



Episode 748: From the Military to Entrepreneurship: How a Listener Changed His Life

Guest: James Newcomb

WOODS: I've been interested in what you've been doing for quite a while, and I listened to the interview you did with the guy who's known as The Real Brian on the Podcasters' Paradise podcast, which I've also been on. And I love him as an interviewer. I mean, he's genuinely enthusiastic about what each guest is doing. He's thrilled to hear about what James Newcomb is up to, as am I, not only because you're a listener of this show and a supporting listener at that, but just because I love stories like this, and I love to see how people carve out their niches and make a go of things. You're a musician, and so that's where you've gone. And by the way, before we even get started, since I'm not a musician but I have strong opinions on music, any time a musician validates my musical opinions, it makes me feel smart, so I'm glad that you've appreciated some of my – not all listeners appreciate them, but you've appreciated some of my musical recommendations over the years, so I'm grateful for that.

NEWCOMB: Well, yeah, that's too bad that people can't see the great – you know, if Igor Stravinsky or, like, Mozart or Bach were alive today, I think people like that would be in the prog rock scene, you know what I mean?

WOODS: There you go. That's all I'm trying to say here.

NEWCOMB: Yeah.

WOODS: Okay, I want to talk about what you do. Now, you've changed up what you've been doing over the years, but it's got the same basic trajectory. You are a musician and you're primarily a trumpet player.

NEWCOMB: That's correct.

WOODS: And you have, as of the moment, you have two podcasts that you're doing, and the idea of these is to spread musical education, but also to earn a living. And a lot of people say that can't be done, and oh, it's a scam to say you can earn money on line – and these are basically people who haven't bothered to try, but they just know it can't be done. So I'm interested in, in particular, you have a – tell us about the trumpet podcast. This is a highly specialized, very niche area, but therefore James Newcomb can become the guy in it.

NEWCOMB: Right, well, my podcasting career started — I guess I got interested in it two years ago when John Lee Dumas came on your show. And at that time, your show was the only podcast that I really listened to. I wasn't really interested in anything else business or economics otherwise. But Tom Woods was the guy for me, and John came on and he was explaining how much he was earning with his podcasting business, and I thought, man — you know how much he earns. It's significant.

WOODS: Yeah, I would be happy with the tiniest slice of that.

NEWCOMB: And I thought, you know, the fact that he is making that kind of money means that there's money to be made, and I might not make what he's making, I might not get to that level, but the fact that he is making it happen shows that it can be done. And so I joined Podcasters' Paradise like you did shortly after that. My first podcast was called *Outside the Music Box*, and that went okay, but the problem with *Outside the Music Box* was, one, I was still active duty in the Army, and so I had a very limited amount of time that I could dedicate to it. Two, I was stationed in Korea at the time, and so 90% of my guests were in the US at the time, so there was a constant battle with scheduling. I literally did interviews at 4 o'clock in the morning just to accommodate guests and 10 o'clock at night, and it was just a big headache. But really the big problem with *Outside the Music Box* was I just didn't take the time to really niche down. It was just a little too broad of a topic. I was trying to get people to think about how music is always in our lives, how you can just walk outside and listen to the birds sing and there's music, and ultimately it was just a little bit too broad to really nail down a core audience.

And so I decided to regroup a little bit, and I started another podcast called *Trumpet Dynamics*, and it's actually going really well all things considered. I started out as once a week, and it's been educational for me — like, I've played trumpet for 32 years now, and I can't tell you how much I have learned just doing this podcast. And a thing that I like to say to people is if you want to get free mentorship or free lessons or free education, start a podcast, because you have the opportunity to talk to people who are experts in your niche. And they don't want to necessarily talk to you, but you have an audience and you have a means that they can communicate their message to other people. And I can't tell you, Tom, how much I have learned just talking to people who will forget more about trumpet than I'll ever learn. And so it started out as once a week, and — I don't know if you were following John Lee Dumas. I guess he's my go-to mentor when it comes to podcasting.

WOODS: Oh yeah, I follow him closely. I'm curious to see when he tries things if they work, if they don't work. And even when he sends out emails to his list, half the time he's promoting an affiliate product that I'm aware of, and I want to see how he promotes it because he's the master.

NEWCOMB: And he's gotten to the point where he's promoting his own products now.

WOODS: That's really where the money is to be made right there.

NEWCOMB: Yes. Anyway, his big push was for *The Freedom Journal*, and he had a Kickstarter campaign, and one of the perks for the Kickstarter campaign was you contribute a certain amount, and then you can spend an entire day with him in Puerto

Rico. And so I'd just left the military, I had some money in savings, and I thought, man, if I don't take this opportunity now I might never get this opportunity again. And I paid the money and went out to Puerto Rico, and the result of my time with John was this idea called Musicpreneur. And you said that it's a second podcast. It's actually not quite launched yet. It's going to launch on January 1st of 2017.

WOODS: Oh, okay, okay. I got it, okay.

NEWCOMB: It's a blog right now, and I write in the blog every day, but the actual podcast won't start until January 1st.

WOODS: Okay, but we'll be directing some traffic over to that blog so that you can exploit some of it for when the podcast starts. Okay.

NEWCOMB: And I also have a free gift. If anyone's interested I'll mention it later. But —

WOODS: Of course you do. You were trained by John. Of course you have a free gift. What else would you have?

NEWCOMB: Of course. And I also have a specialized page on my website just for your listeners.

WOODS: Oh, okay. This was time well spent. I knew that you had somehow been mentored by him, but I didn't know you actually went to Puerto Rico, where he — he relocated from San Diego a couple years ago down there.

NEWCOMB: Yes.

WOODS: I suppose it was for tax reasons, but he earns so much money I just can't imagine that would matter. I'd rather live in San Diego, but that's my own preference.

NEWCOMB: Well, I'm not going to speak on John's behalf, but he was paying a significant amount of taxes, and his tax burden went down from in the neighborhood of 51% to about 4%.

WOODS: Okay, well now suddenly I want to move to Puerto Rico.

NEWCOMB: (laughing) Me too.

WOODS: So you got there and you told him — I want to know how this session went, because he's got — I'm going to link to the — people listening to this really need to listen to my episode that I did with him.

NEWCOMB: Yes.

WOODS: I'm going to link to it at TomWoods.com/748. You really need to listen to this, because this is a guy who for real makes this work and who started from nothing. In fact, he says his first few podcast episodes are just embarrassing. He's so bad at it. But he just kept going and kept going and kept going and learning and implementing,

and man, he is now the go-to master. This is a guy who's earning — just so people understand. He's earning six figures a month from his podcast, so he really does know what he's talking about. All right, so tell me what it was like to spend a day with this guy.

NEWCOMB: Well, he has a certain persona that is like an on-camera persona, and it's very energetic, really just go, go, go, go. That's his sort of on-camera persona. In real life he's very — I'd say he's much more relaxed than he is when he's podcasting or doing a webinar or something.

WOODS: Ah.

NEWCOMB: Yeah, I would say that's more — I guess he's just tame, much more so than his on-camera persona.

WOODS: And by the way, I think that would be a fine way for him to run his different things, because I sometimes feel like he's overdoing it. I know he's full of energy and he's a smart and happy guy, but sometimes I think I'd rather just see the real him. But anyway, go ahead.

NEWCOMB: Well, I mean, he's making the bucks so —

WOODS: Yeah, exactly, exactly. Everything I say, there's a huge asterisk next to it (laughing).

NEWCOMB: (laughing) All right, so I went into the session very green as an entrepreneur. Like I said, I just left the military last December and really made a full — just decided I'm going to make a go as an entrepreneur with podcasting starting earlier this year. So I'm very green, very new. And John knows that. He's not going to expect me to be the next him right out the gate. I just told him — and the funny thing is I had just left a big trumpet conference in Anaheim, California, and I flew from LA to Puerto Rico and spent the time with him.

And the big thing I noticed with this trumpet conference was they didn't have any focus on entrepreneurship. They had a bunch of instruction; they had recitals, which are great. Me being a trumpet player I loved it. But they didn't have any focused, dedicated instruction on entrepreneurship, so that was the big pain point that I saw that that's a way that I can add value to this trumpet niche, is entrepreneurship, because this is what I do. This is what I'm learning. I'm mastering it. Every day I get just a little bit better. And that's what I told him. I said, John, this is where I feel that I can add value, not just to the trumpet world, but to musicians in general who want to make a go and monetize their musical abilities. This is where I can add value. This is where I can perfect my own skillset and really make a go of it.

So the decision was made by me with his coaching and his guidance to make a three-day-a-week podcast, and that's what Musicpreneur is going to be starting in January. It's going to be three days a week. The first episode of the week will be a full-length interview, like an in-depth interview with a musician who's made it happen, who's making it happen. The second episode will be a little more — like I call it a "Technique

Tuesday" or something like that, and focus on one specific of entrepreneurship that musicians can implement in their business. And then the third episode will be me going solo, 15 or 20 minutes or so, and just kind of wrapping things up.

So after that day with John, I made the decision I'm going to take this trumpet podcast; I have this audience that I can sort of tinker with. I can experiment with things. And the first thing I did was make it a three-day-a-week podcast, and so now I'm going to hit Episode 100 in I think it's December 14th, which, you know, that's an achievement I guess. But I guess the result of my time with John is that is the trajectory that I'm going to take my business with podcasting. And once I launched the Musicpreneur podcast, once it's totally in motion, then it remains to be seen what's going to happen with the trumpet podcast. I'm experimenting with ideas as to how to make sort of an open source community, kind of like a Craigslist type of site for trumpet players. I'm just kind of tinkering with some ideas with that.

WOODS: Well, how many trumpet podcasts are there?

NEWCOMB: Right now there are three that I know of, one of which was started as a result of listening to my podcast (laughing). Like I was advertising the free podcast course that John does, and so he listened to that, and he started his own podcast. But there's three that put out content regularly that I know of.

WOODS: Okay, so that's not that many, but at the same time the trumpet community is not the biggest community in the world. So you could — but when you started your podcast — so one of them was started because of you, so there's a third one. Was that one already there when you got started?

NEWCOMB: Yeah, that one's been around for about two years.

WOODS: Okay, so in other words there are whole areas — they don't have to be gigantic because really all you need is a dedicated group of listeners who love what you're doing. It's not numbers so much. Numbers are nice, but it's finding these people who have something in common and who really like what you're doing that matters. If something like trumpet, which is something everybody's heard of, can be so wide open that you can be one of the only people doing it, it seems like maybe there's more virgin territory in the podcasting world than I thought.

NEWCOMB: Well, credibility is currency. Like, I'm not going to make a whole lot of money with podcasting about trumpet. I realize that. And you ask any trumpet player and they'll say, yeah, there's not a whole lot of money playing trumpet, and the same thing is true with having a trumpet podcast, and I realize that. But there is a lot of credibility that I've gained. I left the military last December, and in the trumpet community I was a total no-name. No one knew me. I had a couple of friends, but as far as being any type of authority figure, no way. Just a short time later, nine months later, I have this podcast, and people know my name, and people think of me as something of an authority figure. The longer I do it, the more it'll grow, but there is a lot to be said for being an authority in one particular niche, and once you get good at that, then maybe you can expand and focus on something else like I'm doing with the Musicpreneur.

WOODS: I had not thought of that, but that is really smart. And plus you enjoy probably doing the trumpet podcast. You get to talk to all kinds of people you wouldn't normally have the opportunity to talk to. And meanwhile, as you say, you're establishing yourself as somebody who knows what he's talking about and as somebody other people have heard of. "Of course, yeah, he's got that podcast that everybody listens to. He's got basically 100 episodes." That's an interesting angle on things.

NEWCOMB: Oh yeah, and let me add that, guess who's going to teach a class on entrepreneurship at that trumpet conference next May.

WOODS: Yeah, see, how about that.

NEWCOMB: Yours truly.

WOODS: How about that? Now, that would not have happened otherwise, presumably.

NEWCOMB: Absolutely.

WOODS: That is great. Where do they hold a trumpet conference?

NEWCOMB: This one is going to be in Pennsylvania. Hershey Park.

WOODS: All right, good, good, good. So that's great. Meanwhile, though, presumably you have some kind of a day job while you're putting all of these moving pieces together.

NEWCOMB: One would assume so, but this is what I've done since I left the Army last December.

WOODS: Oh wow, good for you. All right. That is good. So you are really throwing yourself into it.

NEWCOMB: So a combination of that, and my wife is a Pampered Chef consultant. And so I can't say that I'm rolling in money with my podcasting efforts, but I can say that I'm much further along the lines of monetization than I was when I started nine months ago. And my wife is making it happen. We just relocated to North Carolina from Minnesota, and so, man, it's just a season of change for both of us. But you know, I'm getting my name out there as a musician here in the local area, trying to get some students, trying to get some gigs. And you know, it's a little precarious right now, but we'll be fine.

WOODS: You know, here I am, I'm in Florida, and I'm temporarily experimenting with a — I have a temporary home office while the new place I'm going to be recording is being built actually, and so whoever does the shrub trimming or the lawn mowing and all that, they've decided to do that right now. So you would think that by Episode 748 you wouldn't have extraneous noises. I'm not sure that's audible, but there's nothing I can do about it, and I'm sorry. It's just that I'm in between recording places. Not much I can do about it.

NEWCOMB: It sounded like a trumpet player warming up.

WOODS: (laughing) All right, James, let's talk about music entrepreneurship is. What are some things that an independent musician in this day and age needs to know about entrepreneurship that musicians likely don't know?

NEWCOMB: Well, the big quandary that I've found with musicians is twofold. One is, on the one hand, music is something like what your mom sings to you when you're asleep. It's something that you learn in school. It's just always there. Music is ubiquitous, and so it's kind of a struggle for some musicians to sort of package that and make a saleable product out of something — like, how can you package air? Can you figure out how to do that? And it's kind of the same thing with music.

And so what I have come up with or sort of the solution that I have come up with is that music itself is not the product. That's not how you're going to make money making music. The money is to be made in the experience of music. Like, think about your favorite band, like Big Big Train. We both like Big Big Train. And you can listen to the entire album on YouTube for free. But think of the contrast between that and going to a live show of Big Big Train. And that's why you're willing to pay however much it is for a ticket to see Big Big Train. It's about \$60-70 for a ticket. It's the experience; it's not necessarily the music.

And the next thing is that musicians are so far behind the curve when it comes to modern entrepreneurship. There's a lot of old-timers who say carry your business cards with you at all times; network, network, network. And that's great, but by and large musicians are just far behind the curve when it comes to using the Internet, using YouTube, building an email list. They're just not aware of the tools that are available. And when it comes right down to it, it's not that much different than what you do, Tom. Your biggest drive with all of these free ebooks that you offer is you want people on your email list, right?

WOODS: Right.

NEWCOMB: And it's really not that much different for musicians. So that is the two biggest things that I see that musicians need to understand, is that you have to understand that the produce of music that you're going to sell isn't your music; it's the experience that you're providing. And the second is to just be aware of the tools that are available to promote yourself and make a name for yourself online.

WOODS: Did you happen to hear the interview I did with Leah McHenry?

NEWCOMB: Yes. In fact, I'm a member of her Musician Academy.

WOODS: Okay, well how about that. Yeah, because she's very much operating along these lines, and the impression I get is that she's talented and she wants to share her music, and I think she navigated and figured it all out herself. She saw how other people were doing it, and she realized you have to build an email list. And I remember there was an — I don't remember how long ago it was. I did a webinar with Leadpages, which is the company I use for my landing pages. So RealDissent.com, I created that in

like five minutes with Leadpages, and BernielsWrong.com. It's these basic, basic, basic landing pages. That's all you need. You want it to be basic. You don't want a lot of bells and whistles; you want them to just put their email address in, get your free giveaway, and get on your list.

But anyway, I did this webinar a while ago where I invited some of my listeners, and I said I'm going to have Tim Paige of Leadpages come on and show you basically how you use landing pages to create an email list, because you're going to need this. If you're in business or if you're aspiring to be in business, this is going to be a skill you're going to be glad you have. And I actually had some people complaining about this. "I don't want to know that." Okay, then don't go, right? (laughing) Like, what's the big deal? "Why would you think I'd be — ?"

Well anyway, now it turns out next month, or November, I'm going to be doing an affiliate contest for Liberty Classroom, and whoever — I give 50% commissions for people who sell Liberty Classroom through their link, and I'm giving away cash prizes for the second through tenth place finishers in the contest on top of the 50% commissions. Everybody gets that, but then cash prizes. And then I'm giving away a new car for the number one prize. Now, people who built email lists and who — who, let's say, have libertarian websites and built email lists are going to be in a much, much stronger position to win that stuff. So, see? If you listen to Woods you're going to go places, all right? Trust me. I know what you guys need. I'm just here to give it to you.

NEWCOMB: Well, you're the merchant, and your website is your store. Like, imagine — like, go into Walmart and just look around. Just observe Walmart. They have down to a science as to where everything is placed, and a website is just like your first impression. Like, people walk into your store for the first time. What is their impression? That's just your website, and online entrepreneurs need to think that way.

WOODS: And it's funny; just like arranging the items in Walmart, which, as you say, is not random at all —

NEWCOMB: No. It's very scientific.

WOODS: — likewise, even things like the color scheme, the precise wording, things on your landing pages, can affect the opt-in rate to a non-trivial extent. And you want every opt-in you can get. So if you really get deep into it, you start experimenting and doing split testing, and so half your audience sees one version of the page, half sees the other, you look at the results, and say, okay, this is the one I should go with. In fact, there was even a time when I was going to send out an email, and I had two juicy subject lines, and I couldn't tell which one to use. So I sent it out for three hours and split tested it. Half got one and half got the other, and I saw which one got more people to open it up. And one of them, it was like a eight percentage point difference. It was a big difference. So I cancelled the second one and I went with the first one. I mean, I love stuff like this. I'm sorry to keep blabbing on, but at my high school reunion last year I met one of my old sort of acquaintances, and it turns out she does social media and advertising and stuff for Procter & Gamble, so she knows all about split testing and all this stuff. And we just talked endlessly, because we've finally found somebody who gives a darn about this stuff.

NEWCOMB: (laughing) That's funny.

WOODS: All right, so this is all good stuff, but I want to – you keep mentioning that you used to be in the military, so I do want to talk about that for a minute, if I may.

NEWCOMB: Okay.

WOODS: What were the circumstances there? You left the military. Well, that's sometimes easier said than done, so tell me the why and the how.

NEWCOMB: Hmm, man. I knew you were going to ask me that.

WOODS: (laughing) Well, I did.

NEWCOMB: Well, I was in the military twice. The first time was in '94 to '98. I was right out of high school; I'm 40 years old now. And the second time was 2008 through, like I said, last December. And there's two ways of exiting the military: you can either finish out your term of service and, like, get discharged like everyone else, or you can maybe go the conscientious objector route if you feel like your views are that strong – which I did, and I pursued that. Ultimately it ended with me breaking the rules, because I encountered delay after delay after delay. I experienced a lot of indifference, a lot of just blatant incompetence there in Korea. And it ended in me going on an unauthorized trip to Taiwan from Korea, which apparently is a big deal. And so apparently they – I was reduced in rank and was given a new discharge date. So that's how it ended. It was unfortunate, but it was for a good purpose I guess.

WOODS: When did you enter the military, and did you have different views then, and how did they change?

NEWCOMB: They were similar, but not as concrete. Like, for a year I worked for the John Birch Society, so that gives you an idea of my politics. That was in 2005 that I worked for the Birch Society. In 2008 I went back into the military with some reservations, but not to the point where it's like I can't wear this uniform, I can't play my instrument, I'm not willing to do this, I'm contributing to immorality. Over time, I guess just being more educated, educating myself, being exposed to sites like Lew Rockwell, Mises Institute, that's when my views became a little more concrete, a little more crystallized. And I guess it was about two years ago today – not today, but about this time two years ago, I put in the paperwork to be discharged as a conscientious objector. And a year later there was no movement, and I honestly think just the waiting and uncertainty just got the best of me, and I just decided forget it, I'm just going to break a rule and get out of here.

WOODS: If that hadn't happened, how long had you anticipated you'd spend in the military? Were you going to go the whole way, get the retirement package and all that?

NEWCOMB: No, my contract at the time would have expired in May of 2018, so hard to imagine me being in the Army that long. But what can I do?

WOODS: I'm going to ask you a personal question: how did family members take this decision?

NEWCOMB: My wife was very opposed to it at first, because she has what people call the "security gland" that men don't really have, but women like to know that things are set in place. And the military does provide at least an illusion of security, knowing that even if you don't get paid, Congress, well, they'll get you back-pay. You sort have this idea, this understanding that you're still going to get paid. No matter what happens you're going to have that. So she was very, very much against it from the get-go, but I just reached a point where it was like, sorry, I have to do this. I absolutely cannot contribute to this war anymore, and even with something that's a non-combat role like playing an instrument, I'm still sort of rallying the troops, rallying the public with my music, and it just got to a point where it was absolutely incongruent with my own views and my own conscience.

WOODS: Wow, that's hard. That really is hard. And I understand. I totally understand the security point, because of course it's not like that wasn't weighing on your mind to some extent.

NEWCOMB: Oh, of course it was.

WOODS: Of course that's a major factor. But at the same time, what could you do in that situation? Man, that's hard, and that was not an easy decision you made. So all the more I hope your efforts right now — I mean, I'd really like to talk to you again in the future — with Musicpreneur are really going to pay off. Now, what's the — if people want to visit Musicpreneur, how do they do that?

NEWCOMB: Well, I've created a special page just for listeners of this show. You can go to Musicpreneur.com/woods, and I've got —

WOODS: What else? Okay.

NEWCOMB: Everything is ["/woods."](http://woods.com) I've got a special message just tailor-made for your audience.

WOODS: Oh, that is going to be great. Well, I'll link to that special page at TomWoods.com/748 if people don't remember it. So we'll put that there, and anything else you want to send me that would be good to put there, I'll gladly add. So I think this counts as the publicity you get for using my Bluehost link (laughing).

NEWCOMB: I would say yeah, this is sufficient. I think I can live with this.

WOODS: (laughing) All right, good, good, good. Great talking to you, James. Best of luck.

NEWCOMB: Thanks, Tom.