

Interview with Gee Saunders, Vice President of the PCB Agency, Washington, DC
Topic: Matchmaking and dating in a modern world

Venessa: Alright. Welcome to the show, Gee, how are you?

Gee: I am doing good on this sunny day in the Washington, DC Area.

Venessa: Excellent. Excellent. It is sunny here in New York as well, and warm, so we are happy that we've been spared the snow that we usually get.

Gee: Well, don't count it out yet, Venessa. You know how the East Coast is.

Venessa: Oh, I know. Warm today, cold tomorrow. But, I'm going to be an optimist, and we're going to keep on moving with the warm weather.

Gee: Absolutely! And it's love month, so I'm all about warm, fuzzy, warm ...

Venessa: So, welcome to the show today, the Love Right Unplugged podcast. I wanted to talk to you today because you are a matchmaker extraordinaire, and we want to give our viewers some insight about the matchmaking process, what that is, and all that other good stuff. So, maybe I'll just start off with – tell us what you do at the Paul Brunson Agency.

Gee: We are a boutique agency; we like to say that we're not necessarily a Department Store, so you can't come in and just find all of your actual best fits, you can't find a whole bunch, so we actually tailor all of our services to our clients' needs. So, not one person is going to have the same service as another person.

Venessa: Right.

Gee: We do date coaching, which could also fall into the category of love coaching, and we do one-to-one matchmaking. We also do what we consider to be more modernized services. Lots of people are being introduced to lots of potential matches or potential people to date through online means, so we have online services. We have lots of people who actually just need a little practice, so we do what's called practice dates, and also we do group service. We engage individuals who might like the group dynamic, like a workshop, and we're actually instituting, for the first time, an actual retreat.

Venessa: Ok. Cool. Cool. You kind of do it all so you're definitely not a one-size-fits-all agency, so whatever someone needs, essentially, as it relates to dating, relationships, and trying to figure out who they are, and what they need to do, you kind of do it all.

Gee: Exactly. We pretty much say that we have an open door policy. We have been fully functional since about 2009 going into 2010. From our founders Paul and Jill Brunson, basically they started it with the idea of, you know, there is no particular type who deserves love, there's a lid for every pot, so ultimately it's really a matter of what size you are, what age you are. We actually serve nationally, so we can set you up cross-country. We consider ourselves an open door to love services.

Venessa: Ok. So, tell me a little bit about ... I know from the inception, you were primarily a matchmaking agency that focused on women of color, well, women and men of color. Talk to me a little bit about that and your evolutionary process and from where you went and where you are currently.

Gee: Yes. As mentioned, Paul and Jill Brunson, pretty much came from a grassroots approach. They basically were transplants to the DC area, and subsequently just noticed a lot of phenomenal single mothers who were a part of a community program through an education system where Paul and Jill were active. They just saw this awesome opportunity where they had their network from their earlier college years through Georgetown, and they felt like, being new to the area and wanting to make more connections, broaden their network, they started some social events called Brown Sugar. Those Brown Sugars lead to lots of people connection, not only for dates but ultimately quite a few marriages came out of those connections. Subsequently, Paul, really going into his entrepreneurial/finance/business background thought "this might be a great idea", and his wife actually supported it, and really just a brainchild of seeing a need and subsequently recognizing that there was a bit of a particular audience. There were a lot of single, black mothers that they were really noticing were in this position, and then subsequently just opening up the door to really see is this a business. Is there really such a thing as a professional matchmaker? He did his groundwork, traveled across the country, actually, across the world, to meet with some of the top matchmakers in the industry. Basically, self-taught and went through a lot of interning and education building. The brainchild turned into a full-fledged business. Where we are today is that lots of people believe that love may not be for them, at a certain age. Love may not be for them because maybe this is the second time around. So, we consider ourselves to be not just hopeless romantics but we just believe in the, not only the science but the strategy of really effectively dating toward subsequently really aligning yourself with your strongest match because your strongest match is not my strongest match.

Venessa: Right.

Gee: Really understanding yourself. We really put in the work to develop our coined model to basically identify a strong match, effectively date, and really focus on what everyone in this world is really seeking – a lifelong love connection. Love is something that is really premiere and that we talk about in those long-term connections, not just matches and meetups or dates. We really try to help our clients really hone in on the aspect of their goal which may not be your goal, which may not be my goal, and then actualizing that into behavioral steps. Sometimes that requires coaching. Sometimes that actually requires us identifying somebody and sometimes, it's really, again, helping them to develop that strategy that a lot of people need. We do predominately work with people of color. African-Americans. Women between the ages of about later 30s all the way up to mature age, over 50. We do a sprinkle of millennial. We do a sprinkle of further into your mature years. We service men, as well. We like to say we have an open door but we basically serve who seeks us. If you come to us and our services fit, we would be your ideal matchmaker if we are aligned in our values.

Venessa: Okay. Excellent. Tell me about some of the things that you are seeing in the work that you're doing currently. I feel like we're in a microwave age with all of these dating apps and online sites. So, when I talked to Paul last week, he talked about the fact that someone may not go on a date at all in 2017, so we're going to remain optimistic about that but, from a trends perspective – what types of trends are you seeing? Challenges with women and men as it relates to dating and the dating space?

Gee: Well, Mr. Brunson nailed it right there. The trend is that people are not dating because hanging out and hooking up is not a date.

Venessa: Yes.

Gee: To clarify, lots of times we meet people who think that they've dated so much, and they don't even understand the origins of what dating really is. Dating is a courtship. Dating is intentional. Dating has a purpose, and so if you're just hanging out with the opposite sex or whomever you are romantically drawn to, if you are just engaging in a sexual activity – according to the time or just your opportunity, you're not necessarily dating. I do notice that, as he definitely labeled it, that there will be a lot of people who will not date this year because they do not even know what dating is. What we're noticing is that a lot of the people coming to us, and we're asking about their relationship history, people have not engaged in a relationship that's been more than six months. If you've not been in a relationship of more than six months, maybe a year, you, yourself, don't even really understand the dynamics around actually committing to someone that's not your biological family member. Lots of us can love someone, particularly that you birth, I'm a mother. You can love someone that is connected to you by blood, but it takes a certain type of person to love someone unconditionally, lifelong that you are not related to, and to really work it out over a period of time. We are finding that lots of people are not as ready because they don't have the experience of really understanding what it takes to love a non-relative for a lifetime, and then, subsequently, as mentioned, the dating and understanding the education and the definition of what true, effective dating is.

Venessa: Right. Right. Earlier today I had an interview with a woman, and we were talking about preparation and just preparing yourself, and I know that for me, the space that I came from, obviously the interest and my background is in psychology, my interest in this really came from having friends and colleagues who were in the space that they felt like they had it all but that they just couldn't meet the right person. And so, I think that that's what's really shaped my interest in this, my passion for this and ultimately the way, not only the way I approach my own relationships but the work that I do moving forward. I know that you come from a social work background, as well. When you got into this business was it a situation in which you were seeing more of this, and this was kind of your interest/passion or was it a little bit more organic?

Gee:

It was a blend. I was single at the time. I came into this field kind of transferring skills, as you mentioned from social work. So, I went from helping children and families to deciding that there are people who are in different statuses in their life who need help, too, and have always had this idea that I, as the ideal matchmaker, even in my teens and early 20s, I was always matching my friends and setting them up because I felt like I knew who they should date or who they should marry. Then I kind of parlayed that into sort of putting myself through my own study. I transferred from a criminal justice/social work background to re-entering school and studying sociology and, in that, I had the awesome opportunity to work with one of the professors at Bowie State University who decided to help me forge my own project about myself. I was single in the early 2000s, and so I was one of the people who was really foreign to online means of romantic connections. I'm not a techie person. I just got rid of my Blackberry. I'm tactile, I don't like touch screen. I don't trust the cloud at all, there's nothing in my cloud, if you go there it will be empty. I just started downloading music last year. I'm still in analog, I still have CDs, I have albums, so I was not any different in 2000. I was even further away from Black Planet or any means of non-traditional ways of connecting so it was really challenging for me to say to myself, well here I go in dating today, and I am single and I don't have a real process in what I should be doing. Ultimately, I decided why don't I try to do this experiment on myself? What I did was use the sociology aspect to then say, what could I do to start my dating in a more modernized way? And so, I went online and figured out that this is an algorithm which lots of people use subsequently today because everything is so scientific and there's all these different means of coding and systems and things like that. But in the early 2000s it was still kind of foreign. I wanted to figure out what are the actual aspects to really figuring out how to get people online to come and meet me. In a 45-day period, I met, actually, 75 men, and out of those 75 men, I really learned more about myself than the men. It really taught me about what I was looking at, and I'm looking at people who really are not looking at me, particularly not for long-term. They may be looking at me for that night but they're not going to call me back the next day so I forced a lot of feedback. I gathered a lot of data, and we actually thread that into our model today. Some of that information, along with the framework from Paul's book, *It's Complicated But It Doesn't Have To Be*, is our motto. It taught me that the reason why I actually wanted to be a matchmaker was because I remember being with the wrong person. I never forget that now in the work that I do with women or men. I remember the feeling of being with the wrong person and not being loved, how I felt I deserved to be. I also learned the accountability starts with you. It doesn't start with the people you date, it starts with you. It was a groundbreaking moment with me to see that this could be an actual career, and the phenomenal people that we are able to serve is

Venessa: Absolutely. And congratulations to you on your engagement!

Gee: Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you. He's actually part of the experiment.

Venessa: Oh, WOW! Okay.

Gee: He's been around for a while, and like I said, everyone's goal is different, so mine was just was to have a healthy, committed relationship. Almost 12 years later we have now decided to be married.

Venessa: Wow! Okay, look, that is heartwarming and definitely will be heartwarming for our audience members, as well. People listening know that there is a process, and there is somebody out there for everyone, and it's not really about the time that it takes. It takes the time that it takes.

Gee: Oh yeah, everybody's timeline is different. We have had a 65-year-old beautiful woman who had this amazing career try to tell me that she thought that "my time has passed" and I told her, "No, your time is now" because you're talking to me. So today, you're making love a priority. I believe that you are still quite alive so let's make it happen. Just because it wasn't your time or you didn't really have that focus then – your time is your time. Your time can't be someone else's time. Love happens when you're ready, and it will walk through your door when you're ready to open it.

Venessa: Absolutely.

Gee: It's almost that simple but I know that people don't feel like it. But oftentimes, people think that being single is a disease. But, I enjoy being single, that experiment showed me how much fun it can be out there. It's not a disease to be single, so when you're ready to be in a one-to-one, long-term relationship romantically, ironically it's just simply holding yourself accountable and opening up the door, and it's likely that a person will walk right through.

Venessa: Exactly. Exactly. I think you said something that's really key – is when you're ready. Because a lot of people do not realize that they may not necessarily be ready, and they may be manifesting their thoughts and behaviors in a way that does not necessarily make them attractive to a mate, make them that ideal person, so I am a firm believer in doing that work on yourself and asking yourself "Would you date yourself?"

Gee: That is the perfect question, and that is the first question that you should ask. And also again, a lot of people again feel socially kind of bullied into having children, getting married, that's not everyone's goal. A lot of people just end up dating effectively, meeting a lot of awesome people. Love can not only happen once, it can happen twice, three times, four times. And so, we try to encourage people, don't look to your left or right - your love journey is not going to be like anyone else's.

Venessa: Right. Right, that's really key that you said that, and I think that a lot of people think that it's a cookie-cutter approach, and that there's this one-size-fits-all. I can say that from my perspective, even when I was younger, it was okay, I'm on this track, I'm going to have my career, I'm going to get married, and then I'm going to have a family, and then I'm going to do this – boom, boom, boom. It doesn't always go like that, and we have to be fluid, and unfortunately, we're not as fluid when we're younger, I think, in hindsight, we see many more opportunities to change and do things very differently than how we did them when we were younger.

Gee: Oh yeah, and anyone listening would know that you changed through every decade. You evolve just like you do your education or career, so does your love. The person that I probably would have thought I would have married when I was 21 is surely not the person that I am going to marry at 46.

Venessa: Right.

Gee: So, you have to be, like you said, you definitely – being fluid, you really said it right there, Venessa. We're not saying – lots of people, particularly for matchmakers, we hear a lot of feed "you're trying to make me go out with someone that I would never consider or I could have found them on the street". I'm not settling. I deserve better and it could be from what they look like to how much they make, to their education, and I'm often ... I'm kind of considered not a hopeless romantic but probably a little bit of a pitbull in love, you know, like, hey, I don't have a size 2 waist, my butt is not like Kim K's, my breasts definitely sag so I am appreciative of my man loving me as I am. But ultimately, we have to be aware that it's not just what you want but it's also who wants you.

Venessa: Exactly.

Gee: They say you keep looking down the lane of people who are likely not to consider you seriously, you're kind of wasting your own time. So, ultimately, it's not about settling. Love is a decision. You know, make a decision, and realize that that person that's probably sitting right next to you is a good decision for you.

Venessa: Oh My God, that is so true. We don't realize that. I'm a firm believer and tell people all the time, that love is not this butterflies and this, oh my god, he makes me feel this way, she makes me feel this way. What it really is, it's an action, and it is a decision. When you get to that place where you're ready and you're like you know what? This person sitting right next to me ... they've been in my sphere for a long period of time, maybe they've been a friend or colleague or coworker or whatever, and all of a sudden you're like, "Wow, this person really does know me the way that I want someone to know me and really care about me."

Gee: Exactly. We have shared values, we have lots of commonalities. You know, they make me laugh. You know, I enjoy just being around them. Like you said, they have my back, they support me. When I was sick they brought me soup. We tend to ignore those people as if, like you said, that everything should be about butterflies and fireworks, I tell people often, I am nobody's cupid. I am not shooting bows, and this is not a fairytale. Ultimately, I don't like to over romanticize – one of the things that I tell all of my potential clients coming in the door – let me just tell you right now, it's going to be work.

Venessa: Yes.

Gee: Don't think for one second that hiring a matchmaker the work is going to be less. If anything, it can be even more uncomfortable. Because having someone call you out on your shit is oftentimes something that people are not prepared for and so, yeah, you have girlfriends, and you have family members, but no, we don't know you or love you like them. So, ultimately, it's counterintuitive for me to not be transparent with them or with my clients. There's lots of feedback that we receive because we are not perfect, there's lots of feedback that we have to issue, and so it's a very intimate relationship but it's work. We don't necessarily make it simple, we do absorb the hours that maybe it takes for the identification, but it's still work. It's still challenging, and a matchmaker is not a cupid nor are we magicians so we can't make anything exist – something materialize that doesn't exist. We like to be honest; we can't make someone love you but we can surely get them at the table to give a fair opportunity to see if there is some genuine chemistry.

Venessa: Right. Right. Which is key, and I've said that to somebody earlier today. I said you know what, if you're coming to me because you want me to help you get a man, I can't help you do that. What I can help you do is to help you show up to show your best self so that the person will be attracted to you.

Gee: Oh yeah, it's hard. It's hard to do self-work. I know you've done it, I've done it. I know you are definitely dealing with the same realm of conversation that we are. It's hard to look at yourself in the mirror and realize that you know, like you said, would I date me? In a state of mind, in a state of physical health, in my state of just my core values ... would I date me? And it's hard to be able to say to yourself maybe not.

Venessa: Right. Right. Absolutely.

Gee: So, it's a hard conversation, but it's necessary to put yourself in a position to align yourself with people that are actually your best match. It's the first opening to really having somebody walk through that you could possibly share a lifetime with.

Venessa: Absolutely. So, in our last couple of minutes. Tell me, what would you tell the woman who has not been on a date in 10-15 years but wants love in her life?

Gee: Get online. Most people think that a matchmaker would say, "Don't do that, come here, pay us money". That's some stupidity. We do comprehensive dating. We tell all the clients, if you're not online, even with us, you're missing out on a whole pool of people. One in three is not a made-up, myth statistic. One in three relationships today are being met through online or internet means. So, to ignore that pool of opportunity is to really dwindle yourself to limited options. I would first tell anyone, if you have done your self-work and you're really ready to get out there, even if you haven't dated in a long time, if you want neutral feedback from a professional, obviously our agency is there and a lot of my colleagues. I would also say, on the simplest level, you could easily just pick up Paul's book and go online, create a profile and test the waters.

Venessa: Right.

Gee: Kind of that whole put yourself out there – it's REAL online. You are really putting yourself out there if you go online and that's the first step to being vulnerable and making love and romance a priority.

Venessa: Absolutely. Absolutely. That is so key. I'm glad that you said that. I think that a lot of our audience and listeners will be able to appreciate that because there are still a lot of people who are very skeptical about dating online and they don't think it's safe and, just like you said, you still don't trust the cloud and all of those things. So, you literally just have people that say I just won't meet anybody if I have to go online and I'm thinking seriously?

Gee: We get a lot of clients like that and so we respect people's values and we respect the understanding of safety and safety first and just meeting a stranger on the street but we like to kind of normalize it to say that the same way that you would assess someone in meeting them in a club, you don't turn off that just because you have a profile. You would always have safety parameters. You would always have neutral, well-lit, during the day meetups and things. We encourage our clients to maybe set up a Google number that offers a level of privacy if you don't want to give out your personal number. We are very quick to also let our clients know that ultimately, it's a process towards who you meet. You're not going to meet everyone that you interact with online, so that's the whole point to having a strategy. A lot of people who feel that they are not getting positive outcomes with online, is oftentimes because they have no strategy. It's like putting a kid in a candy shop. Everybody looks good, I want to meet everybody, I want to hang out with everybody and then you're disappointed when all of the candy is gone. We just encourage people to include some level of online but definitely, it has to be coupled with a strategy.

Venessa: Strategy is right, and I think strategy is key. I think that is very important. A lot of people don't have a strategy.

Gee: No. Romance can lead you in so many different directions, we totally understand. So, we're just saying in the midst of your heart going in one direction, just don't lose your head. Never lose your common sense.

Venessa: Absolutely. Well, Gee, thank you so much for taking the time out to talk to me about you, your matchmaking and how folks can get out there and meet the right one. We would not be in this business if we did not believe in love. So, thank you so much.

Gee: Love is at the core of our both of our work. So, I appreciate you Venessa, you inviting me. It's just awesome to engage a fellow love gladiator. You are definitely in this fight with us, so I appreciate you.

Venessa: Absolutely. Thanks so much Gee, and I will be in touch.

Gee: Alright, have a great rest of your day.

Venessa: Alright, you too, bye bye.

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