



channel mastery

161: Rach McBride and Jill Nazeer
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Kristin: Welcome back everybody to another episode of the Channel Mastery podcast, I am so excited to have two guests on today for you. I have Diamondback's Director of marketing, Jill Nazeer. Welcome to the show, Jill.

Jill: Thanks for having me.

Kristin: Yup. And I have pro athlete, Rach McBride. Welcome to the show, Rach.

Rach: Thanks. It's great to be here.

Kristin: And we are going to talk about a range of conversation points. Literally I can't frame it up in one single outcome, but just know you will come out of this feeling more empowered to use your brand as a vehicle for positive change. I think that is really where we're all hoping this will net out and there's some great case studies beautiful phase plants, all kinds of things we're to share today, but let's start by having Rachel give us the fantastic story of how they have become a pro athlete a little bit later in life and what that journey has been like, and then we'll take the conversation further.

Rach: Yeah, sure. So I grew up in an athletic family and I did some sports as a kid and as a teen, but I really quit everything for about a decade for the majority of my twenties and was a smoker and was much more interested in the music scene and late nights and that sort of thing. And ended up just needing a change and started running and ran a marathon and qualified for Boston in my first marathon. And then at the age of 32, which was just a couple of years later, did my or sorry at the age of 28, did my first triathlon and absolutely loved it. And it took over my life. And I was like, you know, I was still in my late twenties and I want, you know, team Canada had someone in their thirties who was on the Olympic team.

So I was like, Oh great. You know, maybe I'll take a shot at the Olympics. But I was just terrible swimmer, not good enough for the Olympics. And then at 32 did my first full distance race and or a half Ironman and, you know, won it by 24 minutes and put place in a time that would have put me top 10 in the world. And I thought, you know what, I'm not getting any younger, it's time to take this athletic dream and make it a reality. And

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so went full-time and that was 10 years ago. And I've been living the dream since then. Yeah.

Kristin: That's remarkable and so inspiring to people who are of a respectable age and love to do

amateur athletes athletic events as well. And obviously you're a Diamondback athlete and that's a brand I personally have grown up with and Verde is so happy to work with. And that's another, just really important part of the conversation here. So let's talk about the, I think it was probably a bit of a, a pivot within your athletic career when you were able to identify as your true self, a non-binary athlete pro athlete first in the triathlon community now more recently in gravel. So can you talk about what that was like for you stepping into that and becoming, I think a pioneer in many respects.

Rach: Yeah. I mean, truly my gender journey started when I was super, super young and it's been something that I have lived with for 42 years now. And so it's always been a part of me and it's been like more or less visible or more or less I kind of been more or less out throughout this journey as an adult.

And what I finally recognized that in, in sport and dealing with such a binary in sport, I really got to a point where I felt like something was missing that I, I knew that I, you know, I, when I showed up at a start line, I did not feel like I fit in and I couldn't put my finger on it. And I started having more and more conversations around gender and how I really, and more true and honest conversations. And self-reflection about who I really was.

And because I had incredible sponsors like diamond back who were just supportive and like, you know, were basically like, be yourself rage. Like we just want you to be yourself. It gave me the confidence along with a really supportive community and a family to, to finally, you know, it it's like, it was part of admitting to myself, but also the rest of the world who I really was identifying as non-binary identifying and using they, them pronouns.

And, you know, COVID really allowed me the space to fully explore that and fully like be myself as an athlete and as a non-binary athlete.

And allowed me to have, you know, have all of these conversations with the public and on different podcasts and in different media outlets and to now, and to start working with the companies and the sponsors to try and make change, to try and, you know, I want to be, I want to provide that visibility for other, for folks who are non binary, who are, who want to participate in sport and help them, you know, acknowledge that there is a place for them. And it really helped me as well. Once I really identified and, and embraced my non-binary identity, it allowed me when I show up at a start line now, like I know who I am, I know that I don't fit in, but I know why. And I know that it's okay.

Kristin: There are so many amazing things that we're going to get into here today. And one of them is using a brand as a vehicle for positive change. Your personal brand and your journey to embrace and identify as you truly, authentically are going to create a model that you didn't have growing up in your life. And think about also the support of your sponsors, like Diamondback, really giving you like that platform or adding additional visibility to your platform and, you know, working with you so closely.

And we're going to talk about one of those great initiatives in the gravel scholarship here in a minute with Diamondback specifically, but can you talk a little bit about just the sense of like emotional connection and responsibility probably that you have becoming that mentor for people that you didn't have? I mean, I feel like everybody needs permission on certain facets of their life. Maybe your sponsors gave you a little bit of that. I'm not sure, but I know that you as a pro are going to give that to so many people going forward.

Rach: Yeah. And that's what really keeps me motivated because what I, what I recognized when I finally started going back to racing a few races that we had last year, I started to, because I had kind of come out as nonbinary and as a vacuum of COVID and going back into the real binary world of sport, I recognize just how hard it was going to be, just how often I was going to continue to be mis-gendered. And so it's hard. It's really challenging.

And it wears me down, but the messages that I get and the support that I get from people who are like me, who are non-binary athletes who see that, or who are parents of kids who are non-binary or trans, and who are reaching out and saying, and, and providing that like positive feedback of like Rach, what you are doing is changing lives. And it's incredible. Like I never, never, ever thought that I would be able to have such an impact on such a platform. And I am so grateful. I'm so grateful to sport, and I am so grateful to the companies and the people who support me. It's just, it's unbelievable. And I never, ever, ever thought that I could be this kind of change maker. And it's really, for me creating what I feel like is my legacy in this, in this sport. And that means so much.

Kristin: Oh, that is so inspiring. So Jill, you must be so inspired. So let's talk about the impetus of the gravel scholarship and how you worked with rage to get that across the line last year and what the future of that looks like.

Jill: Yeah. So, in the bike industry, we start making marketing plans a year or two ahead of time, cause bikes take so long to make, and we're always looking forward and thinking ahead. And so a couple of years ago, you know, I had been talking to Rach and Rach was racing. Graebel more, you know, triathlon is obviously, you know, reaches first and foremost, but, you know, as gravel was kind of growing a little, Rach was starting to race in gravel a little, and Rach made a comment to me kind of casually, you know, not even

asking for anything, but just made the statement of, you know, I go to these races and I don't, I don't really see a lot of women there or like anyone who's not male. And I thought, well, that's, that's a shame. You know, obviously we know that there's less women in cycling, but, you know, in gravel, which has kind of, to me, this very up and coming sport, you would think that, you know, people of all kinds would maybe be a little more interested in it.

And I was, I was like, well, that, that seems like a miss. And I, I thought about, you know, is there something we could do about that? And starting out, I thought, okay, maybe we could do like a women's gravel scholarship. We could have a contest and people write a little essay and they get a bike and maybe some other items from Rach's, other very generous sponsors. And at the time we thought, you know, maybe even give them a race entry to something and, you know, tips for training and all this way to support the winner in becoming a gravel racer. And so then eight months go by and it's about time to really like put this plan into action. And there was, there was a lot more talk, you know, Rach had been doing a lot more interviews about being a non-binary athlete and there was a lot more conversation in general from some other trans and non-binary athletes about how we talk about gender in sport, how we can be inclusive in our language.

And I felt like calling it a women's gravel scholarship no longer felt right. you know, it was just a gut feeling. And so I went to Rachel and I said, you know, I, you know, of course, wonderful to encourage women, but you know, that, that doesn't seem like that's the only goal anymore. And I asked her H you know what, what's the best way I can phrase this. So it sounds inclusive to all people. And Rachel was very generous and gave me suggestions. And at no point did Rach ever say, please do this, you know, Rach educated me and answered the question and said, whatever you feel is best, I think this is an awesome first step. And I really appreciated that as a marketer. And so I took that into account. And so this past year we opened up our women's, trans, non-binary gravel scholarship.

Everybody was welcome to apply. We had almost 200 entries, which I was so thrilled about. And I, it down I sent some of the final ones to Rachel. I think we all really struggled with who to pick, you know, trying to pick one person was, was truly, truly a challenge.

And we picked an amazing winner named Hannah. Hannah is a member of the Naval Academy and is on the Navy tri team and is also starting to get into gravel. So, you know, we did not pick her because she had a similar story to Rachel, just she had just, you know, she's awesome. And, of course, racing didn't happen this year, but, you know, Hannah still got her bike and all of her other wonderful prizes. And so she sends me videos of her riding her bike, and it's just so cool to see it, out and knowing that one more person's going to be on the gravel scene because of it. And so I'm just really

excited about it. And I hope that every year we can continue to grow this program and really turn it into something big.

Kristin: That's amazing. And I, what I love about that too, is the fact that you're being so fluid and the fact that it wasn't a set and forget. Right. and the message is progress over perfection. You know, it's, it's okay to maybe have some course correcting or to try and fail. Not that this was a fail in any way, but I think that that is something that hampers people who are used to being like, okay, I'm spending my brand's money. I really want it to go well, and I understand how to do this. Right. And what we're asking here today is be open to trying new things. We have an incredibly special opportunity right now with a lot of people, either falling back in love with cycling or potentially discovering it for the first time and wanting to belong in some way to this wonderful community of the bike.

Okay. So really the message and the takeaway is, is just, I think, fight for calculated risk taking and know that, like, when you make an effort, everybody's going to have an opinion. And that's what is so beautiful about being a cyclist, but at the same time, like the only way that we can create more, a more welcoming environment for everybody is to enable us to as brand leaders to feel like it's okay to try and fail or to not be perfect. And I guess on that note, Rachel, I would love to ask you to talk about your view on what I have traditionally said in a, you know, more of a binary way. If she can see it, she can be, it I've said that on so many podcasts. And I feel like what you've enlightened me to through the research for this show in our rehearsal was it's way, way, way bigger than that. It's even bigger than if they can see it, they can be like, talk a little bit about what your view is in terms of like how you as a pro athlete are now starting to see, you know, the role that you have and how brands have enormous opportunity to present a different brand profile veneer, et cetera, to their audiences, to enable them to feel like they could come in and, and be part of this brand that they love.

Rach: Yeah. I mean, I think the, for example, the gravel scholarship and what came out of that was a perfect example of like this person, Hannah, got this new bike and Hannah put 300 miles on that bike in the first month and which is unbelievable. And she had never ridden on gravel before and put 300 miles on it. And not only is she, is Hannah posting on social media about this and like showing adventures on gravel, but all of the people that she's with and like, you know, it's just like in her community, there it's like another female bodied person on a gravel bike doing their thing. And that it's that butterfly effect. Right? And so I think that it's really important, like just a small thing like that gravel scholarship, the giant impact that it can make in the, in terms of visibility. And you know, to, for companies to actively seek out individuals who are making a difference who may not look like the rest of their athletic community or encourage, you know, it's like, yeah, Hannah was not in the gravel community.

And now Hannah is in the grandmas, gravel community. And to, you know, I think in my mind, really the important thing for companies to do is to take that initiative, to reach

out to their community, to reach out, to to folks who are visible like myself and others about like, Hey, what's important. What is it that you think is going to make an impact? And what do you want to see? Like where are there holes in how we are presenting ourselves that we can do better? And I think the asking questions is really important. The recognizing that you're going to make mistakes, people mis-gender me all the time and I correct them. I'm not mean about it. It's really simple. And, you know, it's just, it's that it's recognizing that you're not going to be perfect. I'm, you know, I'm not perfect. Nobody is perfect. Companies are not perfect. And if we make a mistake, what are we supposed to do? We apologize. And we learn from it. And it's the same, the same sort of thing. And so I think really being public about actively, like as a company actively wanting to learn and showing what you are to learn and how you are learning is really important.

Kristin: That's a perfect segue for you, Jill, and the people for bikes, subcommittee that you're on. If I said that correctly can you talk about the impetus for that and your role there and how you're helping brands do exactly what Rachel is talking about?

Jill: Yeah, so people for bikes is really taking charge and taking awesome initiative to create several sub committees are doing sustainability and there's also a DEI sub-committee. So I'm going to be serving on that subcommittee. I'm very excited and they talked to us about our goals as brands and they're not just coming in and saying, okay, this is the three things we're working on. You know, they've reached out to each of us individually and we've had, you know, an hour long conversation about what do we want to talk about? And of course, racial equality. And that conversation is very big right now, especially in the bike industry. And, you know, but we can't forget about the gender conversation either. And that yes, more women cycling is a great conversation to have, and it's still an important conversation, but that it's also no longer just men and women.

We need to really talk about all genders and all people and making them feel safe on bikes. The bike companies are going to make bikes and they're going to sell bikes, but we're not really doing everything we can if we're not also supporting a community of cyclists, feeling safe and included. And so that's what we're going to all work together on. And honestly, you know, we're a smaller to midsize brand. I'm really excited to work with some of the other bigger brands or the other brands that are smaller, like us to work together in this, because everyone's got a different perspective. You know, everyone has different budgets they work with toward this cause. And I'm just excited that all of us get to work together on this topic.

Kristin: And how long has that sub committee been in play?

Jill: So they're kind of just starting it. I've only recently joined the committee, so we're going to be meeting every month and setting out goals and having those conversations. And, I think People for Bikes is a great organization to lead this conversation. They have such a

great viewpoint into the business side of things, the advocacy side of things, the political side of things, and then the community itself. So I'm really thrilled. I think it's going to be just an awesome opportunity for everybody to get involved.

Kristin: They are doing incredible things. I wanted to go back Rach, if you're okay with this too, your transition from triathlon to gravel I had just so much fun researching your athletic career. And I know that, I don't know if this is still the case, but one of the things I watched this morning was that you actually have one every event that you've entered. Is that correct?

Rach: Well, I've gotten knocked off of my spot in that one, but I've won all but two and I was second place than the other two. So yeah, I I definitely have had some, a lot of success from the very beginning, which is probably one of the reasons why I really love it is because I was good at it. But yeah, I need to still bump up my ratio again of wins to second places.

Kristin: And my hope is you'll have a lot of opportunity to do that this year. I understand you're going to be at Unbound as well as Tran Rockies Gravel Royale, which are two events that Verde works with. So we're super excited to support you there, but tell us what you like, what is your favorite, what are your favorite aspects of gravel? Because when you fall in love with a sport like triathlon, you obviously love the process of training, refining yourself in three sports. But I'm curious to know, like what, how did you transition from triathlon to gravel? Not that you're not doing triathlon anymore, I'm assuming, but I'm so curious to know, like what hooked you with gravel?

Rach: Well, you know, here in BC, we have some incredible gravel roads and a place that I have been going regularly to train has actually a lot of the road rides were gravel as well. So I would be riding my road bike on these gravel roads, and that was just part of training. And once I think it was 2013 this gravel race came on my radar in Oregon and it looked really hard and really fun. And so we went down and, and did it and that, and it was like, that was, that was it. I was on a cyclocross bike, I think for that race because gravel, gravel, bikes were not a thing at that time. And I just fell in love with it. I really, really loved it. I loved the grassroots nature of it. I loved the, it was just like a real kind of like when I started triathlon, I did all of the local races.

I went to like all the small little sprints and little Olympic races all over BC and, and really enjoyed it and really enjoyed that kind of more community and like family sort of feeling that it had. And once he kind of climbed the ranks of triathlon, you lose that sort of grassroots feel. And the gravel racing really brought me back to that. I remember at that race, there was actually this little boy with autism who I think was about seven years old and he had a newsletter that he put out and I got interviewed for his newsletter and I got a copy of the paper interview, his newsletter in the mail and there's a picture of us.

And it was, it was just so fun and so neat to be a part of and love these gravel races. You got a free beer at the end, which like when's the last triathlon you had a free beer at the end and just that like community feel and the fact that you're out in nature. And I love being out in the wild. I love it so much.

Kristin: That I think in, in terms of the influx of newcomers into a lot of different facets of cycling, you're hitting on a key point that we're really hoping more and more people can, you know, take, get it off the Peloton and bring it outside, which is the, just that wellness that being outside and exploring provides. And gravel is like nothing else in that, in that regard. Like it's not regulated yet. Although we are seeing a lot of athletes are becoming represented by agents and like we're seeing little bits and pieces like migrate that way, but I think that the heart and soul of it is so strong and it is, it's such like a great equalizer in terms of does a different disciplines of cycling that I'm really hopeful. And I'm sure Jill is as well because she's nodding her head that it will stay grassroots and that we can all feel part of it.

Jill: Yeah. I agree. I had the same experience as Rach. I was originally a triathlete cause I'm from the Midwest and, you know, gravel, wasn't, isn't really a thing out there and it's true, that community feel was there and it kinda got a little bit lost and, being further out West now where we can climb mountains and all of that, it's just awesome to see this community growing and we're seeing as an industry, we're seeing the you know, if we had to find a silver lining to a pandemic, certainly it's that more people are out riding and more people are seeking out, getting further away from home, you know?

Kristin: Absolutely. As we were rehearsing, you both brought up with, I think a lot of passion, like the notion of intersectionality, it doesn't necessarily have to be about gravel, but I sure would love to hear both of your takes on, like, if you had a way to reach the industry, which we hope will grow into a community because industry has been traditionally kind of a little bit of a, not everyone's invited. Right. But if we're looking at this, like how, how can you explain the importance of intersectionality to brand leaders and to company leaders who are listening right now?

Rach: Well, you know, I felt, you know, going back to Jill's story about the gravel scholarship at how it started out as like a, as a women's scholarship. And when she came, you know, that feeling that she had of something being a little off I thought was, was really important because my first thought in that was that, you know, what, if I see a company just focusing on you know, women something and not recognizing the other aspects of gender, other aspects of that play into our identities and life, that company is a step behind, like, this is what the world is right now - is understanding that we all have these different experiences and different identities that play a role, and that are all important. Be it race, class, gender ability, like there are, it's so important to see people as these holes and not kind of have these like individual little communities that you're targeting

towards. And if we can, you know, I think, especially in this context in, in right now where things feel so divided in a lot of ways that what's, the focus really needs to be on of like, how are we similar? Like, how are we all together? And if we use all of those identities, there's usually something in somebody in, you know, around us that we can also identify with and it connects us as a community. And it also helps us feel recognized, validated as like who we are.

Kristin: I love that. Jill, would you like to add to that?

Jill: Yeah, I would just say too, to add to that point that, we're very lucky that we, as a brand have worked with rage for awhile, you know, and I recognize that not all brands happen to already have in their sponsored athlete family, someone that they can just easily call to run, you know, run an idea past or to educate them. So I've definitely seen how hard it is for other marketers.

We talked a little earlier about, you're very, you're afraid of saying something wrong and it's hard to imagine that the consumer is going to be forgiving of a mistake. And as a brand, you know, you want to be as perfect as you possibly can. And there, there are times I am up at night obsessing over the copy I'm writing because I'm so worried that I might be saying something that isn't perfect. And, to Rach's point it's, we do need to start reaching out further than where we have before to be educated or to get feedback, or even to just, you know, reach out to a community group and say, Hey, we're not exactly sure what we're doing, but we really want to work together. Like let's help each other out. And, you know, I think that taking this step is important and knowing it's probably not gonna always be perfect.

Kristin: Yeah. I agree. Perfection is bullshit, I'm just gonna say it for all of us. Obviously we had some cancellations, just a few in 2020. Rach, what's on your race radar and I know it might be aspirational still at this point?

Rach: Oh gosh. Yeah. I'm feeling very, very challenged this year. Last year was easy with the cancellations. It's like everything was just canceled. No problem. This year is 10 million times more challenging because the world is in such flux who knows what's going to happen? Who knows what races are gonna happen. I still have, you know, being up in Canada, if I leave the country, I've got a 14 day quarantine to think about, which is fine at the end of the year when I don't need to be training. But if it's in the middle of a season, it's another story. So you know, my big goals of from 2020 have just shifted into 2021, which are mostly triathlon focused. So going sub nine hours, it challenged Roth, and then having a good race in Kona at the Ironman world championships, which I'm already qualified for.

And then otherwise it's kind of about what is, what else is going on. And what's actually going to happen. And the great thing about gravel is that a lot of these races are

happening because they're, you know, you can have time trial starts or they're just smaller races in general and they, they can still put them on with smaller numbers. You know, I did a couple of gravel races last year. I've yeah. I find that for the lottery for Unbound, I just registered for Trans Rockies, which I'm super excited about and know that I'll probably be doing Big Sugar at the end of the year. And so those are kind of like the most certain that the gravel racing is the most certain things I think that I have right now on my calendar.

Kristin: That's awesome. Well, I feel like this is a perfect place that you've been so generous with your time, both of you for us to wrap up, but before we do, is there anything you would like to say to our amazing audience on this topic? Or do you think we've kind of touched on everything sort of an endless topic?

Rach: Yeah, I mean, I think we, we really covered a lot and I'm always open to answer questions and to get feedback. I'm really accessible on social media, so I'm really happy if anyone wants to reach out for my thoughts or opinions or to discuss anything. And yeah, I mean, I think the bottom line that I just want to put out there is to just be curious, I think that is one of the most important things. You know, just, yeah. Be curious about all those around you. Yeah.

Kristin: Tell us your most accessible social media handle.

Rach: Instagram is probably most accessible and I'm @RachelMcB R-A-C-H-E-L McB. Okay.

Kristin: And obviously we have diamond back.com and everything is, is located in terms of social media and you can see their beautiful gravel bikes right on the front page. I'm looking at them right now.

Jill: That one on the front is Rach's bike!

Kristin: That's beautiful. Awesome. All right. Well, thank you so much. This has been absolutely amazing. I'm so grateful for both of your insights and your time, and I'm just super inspired by all of this. So thank you so so much.