

Interview with Paul Carrick Brunson

Topic: Will you go out on a date this year??

Venessa: Got it started, alright. Great. Well, welcome. So, today we've got Paul Carrick Brunson on the Love Right Unplugged Podcast. Hey Paul, how are you?

Paul: Venessa, I'm great, and I know that you're great, too, so I am looking forward to this.

Venessa: Oh, great. Thanks so much. Thanks so much. Paul, I want you to know that I've been doing a ton of reading about a number of things, but you and I have worked together, we've worked together for the last six months or so, and I've been doing a lot of reading on matchmaking, relationship strategies, and I figured that since we were going into the month of February and Valentine's Day was quickly approaching, I wanted to talk about an article that I read. And you're probably familiar with this article, because you wrote it.

Paul: I hope ...

Venessa: So, last month, you wrote a provocative piece on LinkedIn ...

Paul: Oh, yeah ...

Venessa: And, it said that 80% of singles will not go on one date in 2017...

Paul: That's right.

Venessa: I want you to know that I read that article over and over again. I read all three hundred and something comments that people had to say about this particular article because what was clear to me was that there were so many people who actually agreed with you. So, here's my question. The first thing is, what provoked you to write that article?

Paul: You know what I'll say, too, when you mentioned that you read all the comments, I appreciate that. In reading those comments, when I read the comments, I was shocked that so many people agreed. I shouldn't say I was shocked. It was – it was interesting that so many people agreed to such a provocative statement as 80% of singles won't go on a single date. The reason why I did it, I'll give you the technical reason, and I'll give you my why – what the heartstrings told me. The technical reason was that LinkedIn actually reached out, and they asked, "Hey Paul, could you make a provocative prediction for 2017?" and I said, "Sure, let me think about what I could say". I decided to write this only because – over the last two to three years I feel like I've been at this nexus of dating coaches, relationship coaches, matchmakers, established dating – large dating websites, and then also brick-and-mortar dating companies, and not just domestic, but also abroad. So I've had this kind of barrage of the industry and then on top of it, if you add another layer, I'm at this intersection of television producers who are looking to either create shows around love, dating, relationships, etc., so I've got that nexus, and then the last layer are people. Individuals who are wanting to date, maybe in a casual dating relationship wanting to move to a committed dating relationship, etc., so I feel like I'm in this really unique position and given that unique point of view that I have – I really feel as if the trend is – we're trending away from dating. I wanted to put an emphasis around that because the marriage – in my opinion, in that piece, I never mentioned anything about that I think that the marriage rate is drastically falling off. I didn't say that. But, I said that dating, and I feel as if the institution of dating, has drastically changed, and in my opinion, it's into the position where it really needs to be rescued, and this was one of many things that I plan to do this year which is kind of my flag in the sand saying when it comes to dating, committed dating, we are just not doing it, and we need to be doing it. That's the reason why I wrote the piece. I wanted to just send a wake up call to a lot of folks to say hey, look, we're not doing this thing that's very important to our world. We need to start doing more of it.

Venessa: Right. Right. Exactly. So, here's the thing. Given the context that you have written that article, and obviously got lots of comments on it and whatnot. Is the dating game broken?

Paul: I'll keep it 100 with you. It's how you define broken. I'll say that we're in the place when it comes to dating, and I outline this in the article, where there's a lot of confusion in the dating marketplace, how do you define dating? That question alone, if you ask ten different people you get ten different answers.

Venessa: Right.

Paul: We are definitely at a point where technology is playing an integral role in either - to the benefit or the detriment of dating. Then you have so many quote/unquote experts with an abundance of information, so much so that it's counter to each other. You know, I just read an article this morning about someone who is a friend of mine who wrote a book about - essentially saying that it's ok to have sex on the first date, and she's almost encouraging that. Her own book says you should have sex on the first date, and then you have a whole other group of experts that say that that's the last thing you want to do, to have sex on the first date. So if you are, if you're single, and you're out here, and you're genuinely trying to get quality information to aide you, you're getting all of these counter positions. There's this overwhelming state of confusion. I can't say that it is broken from the standpoint of in disrepair, and it can never build itself back to where it was, but I do think that it has changed drastically, and it's changed not for the positive.

Venessa: Okay. Okay, that's a fair enough assessment. When we talk about the fact that it definitely hasn't changed for the best, we're talking about what, exactly? One thing that you just mentioned is the fact that there are just so many different avenues, particularly dating apps, and you talk about that in your article. You dating app analysis paralysis. Why is this? Why are we in this place?

Paul: The dating app paralysis is, as I mentioned in the piece - I truly believe that this is driven by the almighty dollar, you know, and the emergence of technology has a big role to play in this. About eight years ago, when I entered the dating space, the love space, there is a conference called the iDate conference which is one of the bigger conferences in the love industry, and it focuses more on tech companies, right? So, dating app companies, it could be data providers for those companies and that kind of thing and I remember going to - this was my first love conference, and I went there. It was in Miami, and I was thinking that it's love, right, so it's going to be warm and fuzzy, and it is going to feel good ...

Venessa: Right.

Paul: I walk into this place and it was the coldest place, I am talking about literally it was the coldest place of anywhere in Miami. It was freezing. But, you know, no one was talking to each other, it was – not that men can't be warm but it was 99% men, 99% middle-aged men, in particular, white men, trying to sell these - trying to talk about data acquisition and customer churn and all of these technical terms. And this is a love industry conference but my point is that, I – actually it was NPR, interviewed me. Someone walked up to me and they said Hey, how'd this guy get in here, right? And they walked up to me and they interviewed me and the quote that I gave them ended up being something that they ran with and they did this whole series on it and that was that I said "we're here at the love industry conference and I feel no love".

Venessa: Wow. Wow, that's powerful.

Paul: The point that I was trying to make with them was that here we have people in this room, building application not to help to connect people, not to help to create more committed relationships, they were doing it to figure out how can we make money. That was their objective. It was how can we figure out – and I really believe that's where gamification of and Tinder, etc., these guys –and I'll call them out, this guy, Sean Rad from Tinder, in my opinion, that was a play to make money. At one point, Tinder, I remember discussions around Tinder, and people saying that Tinder is much more than a dating app, it's a social network. The point here is that we need to have, and the reason why we're in this state, is that we have a lower percentage of people who are true influencers in this space with the genuine objective of seeing stronger marriages, stronger committed relationships, and when we're able to see that, we'll be in a much better place.

Venessa: Right. Right. So, it sounds like that particular conference at that time – it sounds like it was very transactional and very business oriented. I mean, I guess love can be a business, but we don't necessarily think about it like that. We think about it in terms of very warm and fuzzy, like you said.

Paul: And that, you titled it perfectly, it was very transactional. That's not to say that we don't need the business side within the business of love. Because we need it; that's how you run effective operations. But, we also need to understand what is the true solution to the problem? Because in my mind, that's really what business and entrepreneurship is about. It's about creating unique solutions for very challenging problems. What I think that we've done instead of creating – we meaning the masses of the love industry, we haven't created solutions, we've created almost pacifications. Band-aids for problems and these bandaids are just – we're making them so that we can sell more of them. But, we need solutions because that's what we don't have.

Venessa: That's a really good point, and when you say that, I'm very solution driven, and when I think about the love industry, I think about the fact that there are a lot of products. There are a lot of products to throw at why you're not dating, so it seems like there are all of these apps and online sites and etc., but there's no true solution so if people really want to look at – okay, we know what the problem is, how do we get down to the bare bones of how to fix it? And I think that's what's needed.

Paul: Right. I agree completely.

Venessa: One of the things that you mentioned earlier on in the conversation, and you also mentioned in your article had to do with marriage, and the fact that you didn't necessarily talk about marriage. But one of the things that you did talk about in the article is the drop in the value of marriage. So, I'm in the relationship space, as well, trying to help people, and these are people that want to get married. Are we in a place in which marriage is not valued the way it used to be? I think about the fact that my parents were married for many, many years, though no longer together. They were married because there was something to be said for marriage. And in many of my friends and my colleagues and peers, their parents have been married 40, 50, 60 years. What has happened? What's the difference between then and now?

Paul: This idea that there is a drop in the perception of the value of marriage is, I believe, indicative of how alarming a position or a state that we're in. Because of what you just said – you think about 30 years ago or it doesn't even have to be 30 years, we could be talking about 15 years ago, people – the vast majority of people, and this is not just me coming up with these number, this is Pew Research telling us that the vast majority of us – all age groups, we all perceive there to be a value in there. Just to break that down – that doesn't mean that you want to be married. That's just saying that you say that if someone is married or there are benefits that come with it. There's a premium that you get with it, right? It could be a good thing, that's all that is, right? But, what's happened is that when you look, now across the age groups, and you survey, and this is Pew Research surveying today Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials, they still see that the majority of Gen X and Baby Boomers still there to be a benefit to marriage. But Millennials to the tune of 67% of Millennials no longer see a value in getting married. That's incredibly dangerous, and I'll even walk it a step further – just in my eight to nine years in the love space, I've seen what I would almost call a marriage backlash. What I mean by marriage backlash is that about nine years ago, if you were to plant your flag, and say there's more than a value to marriage, there's an importance to being married. If you were to shout that out on social media, "There's an importance to being married", you would be met with lots of applause, lots of likes, lots of reshares, lots of "You go girl".

Venessa: Absolutely.

Paul: Today, you say that, you're going to be met with, still, some applause but you're going to be met with boos, you're going to be met with, "No, there's much more to life than getting married". There's a backlash, there's almost a subtle attack, I believe, on the institution of marriage, and the reason why this is important with regard to our conversation of dating, is that I believe that when you begin to see less value in marriage, you then see less value in the pathway to marriage which is committed dating, engagement – because dating becomes part of that.

Venessa: Exactly.

Paul: And so, that is why it's so dangerous. Because if you don't see there's a value in marriage, you see that there's little value in dating, and it then becomes a question of why even date anybody anyway?

Venessa:

Exactly. Exactly. That's the question that I have for people. I had an interesting conversation – I was at a party, and I met a gentleman who was in his 50s, and he said that he had no interest in getting married at all. He had a son who was older, probably 20 or so, and one of the reasons why was because he didn't necessarily see the value in it. And so, it was really interesting because he was a Social Worker. We started to talk about whether he was commitment phobic, and one of the things that I often talk about when I meet men who are in their 40s and 50s, and they tell me that they are single, and that they have no interest is the whole idea of Peter Pan Syndrome. Do you have Peter Pan Syndrome? Peter Pan Syndrome says I think I'm going to be young forever and I can still do the same things as I was doing at 20 and 30 at 50 and 60. You absolutely cannot do that and then thing that made him pause, I said to him, I said, let me tell you something. You can travel by yourself, and maybe you'll find someone to travel with. But let me tell you when it really makes a difference – when you think about the fact that you won't have anybody to hold you down. It's when you put your parents in the ground. As someone who has buried my father, and someone who has buried my grandmother who was very, very close to me, almost like my mother, I realized at that moment it was one of the most difficult times in my life, and at that moment I realized I could not be alone when it came my mother's time. And it shocked him. It literally shocked him, and he was like, "Whoa ... that's really heavy and you're absolutely right. Can we change the subject?" And that was real.

Paul:

That's real. That is deep. That is deep. You know, when you tell that story, it reminds me – I've actually never stated it this way but that story gave me this thought of – to me, being in a marriage or in a committed relationship, right? It's almost like you watch one of your favorite movies. I love Star Wars. It's almost like you're able to watch Star Wars, it's a great movie – you go to it, it's a great movie but imagine, then, being able to watch Star Wars in 3D. A whole other dimension, you're experiencing new things, new feelings, you're – and to me, that's what being in a relationship is like. There's an additional richness that comes with each and every experience. And that's why I fully believe that we were not put here, on this – in this world to do it alone. That doesn't mean that marriage is for everyone, because I don't think that marriage is for everyone. But, I also don't think that we were put here to do it alone. So, I completely agree with your story, and I run into a lot of people, a lot of guys with this Peter Pan Syndrome, as well.

Venessa: And they're completely clueless when you talk to them. And you say, "This whole hanging out ... Do you really want to be the 60-year-old at the club? Why?"

Paul: Right. It's just crazy.

Venessa: Yeah, but you know, and women, too. I've had some conversations with women in their 40s and 50s, and they're at a place in their life like, "Okay, I guess I should start getting my affairs in order, because I'm going to be alone". That's a really sad state to hear them, and I truly believe that there is someone for everyone, and I just hope that we can get to a place where we find some solutions, and we get back to traditional family values and really start looking at marriage as the end all to be all.

Paul: I tell you what, I feel that that, I'll call it that trend that you just described, I think that it can come especially with the political environment that exists here in the states and also in many countries around the world . You almost feel this closing down of ranks, and when you're alone and you're closing down ranks you realize, "Oh God, I'm alone". I'm being siloed off – but when you have family or friends you realize the importance that comes with it, and so I think we're going to see ... I've seen some pretty interesting studies throughout the years that showed when the world, especially when certain countries were in extreme turmoil. If you look at World War One, you look at World War Two, you look at, here in the United States you look at our involvement with Korea or Vietnam, you would think that, okay, our focus is there, therefore relationships are going to dip off but you actually see peaks in marriages. You see peaks in more people getting engaged when those travesties happen. Not that the world is going to Hell, but we're not headed in the right direction but maybe that's a good thing for marriages.

Venessa: That's so funny that you said that, and actually, I looked at some of those studies, too, and it's very true. I can remember an article that I read, probably around '08 or '09, right as we were trying to get out of the recession, and they were talking about how initially there were people that wanted to get divorced, and once the recession hit and times got really hard, that they were feeling yeah, it's better to have you than to go this alone. As we're now, basically, eight or nine years past that for the most part, although we may be going back that way, but that's a whole other story. Some of the more recent studies have indicated that those people who may have been on the edge of divorce at that particular time are now happier than they ever were, and it took that turmoil in the country, in those hard times, for them to really realize what mattered and that was being together.

Paul: Absolutely. So, we have hope.

Venessa: Absolutely, we definitely have hope. Well, if there's one thing, before we wrap up here that you'd like to say to folks from an advice perspective, what would you tell them about dating moving forward?

Paul: Wow. If there was only one thing, I'd say, get a trusted advisor in your life. And that could be a real life mentor, that could be just continuing to tune in to this podcast where you have someone who, maybe you haven't met Venessa but she's a trusted voice. Be in good books. Mentorship comes in a variety of forms, but stay with trusted advice, and that's good mentorship in my mind, because that's really what helps you in times of difficulty, and when things are good, trusted advice helps you to optimize the good time so you turn good times into great times when you have that mentorship. So, that would be my advice, make sure that you stay around trusted advice.

Venessa: Okay, that's a good one. There's something to be said for surrounding yourself with wise counsel. I completely agree with that. Completely agree.

Paul: Yes.

Venessa: Well, thanks Paul, it's been great talking to you. I totally appreciate you taking the time out, and I look forward to talking to you again very soon. I'm sure that we're going to have some updates and some other stuff that we're going to need to talk to folks about, particularly as things begin to change because I think, as you said, things are definitely going to change, particularly with the environment that we're in now, and I just look forward to seeing more marriages and more love.

Paul: My pleasure, and I love what you're doing, and it's been an honor to join you. So thank you very much for the invite.

Venessa: Thanks, so much, Paul.

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