

Paul Mecurio - Permission To Speak - Transcript

Tim: Welcome back to Living With Money. On today's episode I am joined by Paul Mecurio. Paul is an Emmy and Peabody Award Winner, currently working with The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, standup comedian, writer, you name it, he's done it. Paul is also running an off-Broadway show, which we're going to focus on a little bit later in the episode called Paul Mecurio's Permission to Speak. So with that, Paul, welcome to the podcast. Thanks for coming on.

Paul Mecurio: Hey, thanks for having me, Tim. Nice to be on.

Tim: For the listeners out there, could you just give us brief background about yourself and kind of life before comedy? Because it's not really the background that you'd expect.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, I know. It's the one ... this is the story that gives my mother a heart attack. Yeah, I went to Georgetown Law School and was doing mergers and acquisition deals at Willkie Farr & Gallagher, a big firm in New York, and then as an investment banker at Credit Suisse. And in the midst of that, I started making some short films and writing jokes as a hobby. I don't know why, I just was always a fan of comedy and just started writing these jokes. And one thing led to another and I had amassed a big pile of jokes. And then I went to a private function and Jay Leno was the entertainment and I knew he was going to be there, that's why I went.

And basically after his show, I just went up to him and said, "I don't know if you need jokes, but I have jokes." And he was like, "Um, okay". Which threw me. It was like letting helium out of a balloon very slowly. I was like ... I thought he was a cartoon character. And he took them, and then a couple of days later he called me and the phone rang, he went, "It's Jay Leno, is Paul there?" And I thought it was my friend David who was pulling a prank, so I went, "Yeah, really funny David." He goes, "No really, it's Jay Leno." And I actually said to Jay Leno, "You do a lousy Jay Leno."

Tim: No way.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, exactly, yeah.

Tim: What was his response to that?

Paul Mecurio: He was like, "No, I'm really Jay Leno." And I go, "It's the worst Jay Leno ever." And he kept going, "It's me, it's me. You met at the dinner the other night." I'm like, "Oh, Jesus." He basically said, "I'll hire you to start sending jokes in for The Tonight Show monologue. Feel free to send me whatever you want. If I use it I'll pay you 50 bucks a joke." And I just was like, "Oh my God." And then a few days later, he did one of my jokes on The Tonight Show, which blew me away. And it just was transformative and I started to become obsessed with writing jokes, to the point where I was taking two notebooks to deal meetings, one was for the deal and one was for jokes. And I wasn't taking any deal notes, I was just taking joke notes. And my job at the end of the meeting, after the meeting, was to recreate the minutes of the meeting. But I wasn't paying attention, so I'd walk around the firm going, "Hey, what happened in the meeting?" And

people would be like, "You were in the meeting. How do you not know what happened in the meeting?"

So I basically ... And then I started trying to do standup myself. Leno said to go try the jokes out before you send them to me. So I started to live this secret double life where I'd sneak out of work on a dinner break because I was working all-nighters, long, long crazy hours. And I'd go to dive bars in New York City, work the open mic nights. It was like a tale two cities, because here I am in my Brooks Brothers suit and I'm in a place ... One of the places was called Downtown Beirut Two.

Tim: Oh my gosh.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, I love the two. I guess they were franchising these hell holes or somebody blew up One, I don't know. But it was ... they dealt drugs out of there, a hooker worked out of there. There was a sign on the men's room door that said, "The toilet seat's only to be used to go to the bathroom not to cut coke. Thank you, the management." And it said thank you, the management on it. And I would go to these bars. And one night there was a knife fight at a table and a guy got his neck cut, his arm cut, he got cut up and I was on stage and he didn't like what I was saying so he took all these bloody napkins and he threw them at me. And they stuck to my shirt.

And I went back to the firm and the senior partner couldn't find me and he was screaming at me in front of all these lawyers going, "Where have you been? Why do you have blood on your shirt?" Before I could say anything, another lawyer goes ... because I was keeping this whole double life as a secret from everybody at the firm, my wife. And so he goes, "Why do you have blood on your shirt?" And this other lawyer goes, "What kind of shirt is that?" I go, "It's a Brooks Brothers shirt. Why?" He goes, "Oh, I know how to get blood out of a Brooks Brothers shirt." He goes, "Club soda and lemon juice." And then another guy goes, "No, Armani, that's the shirt you want." And I'm like, "Are you guys remaking American Psycho in your spare time? What is going on here?" And so that became my life. And so I eventually I decided I got to try it full-time.

Tim: Was there a specific moment that you know that that was something you needed to switch full-time to?

Paul Mecurio: No, it kind of grew on me and I kept doing it and I kept just trying to stop. And I realized it kind of had picked me. I know that's cliché, so I basically was just, "I got to try this otherwise I'm going to regret it." But it was like a slowly ... it was coming on slowly if you know what I mean. And it just got to the point where I just couldn't keep sustaining the day job, which was literally 100 hours a week, and then doing this stuff at night. And then trying to keep it from everybody, I was having a nervous breakdown in my 20s. I was like, "I can't keep this up." So I had to go for it.

Tim: Yeah, totally understand. Living a double life like that's got to be pretty stressful.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, and my wife didn't know what was going on, and then I told her, I said, "I think I want to leave Wall Street to be a comedian." Actually she was pretty funny, she said, "That better be your first joke." And then she said, "Thank God." I go, "Why?" She goes, "Well, I thought you were cheating on me," because I was coming home reeking of beer and cigarette smoke from the clubs, and I had phone numbers of women, but they were numbers of women that had comedy rooms. But she had put a different puzzle together. So it was kind of a relief when I could at least tell her.

Tim: Yeah, absolutely. From your time as a lawyer, is there any sort of crossover or things that you took from being a lawyer to being a comedian? They're kind of night and day in terms of career paths, but is there anything that kind of bridged the gap? Or nothing really?

Paul Mecurio: No, that's a good question. I do think that the ability to talk to people and strangers in a commanding way is really a big ... there's a big connection there. I was in rooms and negotiations and things, and it's persuading people. And you're persuading people on stage too. You're persuading them that you're funny and that they should be laughing at you and that they shouldn't throw beer bottles at you or whatever. And so I think there's a direct parallel.

And then the writing, the level of sort of ... the way you have to think as a lawyer and look at things from different angles is very similar to the kind of writing that you do for standup. I feel like those two areas, there's a real connection because the law degree helped me in the practice law sort of just unwrap things on multiple levels. And then to be able to write to that, I think all came ... really had a lot ... not a lot to do, but a significant amount to do with I did this as a lawyer for quite a while so I feel pretty comfortable doing this.

Tim: Right. You went from Jay Leno, won an Emmy in 2001 with The Daily Show, Jon Stewart. Just briefly, do you want to talk about what it was like writing jokes for a show like The Daily Show during a time like the 2000 election and everything that was going on in the world in 2001?

Paul Mecurio: Yeah. I was writing there for longer than that so there was a lot of different experiences. And we were writing early on, and we were just doing this little show and we didn't think much of it. And we were really proud of it, and then suddenly it started to catch on. It was like taking an exam every morning, because you get stories from the news, and then you have to go off and write like a maniac for three hours as many good jokes as you can, and then submit the jokes and then they get chosen and then the script is prepared from that batch of jokes. And so there was an intensity to it that when you first think about it you're kind of surprised. You're like, "Oh, I didn't think it was going to be this intense. I thought I was just going to be writing jokes." And then it started to catch on and Jon Stewart came on board, and he focused it more.

And then we were just trying to give a strong perspective on the news of the day, and the 2000 election was crazy because every day it was huge breaking news like this Brett Kavanaugh thing was for like six, seven, eight straight days, but this was like weeks of hanging chads and people in front of the Supreme Court. And so there was a lot a lot of fodder, much like there is today with Trump, to go after both sides in that case. And so you're writing to the news of the day, trying to have a strong perspective, and give a strong point of view. And you'd work in groups,

and it would get tense, and sometimes you get in very heated arguments with fellow writers and stuff. But it was really kind of cool to do.

And then as the show built and built over the years, and continued to be part of it, it was like, "Well, this was just a little show when I started, and now look at what we've built it into." It was pretty crazy. It was crazy, yeah. And again, that's where the writing similar to the lawyering thing, read it, look at it from different angles, try to write multiple levels of something, and I think there's a tie in there to the lawyer life.

Tim: Yeah, definitely being able to come up with a kind of unique perspective that people might not originally think of when they read a story, and also make it funny to them.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, I think good comedy's supposed to make a point that you didn't think of or couldn't have thought of, otherwise people sit there and go, "I had that same ..." It should either surprise them or, I don't know, kind of just bring them to a different place, so you've got to really try to find unique angles on things.

Tim: Absolutely. So real quick, writing jokes back during 2000 election versus today's political environment, harder or easier?

Paul Mecurio: I think it's the same. I think it depends on who's in office. Trump gives you a lot of material. That scenario which nobody's seen before gives you a lot of material. There's down times, especially in the summer, when there's not a lot of news being made. Obama was different because he just wasn't as much of a character as Trump and not as outrageous as Trump and not saying these things that Trump does. And so you're sometimes doing more policy kind of jokes than you are about the personality of the guy leading the free world. And so this is meat falling from the sky every day with Trump. And so there's a lot there. But also the art of that is to not keep repeating the same kind of joke too. Keep understanding that they Democrats do have their fair share of comedy coming at them, deservedly so. So I think in that period and now, kind of took hold like the 2000 election. We were just dying to find new angles whenever we could. Because you don't want to keep repeating the same joke.

Tim: Yeah, absolutely. You have your show that's off-Broadway, it's called Paul Mecurio's Permission to Speak. You had a sold out summer tryout at the Jerry Orbach Theater. Now it's in open ended off-Broadway run at the Actor's Temple Theater. For the listeners out there, that's at 339 West 47th Street in New York City. For tickets and more information you can go to telecharge.com, or you could call (212) 239-6200. We'll put that in the show notes on the website as well. Can you tell the listeners a little bit about the show and what they can expect when they go to see it?

Paul Mecurio: This was sort of born out of my standup. It's not a standup show, it's a true theater show. We have a really cool set designed by the set designer for The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, and The Late Show with Stephen Colbert. We have digital projection mapping that we do on it of audience members' faces. And we take pictures of them beforehand. It's really cool technology. And then their faces appear on the set. Because this is a show about the audience. I go out, explain to them what the show is, and then I just randomly talk to people in

the audience. And it's not crowd work, like I talk to somebody about their hat and then do a joke about hats.

It's literally letting them talk about their lives and probing with them and getting these amazing stories. Because the theme of the show is everybody has a story. You do, everybody listening does. And if people have an opportunity to tell it, they'll tell it. And in a sort of safe environment, they don't have to worry about being overly politically correct and walking on eggshells. It's kind of a free space that way. And they basically just talk about their lives. And people are leaving saying, "This is a really unique show." Because we want people to connect through the show, we're in divisive times. So I think when people talk, we connect better, and we connect better, things are better.

So it's a little bit of a message in the show, but it's not a heavy, over the head, kumbaya message. But it's everybody has a story, and if we talk, we connect. And people are connecting after the show. Strangers are going up to each other. We had this one woman, a couple, 68, 69-year-old couple. I said, "How long you been married?" They go, "A year." I go, "Oh, that's nice." Everybody claps. I go, "How'd you meet?" The woman goes spankme.com. And I swear to God. And everybody thought she was joking, she's like, "I'm not joking." And the guy goes, "Yeah, we have a very open relationship sexually." I go, "What do you mean? You can sleep with other people?" He goes, "No, we have no inhibitions." And she goes, "Yeah, I was looking for a Dom and he was looking for a Sub, and we started to role play doing S&M and we fell in love and we realized that we were meant to be together, and we just eloped and we're here in New York on our honeymoon."

And the place went crazy. And they looked like your grandmother and grandfather. I swear to God. They're like sensible shoes, they're not walking around in black rubber pants and whatever, skin tight leather vests holding a whip. They literally looked like your grandmother and grandfather or your aunt and uncle that come over and bring a pie for dinner.

Tim: Right. Totally wouldn't expect that kind of story from them.

Paul Mecurio: Totally unexpected. I'm telling you, not only does everybody have a story, but the story rarely matches what the person looks like. We had another woman, she's 75 or so, and really dressed very nicely, looked like she was very well off. I said, "Oh, you look like you probably drink martinis." She goes, "Oh, I drink martinis, I smoke pot, I drop acid. I do LSD. I've been doing LSD since I was 18." Everybody's jaw was on the floor. And she goes, "Oh no, I'm serious." She goes, "I was 18. It's a great drug, everybody should do it and expand your mind. I was 18, I was 18, 19, 20. I was living in California, I was couch surfing and doing LSD every day, just loving life. And then I realized I want to go down to Mexico. I want to take acid. So I went out and bought 1,000 tabs of acid, and I went down to Mexico and I was going to turn everybody in Mexico on and change their lives through LSD." And I said, "What happened?" And she goes, "Well, I got there and I looked around and I realized, well, before they need acid they need food and water. So I didn't bother giving the acid."

Tim: Priorities.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, exactly. She goes, "There wasn't enough water even to take the acid with if you wanted to have a glass of water after." I said, "What'd you do with the acid?" She goes, "I took it, what do you think I did? It lasted me a long time." And again, a couple, a lesbian couple, "How did you meet?" Woman goes, "Well, I was married to a man and had three kids. We met, we strike up an affair, I came out of the closet. And we're married now." And I said, "Oh, that's great." And she goes, "Yeah, and we all live in the same house together. The two of us, my ex-husband and the three kids."

Tim: What?

Paul Mecurio: And the two lesbians sleep in the bed that the husband and the wife slept in. Yeah, I'm telling you.

Tim: Oh my gosh.

Paul Mecurio: These people are from the Midwest who were visiting the city. And that's the other thing, people go, "Oh, you get freaks from Times Square." All these stories I told you so far are people who do not live in New York State let alone New York City. I'm telling you. I had another woman, "What's your name?"

She goes, "Nidia." I go, "That's a unique name. How did you get that?" She goes, "Well, my father named me after his lover." I'm like, "Oh, okay, you were born out of wedlock, no big deal." She goes, "No, no, no, my father got my mother ... was married to my mother, got her pregnant with me at the same time he was having an affair, and named me after the woman he was having an affair with."

Tim: Oh my gosh. What a way to get a name.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, and you see the silence and then you went oh my God. Yeah, exactly, that's what everybody does. So, we've been getting these amazing stories, and then people are going up. Hey look, sometimes it even gets a little serious, like somebody talked about losing their brother in a car accident. And then someone else came up later and said, "Oh by the way, I lost my sibling when she was young." And then they commiserated after in the audience, after the show was over. And the older woman gave the younger woman a place to go, like a support group. Just people are ... another two people happened to work at different times at the same company. So it's really been wonderful to see, people are really connecting through the show and that's what we want. And it's funny too. It's just funny and sort of human and real. And people are saying, "I've never seen anything like this. It's really unique. I didn't expect this. I'm going to come back. I'm going to bring people." So I've been having people come back because every show is different.

The show will never, ever ... that'll only be that show forever that one moment in time because none of those people will be together again in that way, and that's really cool to people.

Tim: That's awesome.

Paul Mecurio: So, yeah, so it's been really well received and getting good write-ups and stuff. And like you said, it's at the Actor's Temple Theater which is on 47th between 8th and 9th. And we've got shows running through December. We just added two months of shows it's going so well.

Tim: How did you come up with the idea for the show? And did you have this kind of experience in mind? Did you expect to get these kind of crazy stories when you came up with the idea?

Paul Mecurio: I knew that you'd get stories because I was talking to the audience in my standup, before I start my jokes and stuff I would talk to them. And I started to realize there's some interesting stories. And then somebody saw me doing this as part of the warmup at The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, and they're like, "We think there's a show here. It's a really cool idea. And we'd put it in a theater and get a set, do this cool set." I said, "Yeah, let's give it a try." And even I've been surprised at the level of story and how much ... like every show there's at least three or four where you go, "Oh my God, I can't ..."

There was another guy ... it just dawned on me, had tattoos all over the place, a nose ring, looked real rock 'n roll. And I go, "You look like you're either in a band or a roadie for a band." He goes, "Oh yeah, I was a roadie for the Ramones." "Whoa that's pretty intense. What do you do now?" He goes, "I'm a librarian." And everybody started laughing. It's like, "Yeah right." He goes, "No, I really am a librarian." And he said to his girlfriend ... his girlfriend had to vouch for him because he looked anything like a librarian. And he goes, "You want to know how I became a librarian?" And he goes, "You got to go to library school and I needed a reference. You know who gave me a reference? One of the Ramones." One of the Ramones wrote a reference for a-

Tim: Not a bad reference.

Paul Mecurio: Exactly, for library school. So this is the guy that looked like he'd be doing S&M and he's a librarian, and the woman at 68 who looks like she's a librarian is doing S&M. So you just don't know. And I'm telling you ... and people are fascinated with other people's stories. And they get something from it too. If somebody has gone through something that you're going through, I think it helps people get through the thing they're going through. So there's a nice added side benefit to it of people just ... it's helping people feel a little bit better in this sort of really intense, combative environment that we live in in the country right now.

Tim: Yeah. And everyone has their own unique story, but at the same time, you're saying, "You might feel like it's unique to you but there could be someone sitting right next to you in the crowd that has been going through something similar." So that's cool that people have been able to connect through the show and also laugh along with some of the crazy stories that they're hearing from other people.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, and I'm really proud that it's something different. That's a big compliment to me. It really is. It's not standup, it's not a crowd work show. It's just this real thing, and people just come up ... there's no show like it, there's never been a show like it. That really plays to my strengths as someone who likes to talk to people and I think make people feel comfortable on

stage. And people don't have to talk. If they don't want to talk they don't have to. But there's always people that want to be part of the conversation. You can just come and watch. And it's for kids too. Teenagers can see it. It's not anything that's super dirty or heavy or anything like that. And we're getting all ages too. We're getting young people all the way to like 80-year-old people.

Tim: So, have you heard any interesting stories from any of the younger people or is it more you get those jaw dropping stories from the older folks who have had more life experience I guess you could call it?

Paul Mecurio: The older people tend to actually have more stories because they've lived life more, but I just had a young couple on stage, Indian couple, and they're getting ... they just got married. It was an arranged marriage. And we explored that. And I'm like, "Well, what if you didn't like the woman?" He started laughing, he goes, "Well, you find a way to say you don't want to marry her without saying you think she's ugly." And everybody started laughing. Or I had somebody who was 25 and just was like ... she goes, "Guys are jerks." I don't want to swear on the thing, but she used a word and she goes, "I can't wait till I'm 80 and I don't want to have sex anymore, then I don't need a guy." Everybody just started ... she sounded like an 80-year-old bitter woman. She was looking forward to not having a sex drive. And this is a woman who's 25 and good looking in New York. Yeah, so there's been really ...

Another guy, a 35-year-old guy with Polio, and I go, "What are you doing here in New York?" And he goes, "I came to take my stepfather to the airport?" And I go, "Where's your dad?" And he points to this guy. And it was a guy in his early 40s, and I go, "That's your stepdad?" He goes, "Yeah, that's my stepdad." He had a 42-year-old stepdad, they were six years apart, he was 36, 42. It was the weirdest thing. The stepdad met this guy's mother at a convenience store, at a gas station. He was selling cigarettes behind the counter or whatever. She came in for cigarettes, they struck up a relationship, they got married, and that's his stepdad. And the guy's got Polio on top of it. And I just said to the guy ... And he's young, he's just married, he's got little kids. And he actually told his little kids ... he couldn't explain Polio to him so he said, "I got this in Vietnam," the crutches and stuff. And then later they said, "Dad, you really get it in Vietnam?" He's like, "Oh man, I forgot I lied to them. I had to fix it." It was so funny.

So it's just like ... a 36-year-old guy with a 42 year old stepfather who's got Polio. It sounds like a sitcom. You know what I mean?

Tim: Yeah, you just wouldn't expect a situation like that.

Paul Mecurio: So old, young, they all ... Yeah. Old, young, they all have stories.

Tim: So you say it's not really standup. Is it more improv for you? How do you prepare for the show going into it on a nightly basis?

Paul Mecurio: Well, I have an opening monologue and a closing monologue that I do. Not monologue jokes like The Late Show, talk show, it's a monologue that talks about the show, what it is, why I came up with it, what we're going to do. I just grab people randomly, pull them on stage and start talking to them, and that's it, or talk to them in the audience. So I don't plan it, I

don't look ahead. I don't even peek out and see who's there. I just start talking to people and just trust that they're going to have something. Yeah, and then there's a couple of transitional moments in the show, we redo some cool stuff and a little surprise for people, which I don't want to give away, that we do in the middle of the show. And yeah, it's really cool. It's a cool hang. We serve wine and beer ahead of time for people, it's free, just kind of make a really relaxed atmosphere. And we want it to be a different theater experience.

And so I just go out looking for somebody, I might call you up, start talking to you. And the next thing you know you might reveal some interesting, crazy stuff about yourself. And it is improv in the sense that I'm just winging with the people, asking them questions and reacting to what they're saying.

Tim: Right. You don't know what they're going to say ahead of time so you kind of just need to be on the balls of your feet.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah. We don't give them questions ahead of time, we don't prep ... there's no prep, there's no anything. I don't prep, they don't prep. They come in, I come in, and we start talking, every show.

Tim: That's awesome. It makes it more real.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah. Yeah, it's very real and that's what people like about it.

Tim: Awesome. For anyone out there who wants to go check out the show, it's at the Actor's Temple Theater, 339 West 47th Street in New York. You can go to telecharge.com, call (212) 239-6200 for tickets. For anyone who's going, Paul, if they could take one thing away from going to see the show what would you want that to be?

Paul Mecurio: That I'm the most brilliant comedian on the face of the Earth, and extremely handsome. Definitely that it's entertaining and fun, but maybe we're more connected than we think, and that you don't need sort of elaborate scripts or anything else to be entertained. That people's lives, which are the basis for a lot of great movies and TV shows, are interesting enough. And people themselves are interesting and have something to say, and just given an opportunity to say it, there will be really surprisingly cool, interesting stuff that comes out of these people's mouths. And so I think that would be the big thing, just that ... and it's a night that's unexpected. Talking, telling your own story, and connecting, and in connecting, maybe we all have better life experiences, that we're not these nameless and faceless people that we cross in the street, when we're walking through the mall, when we're in a hurry, and that take a minute to realize that everybody has a story and that story's worth listening to.

Tim: And it's definitely unique. Everyday people might not think that they themselves are interesting, but when you get up and are able to actually speak your story, you'd be surprised at how interesting you actually could be to people that you might not originally think cared about your life at all.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, and the thing is that people in the audience, some people come up to me almost every show and go, "Oh, I wish you'd talked to me. I got a great story." I was like, "Well, you should've just yelled it out, raise your hand." It's almost like they start to see other people tell their story, and they're like, "I want to tell my story," you know what I mean? An interesting dynamic happens there that people sort of ... It's almost like kids, one kid who's shy watches the other kids play for a while and then he jumps in. That's what happens in the show. There's always one or two people who are like, "Oh man, I should've said something. I had a great story." And I'm like, "Next time." Because people are coming back to see the show repeatedly because every show is different.

Tim: Right, exactly. Segueing nicely, speaking of interesting people, you also have a podcast called The Paul Mecurio Show. You've had some pretty interesting prolific guests on there. The first name that popped out to me was Paul McCartney. Also Stephen Colbert, Bob Costas, a lot of big names. Those people obviously have very interesting stories. Was there one or two in particular that kind of stuck out or had you sort of awestruck speaking to them?

Paul Mecurio: Well, Paul McCartney was definitely just ... before I started talking to him I'm like, "You're not talking to Paul McCartney." I told myself I was talking to a musician about music. And he was a nice guy. When I met him we just started talking in the hallway, and then I went back a few minutes later and said, "Would you do my podcast?" And I thought he'd say no, but he was like, "Yeah, sure." And then I'm like, "What?" And he goes, "How would we do it?" And I just started to stammer, I'm like, "Um, uh ... I can come to London."

Tim: I didn't think we'd get this far.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, exactly. He's like, "We're in a room in New York together. Why would you come to London?" And he goes, "Is it easy to do?" And I actually said to Paul McCartney, "Yeah, it's really easy. You can do it on your phone naked from your toilet." I'm like, "What am I saying?" And then he goes ... I go, "I'll just find your assistant and I'll set it up." He goes, "No, they're going to screw it up." He goes, "You and I will do it." I go, "What do you mean?" He goes, "You and I will set the call up directly. We'll exchange phone numbers." And I thought he was-

Tim: With Paul McCartney.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, yeah. And I gave him my phone number, he gave me his. And then about an hour later my phone rang and I didn't recognize the number and I let it ring to voicemail. And I had a message from Paul McCartney saying he was ready to do the podcast. And I was like, "Oh God." And people can even hear the message at the beginning of the episode. If you click on the episode on iTunes, you can hear the message. And I just was like, "Oh my God, I lost Paul McCartney. I'll never get him." And then I called him back and he picked up and we did the call. And you know, he talks about touring around in the beginning and living in a van with the other Beatles. And the window was broken one night and they had to all sleep together huddled in freezing cold. And kind of really took you back to things that I hadn't heard before. So that was a really cool experience for me.

And by the way, Bob Costas, he got into broadcasting as a kid. He listened to the St. Louis Cardinals games on the radio, on a transistor radio on his bed, and he was more enthralled with Jack Buck, the announcer's voice than he was the game, although he loved the game. And just wanted knew he wanted to do that. A lot of these people, you can point to something in their childhood that tells you what they're going to be. I like talking to people about process and what they do. So I had Neil deGrasse Tyson, and heads of corporations, and Thomas Friedman of the New York Times, and Jay Leno, and Rob Cordray and Bob Costas and Bryan Cranston. So there's a whole ... Kristin Chenoweth. There's something for everybody.

Tim: So, between the podcast and the show, you're kind of in a sense interviewing the people in the audience, getting to hear their story. Is that just one of your favorite things, just talking to people and kind of interviewing them and hearing about their story?

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, I really like it. It sort of comes, I think, naturally to me, and I think people say I'm a good listener. And I try not to anticipate what people are going to say and just be in the moment. And again, I'm talking about pointing to something in somebody's childhood, I was the kid selling furniture in my parent's furniture store when I was 12 years old, so it forced me to have the gift of gab and talk to people like adults. And I think that stuck with me.

Tim: We touched on a little earlier how obviously switching careers from being a lawyer to being a comedian is pretty drastic. Just for anyone out there who's listening who might be nervous about switching a career, kind of taking that leap, what would you say to them? Is there any sort of lessons you've learned along the way? Or just going for it?

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, it's going to be scary. It's not going to be easy. But you really have to commit to it if you want a career. If you just do it part time then it's going to just be a hobby. And that's fine if that's what you want it to be. But don't expect it to be ... to get the outcome that you'd get if you commit 100% to something when you don't commit 100%. So that means you have to unravel your life. I sold my nice apartment in New York City. I moved to a rooming house. I lived like a student again. I completely had to build it from the ground up. And that's what you're going to have to do. If you have a secure career and you want something more artistic, in the beginning you're going to have to suffer. And you have to decide you want to do that, and if you don't then don't and just do it as a hobby,

Tim: Right. You've got to go all in and fully commit to what it is that you actually want to do.

Paul Mecurio: If that's what you want to do, if you want to fully commit. Sometimes people think, "Oh, you know ..." Take comics for example, "I'll be a comedian on the side and I'll get all the good things that comedians get, like on the Tonight Show and this and that. But I'll keep my job to be secure." It's like, "No," because at some point you have to really develop into a really good act, and that takes all of your time and effort, not 10% of it.

Tim: For you, you have your one man show now, standup comedy, won some awards for writing, Emmy, Peabody, have a successful podcast talking to Paul McCartney. Is there anything next for you on the horizon? Any exciting things that you've yet to try that you want to try out in the coming years?

Paul Mecurio: I had a bucket list and being on this podcast was the last one. So I'm done.

Tim: Perfect, check it off. There we go.

Paul Mecurio: No, I think we've always ... I'm always doing TV and working on TV projects. And so that's something that we kind of focus on a little bit is doing a show about me or with me at the center for TV, and that's been our focus lately. So other than that, I really love what I'm doing and I feel really fortunate in a lot of ways.

Tim: I've got one more question for you, Paul, before I let you go. I like to ask this pretty much to everyone who comes on the show, whether it's a personal, professional, or both, what would you say would be one of the best pieces of advice that anyone has ever given you?

Paul Mecurio: Jay Leno said to me, "If you really want to do this full-time, standup, don't buy a lot of things and start getting yourself hung up with bills and all of that, because then you'll have to go get a regular job to pay for those things and you won't be able to devote your time to your craft and your art." And I took that to heart and I really tried to focus on that and not rely on having money, which I didn't have a lot of anyway when I quit, but I just really scaled down my life and lived in a 10 by 12 room with a hot pot on the floor in a rooming house. And started over again so I could just focus on the one thing. And I think that was probably the best piece of advice I ever got.

Tim: Yeah. That ties in nicely with some of the other people that we've had on this podcast talking about finance and living within your means or just getting by with what you need. As long as it can fund your career and push you towards your goals then that's really all you need.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, otherwise you become a slave to the money, you need the money to pay for the \$50,000 car you bought when you could've bought a \$20,000 car. And then you'll develop that much better and faster and then you'll be able to buy a \$200,000 car. So you've got to just stay within your means, definitely.

Tim: Yeah, absolutely. Well, Paul, thanks for coming on the podcast. I really enjoyed talking to you, hearing some stories about the show. Thanks for taking the time.

Paul Mecurio: Yeah, absolutely. And I hope everybody can make it out to see the show at the Actor's Temple Theater. All the tickets, like I said, are on telecharge.com for sale. And you should come and I'll talk to you, I'll bring you on stage, how about that?

Tim: Awesome, definitely. All right, it's a date.

Paul Mecurio: Cool. All right, man.

Tim: All right. Thank you.

Paul Mecurio: This was a lot of fun, I appreciate it.

