

Talks at GS
Maverick Carter
CEO & Co-founder, SpringHill Company
Kim Posnett, Moderator
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Maverick Carter: If we don't have new, innovative, amazing ideas and ways to tell a story and create experiences, then we just shut this down and go home.

Kim Posnett: I am so excited to introduce Maverick Carter.

Maverick Carter: Thank you.

Kim Posnett: Maverick grew up in Akron, Ohio, and played high school basketball with LeBron James. And when LeBron started building a business early in his NBA career, he could have called an NBA agent, he could have called a powerful Hollywood agent. He didn't. He called his high school childhood best friend Maverick.

And so it's been many years of them together, building this company, the SpringHill Company. Maverick's the co-

founder and CEO. So we have a lot to talk about. But first, let's welcome Maverick to the stage.

Maverick Carter: Thank you.

Kim Posnett: So let's go back to the beginning. You started your career as a field representative at Nike. Tell us about leaving Nike, moving back to Akron, Ohio, and choosing to work with LeBron.

Maverick Carter: I actually started as an intern at Nike, a long time ago now. And then I was a consultant, and they hired me and I moved to Beaverton, where Nike is headquartered, and worked there for three years or so. And then decided to leave based on a decision that I had made in a conversation with LeBron where he wanted to make changes about his career.

I knew that there was opportunity, and I knew, if we thought about it the right way, we could build something pretty amazing. The idea was just, if you really believed, like we did, in the longevity of LeBron's playing career, so if you believed in that, then how would we also match and

build something in parallel off the court that was a business that really paralleled that? And knew it would take a lot of twists and turns in thinking, but ended up building a content company in the SpringHill Company, which really makes sense based on my background and who he is. And has paralleled his career now. Hopefully, we have a company that'll last much longer than his career.

Kim Posnett: So you've been described as the creative director of all things LeBron. Tell us what that means. What are the most critical elements of building a brand around LeBron James?

Maverick Carter: If you are good at storytelling, then you can actually build something that matters and talk to your audience in a way that really matters. And then you start to build business. Well, then that's kind of what we were thinking back then with what we were going to do. And then the idea is also, when you talk about a person like LeBron, we never sat around and go, like, "What's the LeBron brand?" A brand, if it works, will never change, right? People know it. They like it. So a person, to me,

can never be a brand because you're always changing, evolving.

So it was more about how do we build businesses and other brands that we can actually have a real effect on through our way of storytelling and with LeBron's name, likeness, and image to really help super charge and really own a piece of the equity and capture enterprise value instead of just taking fees and helping someone else build enterprise value.

Kim Posnett: So let's shift to the SpringHill Company. You created Uninterrupted, which is this basic belief that athletes should have the ability to share their own stories, uninterrupted. And so how did that idea come about? And how has it evolved since then?

Maverick Carter: The way that came about was the first time LeBron decided to switch teams, going to a really good franchise in Miami that had great leadership. We produced a show called *The Decision* which was now forever ago but widely seen as a terrible mistake and a disaster and forced me to hide out in my grandmother's basement for a couple

months. It was not well produced as a TV show, but the idea and the ambition was there. The ambition was there and the idea was right. It just was not executed greatly.

But then when LeBron, being who he is, decided to leave Miami and go back to Cleveland, we did the same thing, but this time he wrote it as a letter. And there was a line in the letter that said, "I'm doing it this way instead of like a press conference so I can get out all my thoughts and ideas uninterrupted." Like entrepreneurs, you see an opportunity, you see a need in this instance. We saw a need from consumers wanting to hear directly from athletes and hear stories and athletes that wanted to tell stories. So we built the company and the platform and the brand. And today, it's grown. You know, there's a couple hundred people who work there.

And the beauty of it is, then, nobody was doing it.

Everyone is doing it now. That's awesome. We applaud everyone out there attempting to do it.

Kim Posnett: Maybe let's spend some time on the SpringHill mission more broadly, which is to empower

greatness in every individual from creator to consumer. How do you think about the culture of the company? How do you think about the projects that you pursue or don't pursue?

Maverick Carter: The key word in there is “empowering” or “empowerment.” And that starts with all the people who work at our company, first and foremost. We want to empower employees. We're an idea company. We're a creative company. Creativity is at the center of what we do. I tell the team and the company all the time, if we don't have new, innovative, amazing ideas and ways to tell a story and create experiences, then we can shut this down and go home. We have to put ideas at the center of what we do, but also that becomes a thread that we pull through everything we do.

Because on one end of our company, our studio team is making film, TV, storytelling projects. And on another end, we're creating products, building commerce and products, doing licensing deal, licensing out our IP. And those are two totally different types of people, but that thread, we have to pull that thread there. And that thread is what

holds it. That thread of empowerment is what holds it all together, and it starts with the people who work in our company.

Kim Posnett: You guys also do a lot of branded content for partners -- Walmart, Nike, Uber, Proctor & Gamble, many, many others. How does your mission translate into your partnerships with those companies and sort of your client relationships?

Maverick Carter: Yeah, our mission translates directly into those partnerships because, when we work with brands like a Nike, it is them understanding our mission. So when we work with brands, like you said, LVMH and Google, Nike, and we work with Proctor & Gamble, we're not an agency for hire. Meaning, we don't just give you our ideas and you go make commercials and put your brand in. It's us partnering and co-producing content with them. And as all these big brands start to slowly transition from transactions with customers and consumers to engaging members, then they need content. So we bring our mission to the table, and they want that because athletes don't want to just be in commercials anymore. They want to

create content, so help us do that together.

Kim Posnett: So *The Shop: Uninterrupted* was on HBO for four seasons. I think earlier this year you renewed for a fifth season, but it's on Uninterrupted's YouTube channel. So talk about how you choose different channels/platforms for content distribution. How do you think about that?

Maverick Carter: Yeah, using that example, which is a good one, the show was on HBO for four seasons, and HBO was a fantastic partner. Really helped us launch the show. But we own the IP of *The Shop* and we own the episodes, but we would license them to HBO. And they'd come back after a certain amount of years. But then as *The Shop* has grown, we really saw *The Shop* as a franchise, in a similar way that Disney would look at *Toy Story* or Disney would look at *Star Wars*. And when we were raising capital, we closed around last October. One of the things I talked about, like the headline, like when you walk in, you guys have all, as entrepreneurs, walked into those investor meetings. You want to leave something that they can, you know, there's always all type of questions. I was, like, what am I leaving them with that sticks to their head? And mine

was like we want to build Disney for culture.

And one day I was sitting around at home. I was, like, I really said that in the meeting? Like, that's really arrogant. And it's also really ambitious, too. But that was my thing to leave them with. So then how does that come in practice? Well, with *The Shop*, HBO was a great partner, but it was time for us. *The Shop* had become more than a show; it was now a franchise, what we call a franchise, an IP. So now we have to think about the best way to grow it, leverage it, monetize it, but also monetize it so it lasts forever.

Now, on YouTube we have a couple things. It becomes international with the click of a button. Now, we have no restrictions on time. Now, we can make it 45 minutes, 20 minutes, and, you know, we've had everyone from Obama to Jay-Z to Tom Brady, Drew Barrymore on the show. And we tape sometimes two hours, sometimes two and a half. So now we have that freedom. Thirdly, now, my brand partnership's team can bring in brand partners. And then lastly, we can promote our own products that we sell. We're going to now do a brick-and-mortar space with *The*

Shop. So it really starts to look like a real franchise, and putting it on YouTube, that specific piece of IP and franchise works for us. And again, just keeping that thread through all of it, which *The Shop* is about community empowerment.

Kim Posnett: So you and LeBron are co-founders in all of this. How do you guys split roles and responsibilities at the SpringHill Company? How do you guys think about that?

Maverick Carter: Well, he scores 30 points a night. I don't get involved in that. But at the company, he is the chairman of the company. He's the chairman of our board. He spends a lot of time on how are we growing franchises like *The Shop*? We have a brand called Love Is with Megan Rapinoe and Sue Bird. How are we growing that? We have a piece of IP called Throwing Bones. How are we growing that? He's very focused on the growth of that. How are we protecting those brands, and then how can he help? Because he's obviously a gigantic promotional engine and engine himself, so he really focuses on that. The day-to-day stuff, he doesn't -- he assumes I'm taking care of it.

Kim Posnett: So let's shift to your social endeavors. You talked about this philosophy of “more than.” Maybe explain to the group what that means and how it influences where you spend your time across social endeavors beyond the business.

Maverick Carter: Yeah, I mean, the business is obviously a for-profit company, but it's a bit of a social endeavor also because our company today is about 220 people at the SpringHill Company. We're actually exactly 50/50 male/female, and we're 67% people of color. So the idea of being more than is embedded in our company. It's one of the reasons we founded the company because, as we talked earlier, LeBron gave me an opportunity that empowered me to be more than what the world would ever see me as, right? As a, back then, 22-year-old Black kid from the inner city in Akron. And I still wake up every day wanting to prove that I am more than what the world would perceive me as or say I am every day. So that's what the company, that's one of the ethos that we're founded in.

Uninterrupted, our sports brand, that was the tagline,

“More than an athlete.” But also things I do outside the company, whether it's helping people. Obviously LeBron has a gigantic foundation where he's basically trying to rebuild the whole inner city of Akron. So that feeling, that feeling of being more than, proving that you're more than is embedded in everything that we do.

Kim Posnett: So I want to get to your grandmother's basement. Some people are more willing and able to take risk. You talked about your grandmother a lot. Explain your approach to taking risk, how she influenced you, and how that might have changed over time.

Maverick Carter: My grandmother is who gave me my name, Maverick. When my mom went into labor, my grandmother was at a poker game, so she was playing poker and she left the poker game to come to the hospital to name me. And the reason she was at a poker game is because she ran the poker game. My grandmother's basement was what we call an after hours. And I met all type of people there. There's everybody from the community was there.

And as a kid, I would sweep up when the game was over, but she cooked food, gave the food away for free, and I asked her one time, “Why do you give the food away for free?” If you weren't playing, you would pay for it, like, 5 bucks. If you were playing, you ate for free. And she says, “Because the rule,” and this is another entrepreneurial thing, “you gotta keep the players playin' and you don't want them to have to get up and leave.”

And she gave me my name because of the TV show. She loved gambling and the TV show from the '60s where their last name was Maverick. But she really, she taught me how to gamble as a kid, like, literally taught me how to play poker. The earliest memory I have learning in her bedroom, like, five years old, six years old. And what it taught me was that, to process information, process the information that you have and quickly get to an answer of what's my upside and what's my floor, and then make a decision. And I do that every day in business because, in cards, the lovely thing about cards -- and she always had this line, we'd be playing cards. And I'd say to her, like, the hand would be over and she'd win. And I'd say, “Let me see the next card,” and you see it. And it's, like, you turn it

over and it's a six, a club, and you're like, "I should have stayed. I could have used that six of club." And she would say, "Son, that's why the cards have backs on them."

And what it taught me was that, if you're playing any type of card game, with every turn of the card, you get more information. And every time there's a card turned, you're getting fresh information. So therefore, your upside and downside are changing with every turn of the card, and you have to make a decision whether to stay in or get out. And that's basically life.

Kim Posnett: I want to end with wishing you a happy birthday.

Maverick Carter: Thank you.

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