together?

Earl ([36:06](#)):

Well, it's funny because my, uh, my son, uh, it's sorta like me that shouldn't go to anything at all. And he just basically said it one day. He like that. There's no black people out here. I said, well, you know, um, and it was before I started black fools camp too. It was four. I started coming as a matter of fact on that trip is the reason why I started black folks. Can't too. It's a matter of fact, uh, some of the greatest ideas I've ever had in my life. Well, all of the greatest ideas I've had have happened while I was camping. And so when we met that couple, uh, at the, in New Mexico, in Albuquerque, the young lady of the group of the family, she challenged me. She said, Hey, I hear you talking that you, uh, you're the only one of the only black executives in the industry.

Earl ([36:50](#)):

Why don't you change it? And it took me about a year and a half, maybe year and a half, two years to really get my arms around what she said, what she thought about, what, what was it? And I said, you know, if anybody's going to change this, it's going to be somebody who's already in the industry. I know the inside of the industry, I know the players, I've had conversations with some of the big boys and the big ladies in regards to, uh, the, uh, the industry, the executives and things of that nature. And here's what I say to the industry. If you're not going to count on a person who was in the industry that looked like me to help change the industry. Who else are you going to count on? Right. Who else? Right. And again, you know, this is not a harm to us demo.

Earl ([37:30](#)):

This is hard, twist a Mo we gotta, we gotta change this and we're going to change it. Right. We're going to change this. Uh, and again, I'm a part of the industry. I'm not, I'm not bashing the industry. I'm not punching the industry in the jaw. I'm not doing that at all. What I'm saying to the industry is we must change. Right? We have to change because they're going to be some questions starting. They're going to be starting to ask within the black community to ask the question, why haven't they market to us? Why haven't they invited us? Why haven't they helped remove this fear? Why haven't they done these things? And you better have an answer. And right now the industry doesn't have an answer.

Kristin ([38:10](#)):

You're absolutely right. And so I have a question around, um, how can accompany, let's just take like a fictitious company. Like if they were to start working with you, what is your you and your team's goal? And you know how we work in seasons, Sylvan sport as well, like new product comes out, new marketing, et cetera. Like what is the cadence that you can work with a company to enable them to kind of have the foundation and the footing and move forward with this in a successful way?

Earl ([38:40](#)):

Well, you know, we have phase one phase, two phase, three company. That's what, that's what we are. That's how we built our company. You know, we said in phase phase one, 2019, we really are going to market our logo. That's what we're going to do in 2020. We said, we're going to really build our content, right? So for the most part, people thought we were just a company taking black folks out camping. We used to get this all the time from companies, Hey, Earl, we really want to send you guys three backpacks, three or four backpacks of some sneakers to continue on your trips, taking people out. We were like, thank you. Keep those for a minute. And let us share with you what we were doing. First, what we had

to do is we really had to go get content. So we actually started taking folks out to get the content, to get the, really the data.

Earl ([39:21](#)):

Right. We got a lot of data in that particular space for, uh, for almost a whole year. We were gone backpacking and, and RV camping and all those things to get data. And so when we meet with companies, we give them a phase one plan, right? The phase one plan really is to really help them show them why we need to educate the customer, right? You can't go right into selling a product to a customer. You have to, particularly the black folks, people who are fearful of the outdoors, we have to educate them first. So we share with the model of them, how to educate the phase two is, do you even have products that actually in that particular phase, w w is it a beginner product? Is it a product that, you know, is it ice, ice picks to go ice climbing, right. Well, you give us how you gonna get us to go ice climbing and rock climbing.

Earl ([40:10](#)):

You can't even get us to put on hiking boots or go in the woods, right? So it has to be phases of this. And every company doesn't fit in, in, in, in phase two, right? And then phase three for us is making sure that companies understand that phase. One is going to phase. One is going to spill into phase two to make sure that customers not only want to go camping, but now they believe in your brand because your brand is actually fixated on removing fear, adding knowledge and invitation. And the third thing is now to how do we go to market, right? How do we go to market in those particular spaces to get the retail spaces on board, to get the, uh, make sure the manufacturers on board, make sure that your, your social media make sure everything that you have in your space and your marketing space is on board. You don't have to change that. You don't have to create this other marketing space for black folks to really byproduct just integrate us into the marketing space. You already have. You don't have to, because when you start to start making other groups and things of that nature that's that true inclusion? That's actually, to me, that's exclusion, right?

Kristin ([41:14](#)):

Yeah. That's not really progress. That's just kind of keeping everything separate. Yeah.

Earl ([41:18](#)):

It's separate. I don't believe in that. I think, I think that's kind of the easy way to do it. Let's do the hard work. This is, this is the greatest time in America right now to reset and restart. And I think companies have to reset. And one of the biggest problems is though a lot of companies, they don't have any black folks on their staff. Well, how do you change that? You have to educate black folks about the industry. So they'll want to be in the, in the industry. I've been educated about the industry. I succeeded in the industry. Other black folks have succeeded and succeed in the industry, too. Right? And so you have to, you have to be intentional about this. You have to, you have to get people in your space and you have to encourage them to help you do what you want to do.

Earl ([42:06](#)):

You can't say I've been reading books and watching movies on how to get rid of all this racism and the Indian man. Come on. Let's just be real. And then most cause I get a lot of, I get a lot of this too. Oh, you're just too hard on people, man. You, you, you're just too tough on them. Listen, 50, 60, 70, 80 years of money, tons and tons and tons of black folks, money have kept these beautiful lands, gorgeous again, sooner or later, it's going to be somebody that looks like me, but don't think like me and they're going to

ride on the industry. Right? And so what I'm saying is, let us help you, let us help you keep that notion from happening. Although it still may, but we want to make sure that we, you guys are on the offensive side of this and you should want to be on the ops offensive side of it. Don't do it for me. Do it for yourself. Do for your company, do it for you. Let's get some harmony around the campfire.

Speaker 4 ([43:13](#)):

Totally. So when you start working with brands, what do you find is the best point of traction with them? Or what's the best approach when you're starting it off?

Earl ([43:23](#)):

As much as I taught ladies, I got to tell you something. Um, I've told our team, we have to be great listeners, right? We have to understand because there are some outdoor companies out there that re you know, have come as real. The ones who really want to help us and really drive this. Those are the ones who are not really making any money, right? The other ones are not really doing the well, there's the ones that, they're the ones that haven't been around as much or been, or haven't seen as much. Those are the ones who are really wanting to jump in, man. They really helped us without us twisting their arm or twisting their hearts. And sometimes, and I know I like to listen to their business. I think one of the reasons why people liked me so much, because you know, I'm just not banging on their door saying, give me \$20,000.

Earl ([44:02](#)):

We want this money. You owe us this money. I'm not saying that to them. What I'm saying is, is this, let us create a plan for you and us, for the black community, people of color, to make the business and make it well for us all. So one of the biggest things we do, we listened to the customer. We listened to the client. We listened to what the outdoor industry and those players have to say, right? Where do you want to go? What do you want to do? And when many of them don't know what they want to do, then we start developing a plan for them to do what we need them to do, to do the same thing we're doing in the black community. The same thing we're doing with the industry. And we asking them questions and what they want to do.

Earl ([44:45](#)):

It's the same thing we do into the black folks were asking them, do you really want to be in the outdoors? And they're saying not really well, let me show you these beautiful waterfalls over here. Do you want to see that? Oh yeah. I want to see that. Right? You want, you want to go on top of that mountain up there and see these beautiful Mount? Yeah. I want to see that. Well, let me show you how to get there. It's the same thing with the industry. You want to make more money. You want to see more black folks in the outdoors. Well, let us show you how to do that. Right. And if you don't know, we work together because obviously if you're a successful company, your tactics have worked in your marketing style of work in other spaces, right. Let's just use those same, those same spaces. You'll same taxes, the same things. And just push them over to a group of folks who don't even know anything about your company. Right? I mean, it's hard to, for people to buy something they don't even know about. That's why I like the phrase move in silence. I don't like that phrase. I want you to hear me come in, because if you hear me come, you'll get ready.

Kristin ([45:41](#)):

Right. Um, I guess I'm, I'm curious to know the companies that you've worked with. Did you find that if the leadership was maybe a little bit like perplexed or deer in the headlights, that you were able to

reach into the workforce because that's overwhelmingly, I think where so much of the change wants to be driven from, and often they aren't given a voice within their own organizations.

Earl ([46:03](#)):

Let me, let me, let me, let me, let me just go and tell you. There's some companies out there to reach out to me. And they said, Earl, we don't know what to do. And we're calling on you. Back country reached out to us. Nimo reached out to us. GSI reached out to us, South Carolina. They basically reached out to us because he agreed to go down this road with us. There are a lot of other companies, it venture ready, reached out to us beings, tick fleet. I had explained to them, one of the biggest things in the South are mosquitoes. Mosquitoes. That's what keeps most blacks, both in doors and not want to go out to cookouts. So if we don't want to go to cookouts and grill outs in the outdoors because of mosquitoes and bugs, well, those same bugs are in the outdoors and packing and backpacking.

Earl ([46:51](#)):

It may be advantageous for you to promote your beautiful tick brand or your mosquito brand with us. And they agreed because it makes perfect sense. Right. But if they didn't know all the things I just said to you, right. Then how would they actually want to, uh, how do they know how to drive the business? Right. A lot of things, again, a lot of these things don't happen overnight. Ladies, it's not going to happen overnight, but we have to get in front of it though and get started. Right. We have to get started. And so these companies, you know, they helped us grab a lot of this content. Right. And in turn, they have a lot of content now. Right? So, so it wasn't like they wrote a check and said, Hey, Kuma, ya'll see you later, but we wouldn't let them do that. I've had companies soon as checks before.

Earl ([47:37](#)):

Honestly, I've had two companies as soon as checks some big checks. And I sent the checks right back to them. And here's why I sent them back to him because the checks didn't have anything on it. It just said, it's one of them said, God bless. And he just sent it to us. And I was like, yeah, he's been doing that for a long time, but I want to know why you sent this check. And so I had a conversation with that individual and they told us, and I said, okay, now send the check back. Now I understand what you want to do, what you, what, why you sent it? I understand that. And it was beautiful that we had a conversation because that's what we built this company on. They can't find it is the, the campfire and our logo is the, is the portal for conversation for amazing conversation. It didn't matter your race, your age or your gender. We all have something to say. Right. And I wanted to hear what they had to say. And if it aligned with my mission and that we aligned with their mission, let's go make it happen.

Kristin ([48:42](#)):

So I have a question. So you know how, when you're taking somebody to discover a waterfall or a favorite outdoor location, it makes it new for you. Yes. How has it been for some of the executives to finally like, or just workforce personnel come around and realize like, that, that's what this is all about. Do you get to see that like ha moment happened where everybody's just sort of like, Oh, this totally makes sense. It's what I love about it.

Earl ([49:11](#)):

So beautiful. Listen, we are a company companies like granite gear, you know, uh, you know, there's a lot of companies out there that like diamond brand, you know, make tents here in Asheville, North Carolina. When I share with them what we wanted to do, particularly with our, uh, our, our unity blades. So the campfire in our logo now is, is, uh, we, we we've really positioned that logo to be the unity blades

in the outdoors for everybody. Right? And so when I shared with them, what we really wanted to do with that unity blades and what it stood for, what this guys, he said, man, he might be the most genius thing I've ever heard. Right? Because they've come against so much of not knowing what to do. We gave them solutions on what, on what they should do. But the other thing is too, I put it to him like this, you're you and your family.

Earl ([49:59](#)):

You love the outdoors, you and your family go to the outdoors to get serenity, you and your family go to the outdoors to see these beautiful waterfalls. You and your family have gone and seen some beautiful places in the outdoors. I have a family right there, other family, black families out there that want to experience this. Are you saying that you don't necessarily want them to experience this? And if you're saying you're not, no, you're not saying that because I know your character. So, so help us do it. And I watched a sense of like a woo, sorry, come over them. Like, man, we didn't know how to do this. And thank you. And because, because, because frankly I think the outdoor lifestylers and style industry are tired of seeing it to be all white. To be honest, you can't be seeing it. You, you, you can't be, it's almost like you can't see the industry look like this for the rest of you.

Earl ([50:59](#)):

I mean, just saw you. See, you never have you, what happens is that you don't have really a sense of the world in, right. Like most folks say, well, let me give you a prime example during the COVID doing, COVID doing COVID was tough because with all the chaos was going on in a lot of these cities and all these areas, particularly in black community, black folks didn't have a place, a place for refugees. We couldn't, we didn't go to the outdoors. We didn't go and backpack. And we didn't go to Colorado. And in the, in the, in the, and see the, the, the beautiful mountains there, we didn't go into North Carolina and go to a black box. And we didn't, we didn't pick up our RVs and get away from all the chaos. Well, we did. We suffered in that chaos. That's what we did.

Earl ([51:45](#)):

We suffered in it because there were stores were closed. Museum and park were closed, where we normally go, amusement parks were closed. All the places where we go to see refugees were closed. Well, everybody else had places to go. And we're sitting here and doing all this pain and all this turbulence while everybody else is getting some fresh air and coming back and telling us, man, I had a really good weekend last week. What'd you do? Oh, I went on top of the mountain with my family. You should come too. Now I know what all that you know, because they didn't know. And then, you know, there's reasons, the very same reason I told you, fear no knowledge. And haven't been invited. Right? Speaker 4 ([52:22](#)):

I feel like in so many ways, 2020, and COVID has just shown a light on things that were already there. And it's like, it's cause of the pandemic. But also there's all these issues that are made worse because of the pandemic.

Earl ([52:36](#)):

Listen, we, we, we, we in America, we're in America. We have a deep, deep, deep hollow history. I mean, a history of, of, I'm not saying other countries haven't, but I don't live in other countries. I live right here in the United States. And what I know for a fact is is that we're going to have to live with one another. We're gonna have to live with one another. We're gonna have to be with one another. We've got to go to school. One another. We're gonna have to respect one another, no matter how the climate

looks like, what COVID has taught us more than anything that we need. One another, I don't care if you're a billionaire to a no, they're all in between you, you need to suffer or, you know, someone has suffered, right. You've either had the furlough or you, or you were furloughed, you were laid off or you had to lay off, you went to the grocery store and something wasn't on the shelf or you, it didn't matter. Earl (53:33):

We all have gone through something in this space. And the bottom line is, is that if this doesn't bring us closer, particularly in the outdoor space, what else will, what else will? Right. And so I, again, I just want to thank you ladies, honestly, for giving me this platform to have this conversation, you know, because I'm, I'm no stranger to this again, I don't sugar coat, anything. I don't worry about anybody coming out to what I said, because I speak on facts. Right? And the bottom line is, is that we have to change this. And I'm not a rhetoric guy. I'm this is not just going to be touting. Got y'all got y'all. I want to help fix it. I'll fix it, man. You know? And, and, and, and we need the tools to fix. We need the capital and the money to fix it for you. Right, right. Because you know, Earl was pretty talented individual, you know, I can, I can, uh, I can find a job anywhere. I mean, it's true. Right? I mean, so I, I, again, I think this is my legacy. This is my legacy, right?

Kristin (54:38):

This is so incredibly important. And I really feel like you've shown just an incredible way forward in light here. And I have to ask, just to make sure, is there anything that we did not touch on because you have the platform, like you're literally everything you're saying is incredibly meaningful. I've learned a ton and I just know other people are gonna devour this.

Earl (55:01):

Well, I will say this. Um, first of all, our website is black folks. Can't to black folks. Can't to T O o.com. And so when you go to our website and when you go to our social media page pages, what you're going to find is delightfulness, you're going to find the light from this all through our company. You're going to find a delightfulness through our employees. You're gonna find the light from this, through our words that we speak our photos, because that's who we are. Now, we may do a little hugging and a little shoving when it comes to us driving this. But for the most part, we're delightful company. And we want to see the world delightful. And if you don't want to see the world delightful, we don't want to be around you. We don't want to be even a part of your company.

Earl (55:49):

We don't want to be nowhere near you to be Frank with you, because you're probably part of the problem, right? So we want you to follow us on social media, follow us on social media, follow us on our website, contact us if you need us contacted. If you don't need us, obviously you do contact us. Right? The second thing is, I will say to you, the campfire in our logo, the campfire in our logo is a unity blades. And you're going to see this campfire all around the country, all around the country. Because one thing I do know is this good news, good news, travel fast, just as fast as bad news, but good news travel. And the good news is we're going to get black folks in the outdoors. It's simple as that. And we're going to get everybody around that. Campfire, black folks, white folks, green folks.

Earl (56:37):

And we're going to have some amazing conversation and we're going to have harmony harmony around the campfire. So I thank you. I really do. Thank you ladies, for having me. I'm very humbled by this because as you can see, I like to talk about it. And, um, and um, I like to be, uh, point blank. And I'm glad

it's been a safe conversation for the three of us. Because a lot of times, sometimes these conversations, sometimes most white folks, I feel like they have a safe platform, even talk about this. Like a lot of folks want to help. A lot of folks want to do a lot of things and they feel like they don't have a safe conversation with anytime he talking to me, you got to save conversations. I'm going to say what I say to you is what I say to anybody. Everybody's gonna get the same. Nobody gets sugarcoated. Right?

Kristin ([57:19](#)):

I am so fired up by this, literally like, thank you so much for bringing your message here and know that what we value about our agency as we work, to get the message out, to improve the exactly the dilemma that we're talking about right now. And it is it's crisis. When you look at COVID, it is. Yeah. So we are here to help get the message out on that. And we definitely would love to have you back on the show to give us updates on your progress, to share case studies, or if anything pops up that you think is newsworthy. You're always have a spot right here on the show. Thank you.

Earl ([57:55](#)):

I say one thing, Christian, there's a lot of companies out there, a lot of outdoor companies out there, a lot of companies in the space that are doing some amazing things. Let me just make sure I, I point that out. Lots of them, they may not have been doing it on a huge scales, but listen, again, this is not a marathon. I'm sorry, this is not a sprint. This is a marathon. So you may not see it. And honestly, if you don't see it, that's none of your business. As long as they're doing what they need to do and what they can do within their capacity, you should be, you should, you shouldn't want to see it. You should be doing so much that you don't even want to see what they're doing.

Kristin ([58:35](#)):

Oh, thank you. And we can't wait to have you back. Thank you so much. This has been amazing. Really has been, Oh my gosh. That was so.