



David Hieatt

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<https://predictablesuccess.com/david-hieatt/>

Note: *This transcript has been lightly edited for clarity and understanding. There may still be grammatical and spelling errors,*

Les McKeown: Hi, everybody. It's Les McKeown here, founder and CEO of Predictable Success. And we're back with another in the series of the Predictable Success interviews in which I talk with people who have either themselves, and/or with other people, achieved that state that we call Predictable Success. And today I'm absolutely delighted to be speaking to someone who I will be absolutely honest is in a small category of my genuine business heroes, David Hieatt. We're going to hear a little bit about what David's up to in a moment, but for the moment, well, welcome to the show, David. Good to have you here.

David Hieatt: Thank you very much Les, yeah, I wish I was over there and in person actually. but you know, Skype is a good, good way of talking to you. So

Les McKeown: It is once you get the technology right, as we just discovered. I first met David through something called the Do Lectures and in my perception Do Lectures are probably the greatest undiscovered asset available in the business community today. And normally what we do in these series is we start from the back end and we get our guests to talk about their background. But I'd love if you could start actually by just explaining what the Do Lectures are, David, and then tell us a little bit about how you started them.

David Hieatt: Well, it's an incredibly small event because it's 80 to a hundred attendees. and everybody gathers on the edge of West Wales, at a place called FForest. and everybody eats together, drinks together, you know, listens together, talks together. And the magic of the Do Lectures is that listening to the talks is great and it's important, but because they're together for days, it's the talk after the talks that matters. And, sometimes the things that work against you actually in the end work for you. And, the fact that it's very, very, very far away means that actually the speakers don't leave. So they commit to the time. and at that point, so they're very focused on staying and actually 90 point 99 percent actually do stay.

David Hieatt: the other thing is actually wifi really bad, - so they literally have to switch off. and the other thing that's really going for it, there's a place at Fforest and actually one in Campovida in California where the extraordinary nature of the place takes you to another place. So you switch off as well. So in a way, all your senses are, are sort of calm and, you're very receptive and a is a gathering of, you know, some brilliant minds. and the most fantastic thing is people talk to



each other and I cannot control it, but, it's very easy to go to conferences and listen to a great talk and then go home. and actually in a, in a strange way, this event as the opposite. And you have to think about what you see. but you also have to talk about it because you're sitting next to, you know, and it's, it's very random. You can talk to a speaker, you can talk to an attendee and actually nobody knows who's who until, you know, the speakers get up and talk.

Les McKeown: Why did you start it?

David Hieatt: I was reading about one of my favorite brands called Patagonia and they do a 'Tools Camp', once a year, actually twice a year. And it's to teach people the tools of being an activist. And I thought, well, it's typical of a Patagonia where it's a fantastic idea, but I also kind of thought, well, actually that's great for 80 to a hundred people, but actually, why don't we film it and why don't we make that available to millions? And about the same time as I was reading that my friend Tony Davidson sent me a text and it said, 'Dick Dastardly was right - don't just stand there, do something'. And, myself and Claire, over dinner last night and we were running Howies at the time and we said, Oh, it's great that we make clothes. And, you know, everybody loves the company, but actually what do we do? And then when we started talking about doers and actually the people, we, get inspired people by all the people, who've done great things. And I think that's, that's got us thinking, why don't we do something and try and bring all those people to do it together. And in the hope that they would inspire the rest of us to go and do amazing things too. Right.

Les McKeown: And how long you'd been doing it now?

David Hieatt: It's been going for five years.

Les McKeown: At the point that you're at now, and you look at what - you just had one recently, and you've got another one coming up in September - how close is it to your vision?

David Hieatt: I think it's very close and I think, you know, the mixture and eclecticism of the people is really what I wanted it to be. I wanted it to be the ultimate mashup of ideas, music, food, bikes. so it's very, very close to what I dreamt about it has been. and I suppose it's probably reached its optimum size, I mean, in terms of that small event.

Les McKeown: So do you have plans to, well, before we get to that, before we get to work, can you give the folks a bit of a sense of the type of thing, you know, in terms of speakers, what is really, who's really spoken to you recently? You know, what have been your highlights? What's the sort of flavor of the type of thing that people will encounter when they attend

David Hieatt: Well, I mean, we pick from about seven different categories and one could be business, or it could be sport, it could be food, one could be tech, yeah. One will be local. and it is that, you know, that eclectic mix, which makes it magical because sometimes you're just about

to hear a talk about what could I possibly learn from this girl or guy. But there's all sorts to be learned from these different people and the ones that have caught my eye?, This year for this spring, Tim Smith came and talked about what he'd done at the Eden project. And, I don't know if your audience will know that, but it's outside of London, it's Britain's biggest visitor attraction and covers a subject which is not to some people, not that interesting, you know, plant life and nature, but it's absolutely a huge success. So he gave a very Maverick talk and I thought that was fantastic. I thought James Victoire - a new Yorker, a graphic designer - really got everybody bubbling, and Sean from Falling Wisdom gave the most monumental, heart rending talk. So they can be from NGOs to big businesses, to local growers, to bakers, and every few years, you know, from a knife maker in Brooklyn, you know, there's, this, there's a very odd mix, but actually when you put it all together, it actually makes a lot of sense.

Les McKeown: Right. I can completely attest to that when I was there last year. I remember reading through the speaker list and, you know, I'd look at people's names and titles and what they did and what they were going to talk about. And I'll be really honest with you in advance. I'd look at some of these and I think, you know, there's just nothing in this topic that I have any interest in. I didn't miss a single minute of one of those. I was gripped by every single presentation and there's something that is a, it's really ephemeral that, that there's a, there's definitely a magic about the place and the way people as you say, are, you know, we're sort of forced to spend time together, that just produces something that's magic. And I remember you remember Cheetotop, talking about the mushrooms?

Les McKeown: I mean, just unbelievable stuff. And this tall thin guy with a beanie cap gets up, it was Nick Hand to talk about cycling around Britain and Nick and I are now firm friends, I met him when he was out here in New York and, you know, I got to meet his wife and, just the friendships. And I'm sure you've heard this a lot, the whole sense of being a doer, having been there. it's, you know, it's very strong in my life and anybody else who's been there exactly. The same thing

David Hieatt: It is. it's, you know, friendships are made there and you never know where this stuff takes you, but absolutely.

Les McKeown: And let's talk a little bit about your next five years. To what degree do you plan medium and long term? Do you just do this each year and let's see what happens or do you have new things that you'd like to see happen?

David Hieatt: Well, I mean, I think, I mean we should plan things. I said to myself, well, if it's brilliant, we'll carry it on. And then, then you know, the first day happens and I'm going um...I'm gonna go again - and it's bloody brilliant again. The five year plan is can we get a thousand talks up online, as a resource, then it'll become something quite amazing and I think has the potential to be a really important resource. so I mean, that's our plan. I'd love to do the Do Lectures in India. I'd love to do in Australia. I'd love to do one in Spain. So, I mean, I think we've got to work



that out, we're doing one in California in September and that's his second year and that's gone really well.

David Hieatt: So the Welsh government here asking us, can we do a festival? And so we bring a big audience for the town. Right. and I like that aspect where, you know, the idea of the town, ideas of music can come together. So, we're thinking about that but I suppose, like anything, we've got to concentrate on being brilliant, right? And, and see where that takes us. Because a lot of people would make the comparison of, Oh, you're like TED, but the only thing we have in common with TED really is the fact that, you know, we'd have speakers who do talks and we recorded them online. I think for the event itself, we're very different to TED in as much as, you know, the, the speakers and the attendees come together, there are no differences. You know, there are workshops, there are bands playing and there's, you know, they're in a tent, it's raining, you know, you're cold. There's communal eating, there's its own pub. And I think it can, I think that's where the comparison kind of, doesn't hold up, we're kind of different to TED.

Les McKeown: As you push it out - I know you've got the US one and you were talking about India and Australia, for example, do you aim for you and Claire to be involved with those, or do you want to find key people who will develop them? I know you've worked quite a lot with Duke Stump in the US for example.

David Hieatt: I mean, I think if we can find people who get it, and I think, with Duke, I mean, he, he invites us over out of, yeah, just interest for us, but when he, you know, he sort of, picks all the speakers and, and everything is taken care of. And that's what I wanted really, because, you know, I didn't want to run Do India and start picking speakers, because actually you need a man or woman on the ground running it. And actually maybe the Welsh one works because in a way that's my flavor. But Do Spain - that might be different. And I think, I think you just gotta give people a, you gotta let 'em fly and, you know, don't clip their wings really.

Les McKeown: So you put all of the talks up for free online so people can go access them. Where's the best place for people to go get a flavor of the talks and find out about future events?

David Hieatt: the DoLectures.com website, it has all the talks up there and anything that's happening for the event, all the details. So, I think the website is probably the best way to get hold of us.

Les McKeown: And the thing that really blows me away about all this David is that it's not as if you're sitting around doing this full time, you actually run a business, as you mentioned in passing. I want to go into that - you had a business called Howie's before you started Do Lectures. Could you just talk a little bit, share with our folks what that was, a bit about it's history and lead us into your new business you're in, your current venture.



David Hieatt: Yeah, I started a clothing company called Howie's in 1995. And for the first six years we did it as a bit of a hobby, and we kind of fell in love with the hobby. So myself and Claire moved back down from London down to Wales. And, we, we did have this full time and it grew really fast and, yeah, in a way, a little bit too fast. So we kind of needed to find somebody to team up with, in the end we sold Howie's to Timberland, and, that, you know, wasn't really what we wanted, and it wasn't a great time. So I think in the end we tried to buy it back. They didn't want to sell it. And in the end it was hard to be there.

David Hieatt: So we, we kind of left Howie's and, I remember walking down the stairs and I'm thinking to myself, I'm shutting the door on Howie's after 15 years of building it. So now I've gone, what am I going to do now? And, I was really smitten with jeans. I love the way that they would get better with age. I love the fact that creative people wore them. and I oddly lived in a town that knew how to make great jeans. I mean our town used to make 35,000 pairs of jeans a week for three to four decades. And then one day the factory closed, but all that skill, remained. And, I kind of wrote the plan pretty much soon after I left Howie's and then, I sent it to all my investors and I said, do you know what, you know, do you want to do this?

David Hieatt: And they all came back to me and said we love it, let's do it. And I said to them, I think I'm not sure if I want to run around on the same track twice. And, so I put the plan aside for a year and then one day my old designer called me, he said, why aren't you doing the plan? You know, we all loved it. And so what do you say I haven't worked out the why of it. And he said to me, I thought it was all about getting the town making jeans again. And as we discussed it actually the economics weren't as daft as I thought they were going to be. And it was like, sort of, you know, that moment where you go, of course, that's why I've got to do it - that's why we're going to go and build a nice global kind of brand - because our town needs to get back to making jeans again.

David Hieatt: And, I knew that you can't build a great brand just on sentiment. And we got a lovely story, you know, the story about our town making jeans again. And we also knew that, you know, we have to do something, you know, with great skill. So we do make the most amazing quality Jean that we can, and that puts us up there with the best. But even now alone with a great sentiment and a great quality product, you still need something else to go and change the, the denim industry. And, and I'm pretty convinced that the way for us to succeed is to bring ideas to the denim industry. It hasn't changed in a hundred years. when I looked at, a pair of Levi's in the Levi's store in San Francisco from 1876 or whatever it was, they nailed it.

David Hieatt: They absolutely nailed it. And actually he hasn't changed at all, you know, there's tweaks and various bits but it's all bits around the edges. So, but the one thing I noticed was, actually if you make a great product to last, I noticed that those products that last can tell great stories about you, right? And I thought, you know, there's like two worlds coming together. And one is what I call Luddite, where great companies do want to make things to last. And the geek road, which is where things have the ability to tell stories - and where those two things come



together is really where a thing that we call the history tag works. And that's essentially a way of attaching memories to the products that we buy. So for example, you know, you'd get a pair of jeans, you'd have a unique number when you get them, you register that number onto the historytag.com website, and you'll see six or seven pictures of your jeans being made. But at that point, then you can decide whether you want to upload pictures in its future, right. And the purpose is so if they ever get handed down or they end up in a secondhand store or jeans market, the memories will go with them too. And I kinda love that notion. I think there's a deep desire for it.

Les McKeown: I think it's a wonderful idea.

David Hieatt: And, and I think, you know, each, each pair of jeans is going to have a different story,

Les McKeown: Including mine, which I believe are being made this month.

David Hieatt: Yes they are. And I know it hasn't been the quickest of jeans, but they're all fantastic.

Les McKeown: How has your first few months experience been like, compared to what you had anticipated?

David Hieatt: Well, I mean, the brave thing about business plans is they're always perfect, which I love. But then, for any start... I mean, for us, we didn't anticipate the level of demand. We thought we'd have a nice gentle baptism. But we got hit quite hard and, you know, we almost got three months with orders in the first couple of weeks. And when you're geared up to make 10 pairs a day with, with the help of strong coffee and great music, that's a bit of a test.

Les McKeown: So you, you accelerated through Early Struggle, past Fun and right into Whitewater in the first month and a half.

David Hieatt: Yeah, we went straight there and so, yeah, we're, we're kind of hiring more machinists, and, you know, we're managing the process of trying to keep everybody happy. And also, I was a bit surprised that shops from Japan have been coming down to us and people from shops in France going, can we stock this? And you're going, Ooh, wow. So it's been a nice surprise. I mean, and, so we're just kind of managing that. I mean, I guess we've built brands before and we kind of know we are comfortable around doing that. But, I guess we haven't done manufacturing before and, that's been an interesting one and yeah, fortunately this town is full of machinists and we just need to go and hire them. So, I mean it's a lovely problem to have, but it's still a problem that needs to be solved.



Les McKeown: And tell us a little bit, just before we come to a close does a little bit about the Grand Masters.

David Hieatt: Well, I think, you know Malcolm Gladwell, who wrote about doing something for 10,000 hours and after 10,000 hours, you get pretty good at it. And, and it was based on chess grandmasters where after 10,000 hours you become a Grandmaster. And I love that notion of, there comes a point in your life where you get really good at something. And for us, the machinists we were going to hire, they'd had 10, 15, 20, 25 years of experience. So they were grandmasters upon grandmasters. and for us, when you're a startup and you go over a hundred years worth of experience, making jeans kind of fits really well actually, you know, that you got some really experienced people around you and, we are ambitious in as much as we want to go ahead and build a global denim company so that we we can get 400 people they're jobs back, which is ultimately a crazy dream. Right now there's 10 of us. But I kind of, you know, I guess, like you Les, you get to a point where you studied your thing and you have to practice your art at some point.

Les McKeown: Right. Absolutely. And we don't have time in this call, but I'd love in some future call, maybe also a couple of years down the line from now and maybe the rawness of startup is a fond memory. there's got to be a fascinating story in there of bringing visionary leadership, an expansionist mindset, and working with a group of people who are essentially artisans and traditionalists and, you know, who have the knowledge locked away in their head of mechanically making this thing. And, just juggling all of that must be fun, but we'll maybe get you back to come talk about that separately when you've got through the hump. I know you've you stopped taking orders just momentarily while you catch up with demand, but if people do want to go see what Hiut Denim is all about, where can they best go?

David Hieatt: Hiutdenim.co.uk. and we're just about, hopefully in the next four to five weeks, getting over the hump. But just to finish up, I'll tell you one story, which is, which is relevant to what you just said. Claudio who cuts our jeans has 38 years of experience cutting jeans. And, he said to me, so do you know what I was really worried about Dave, is I wouldn't have anybody to pass my skills on to. And, I just went, Oh man, that's what we do to make this work. And sometimes ideas are very timely. If we'd left this idea another 10 years we wouldn't be able to have done it. And all of that skill would have been lost. It would have been lost. So it's, so it was kind of timely. And, you know, we've got to go and if that's what galvanizes me well then okay, I'm going to get this done.

Les McKeown: I can imagine when you get to the point that you're watching an apprentice learn from Claudio and get to Grandmaster level him or herself, that's just going to be a wonderful sense of legacy. Hiut denim is H I U T D E N I M.co.uk, and I recommend everybody to go there. See the story. I mean, just the story itself that you've got up on the website, is magnificent and the jeans - eagerly anticipating mine - are superb, go to Do Lectures.com, try out some of the lectures, see what you think about it. I strongly, strongly, strongly recommend everybody get on



a plane, go to the Do Lectures. It's, it's a, I mean, for me, I can honestly say I'm in my fourth decade of business, it's the single biggest game changer that I ever attended in my entire life. There's just no doubt about that. I strongly, strongly recommend it. David, both you and Claire have got my highest admiration and I hope you'll come back and tell us how it turns out.

David Hiatt: Thank you very much, Les.