**Gresh interview**

**Nikki:**  [00:00:00] Hey party people. Welcome to Stand Up and Stand Out, I'm your host, Nikki Green. Stand Up and Stand Out it's more than a podcast. It's a call to action. And no, I don't mean in that cutesy CTA acronym, buzzword type of way. Are you tired of misogynistic bosses, ruining your Workday? Did you dream of using your creative energy for good, instead of promoting corporate greed and evil?

Then this educational podcast is for you. Following, nearly two decades of working in fortune 500 companies. I want to share my leadership learnings with all of you. Leaders are needed in all walks of life, not just business. We are in a critical time to pivot ourselves. And the community around us to build a better future together. In this podcast, we're going to cover some behind the scenes. From my new book, "I laugh in the face of danger and other life lessons that should have taught me better."

Stand Up and Stand Out is education, comedy, and therapy. All in one. See you [00:01:00] there! Hello everyone, and welcome to Stand Out and Stand Up. I'm your host, Nikki Green, and today on our show, we've got Gresham W. Harkless Jr. Gresh is the founder of CBNation and Blue 16 media CB nation is a B2B brand focusing on increasing the business success rate by providing visibility and resources for CEOs, entrepreneurs, and business owners.

CBNation consists of blogs, podcasts and videos: CEO blog, nation.com, CEO podcast.com and CB nation.tv. Blu 16 media is a digital marketing agency providing digital marketing services, including web design and SEO to small and medium-sized businesses. Central to his marketing philosophy is that you are a media company developing a marketing strategy to connect with your target and reach your goals.

Gresham is a proud graduate of Howard University and Georgetown University. He is also a graduate of the 2020 leadership center for excellence, young professionals program 2016 and recognized by the Alexandria [00:02:00] Virginia Chamber of Commerce, 40 under 40. And if you guys don't remember, I was on Gresh's podcasts a few months ago.

I am CEO, and I'm glad that we're full circle here now today. And Gresh has joined us so welcome.

**Gresh:** It's great to be on here, Nikki. I truly appreciate getting the opportunity to now be on the hot sit.

**Nikki:** Exactly. My fans know I'm a big scifi nerd and a family full of comic book nerds too.

I like to go through it in a storytelling fashion, but feel free to add your own flair as we go through the questions. So we're going to start with, there is an amazing bio, therefore you have so many things that you've done, but let's flash back a little bit further and let's talk about.

What's your origin story, every great super hero and villain has one. What's yours?

**Gresh:** Yeah for me, I feel like if I go too far back, I feel like I have a little bit of both have a little bit of superhero on the villain in and trying to rescue myself from myself with sometimes it could be the biggest thing that we have to go through.

But, I always said I was like entrepreneurial [00:03:00] when I was younger. And even before I knew exactly what that was, but I was the kid that got my parents to go to buy potato chips so I can sell them on the playground or go to MJ Designs, to get and create necklaces, to sell on the playground, do things like that.

But one of the things that I always go back to that I felt was like my unique thing that I did when I was a kid was I started this family newspaper. I would basically do it on, get word and then put clip art in, and I would put stories about what was going on in our family.

And the reason I did that is because my dad was in the military, so he went TDY for an entire year, which was super hard to an entirely different country. So I was about 10 years old, I created these family newspapers and of course being a true entrepreneurial person I sold this subscriptions to my family members.

That was one of the things that I felt I always go back to because I felt like it was unique. It was before I did stuff because I was trying to be popular or get awards or, any of that stuff, it just felt like I was just kinda being me. Fast forward a lot of years I graduated from Howard undergrad and [00:04:00] Georgetown.

I'm in the Washington DC area and I basically bounced around, so a bunch of different jobs and trying to find myself fine, what I wanted to do and what that looked like. And, definitely a roller coaster ride but um, that's a short version of what brought me here and what started a lot of this stuff that I do.

**Nikki:** That's fantastic. And I think a lot of our listeners can relate. There's a lot of folks out there, especially right now, trying to figure out what to do with themselves. And maybe they had a plan last year and a lot of things they just changed. And I think one of the things that I really want to do with each of these wonderful guests is show the variety of things that do make people successful.

So what about what makes you stand out? What makes you unique?

**Gresh:** Yeah. I think that as I started to try to figure out what I wanted to do. I leaned in on that kind of story that I talked about, you know, me being a 10 year old and doing the family newspaper. So I really have always loved writing.

And I think it has manifest itself into podcasts and videos and different types of content now, but I've [00:05:00] always loved stories. I was for whatever reason, the kid that looked and ran to see the Washington Post, which was here and just see the different stories, practice writing, and just really loving all those like story aspects of a business and really on a deeper level of life.

So that's something that I always leaned on is that, the written word,to being able to write content or speak on podcasts or even create video content has always been what I felt like as my super power, the ability to try to hopefully. Tell my story, but probably I enjoy even more than anything else that, is just being a guest is getting to understand the story of a person.

What makes them thick, why they've created something that they've created. Just try to get there. What I like to call "secret sauce," the thing that makes them unique out so that people can understand a little bit of who they are, get inspired maybe, and maybe even wants to do it within themselves.

**Nikki:**  That's fantastic. I love your unique format and I do that quote name of "secret sauce ." It's really great just to be able to showcase and I think that's what I'm [00:06:00] enjoying about this too, is learning more about people that I've interacted with in lots of different forums, but you get to learn so much more when you have this cool sort of intimate one-on-one setting.

We talked about career. And one of the things I'm trying to dispel is this myth that we go to school, you magically know exactly the career choice you're going to have after that. And that's all you ever do. I think more and more, not just with our generation, but the generations coming is that career paths are going to continue evolving and you will probably do lots of things over your lifetime going forward.

So why don't you share a little bit about what careers you have explored in your lifetime?

**Gresh:** Oh, Nikki. I wish that I had known what exactly you just said when I was younger, because I was definitely the kid who ended up going into college and I came in as an undecided major. So I didn't really know what I wanted to do, but I went back to that story.

So I ended up becoming an English major because I really loved, writing and creating content. But after I graduated, I was going to go to law schools. And I took the LSAT. Did all those things needless to say did not go to law [00:07:00] school. I bounced around to a bunch of different jobs and trying to like, even document like how many jobs I definitely need a resume for that to happen because I bounced around to a bunch of different things.

So I had my fair share of like outside sales job. Originally, like when I first graduated. I worked for the United States postal service, doing a sales position. I ended up starting and working at a yellow book, which eventually became Hibu. And that was also an outside sales job. I worked for this publication called AOL Patch, which was also outside sales job. I worked with kids cause I got my master's in sports management and I truly love like sports and working with kids. So I used to have my absolute favorite job, which was going to preschools and teaching the little two to five-year-olds how to play certain sports. And I used to walk in with an inflatable Mr. Football and help them to throw the football, through the hole so that he can catch it and clap for him and share for him and teaching them a lot of skills that hopefully that they would use later on in their life. But those were [00:08:00] just, some of the jobs I started different ventures started a nonprofit when I was in, in college started an editing company that flamed out as soon as I sent my first email.

But there's so many, different things that I tried, but one of the things that she said that really resonated with me is I really appreciate it. My desire to just try things, to try to figure out like where I fit in and what actually stuck, because if I didn't do that, I would always wonder, and I would never know.

But it was those things, those practicing different jobs and positions, freelance writing and I was even an adjunct professor for a year at Nova, the Community College. So it was each of those different experiences and really in a short period of time that I think. Help me to kind of understand a little bit more of who I am and what exactly would it ended up being my path.

**Nikki:** Yeah, that's fantastic. And I think that's really what I want to encourage more people to do, is you don't know, and sometimes you have this ideal or people are telling you this is the right job, because maybe it makes a lot of money or has good benefits or whatever those [00:09:00] things are. But when you get into it, You feel that disharmony, you feel that you're not connected to what you're doing and you can go through the motions for a while, but eventually that just stresses you out, you know? and it creates other problems. Like you may have solved maybe the money problem, but you know, you're just not fulfilled. And I think this is really this great opportunity with the pandemic and everything happening to pivot and really do something that makes you happy.

**Gresh:** Yeah. And if I could say one more quick thing too, like I really and I appreciate you for saying that, cause I really beat myself up about not fitting in, not being in the right place.

And I think what you said, really hits the nail on the head. That is completely okay. It's part of the process. Most people that, have a certain degree, they don't end up doing whatever it is that degree is, and having known that, in the very beginning, I think that would have helped out. I think I would have had a lot more peace in the process and not been so frustrated about getting to whatever that destination is. So I appreciate you for saying it and all the work that you do, because it helps people to kind of get that [00:10:00] clarity.

**Nikki:** Yeah. And not to compare ourselves to, I think it's really difficult in high school you're a lot similar and you go to college and you start branching out and everybody starts with different majors. And so they may finish at different times. They may get jobs quickly or slow or, and I see a lot of groups too, especially because now they're bombarded with the social media and everything else. And, so you're seeing everybody do these, these next-level things and there is no race, right? Like we're all living a really long time now, even despite the pandemic, but most of us are fairly healthy. And we're doing okay. And if you're going to live now to 80, 90, 100 years old, you're only 20.

You got a long time to have a lot of adventures. So don't stress out about, what's happening in those couple of years. Start somewhere learn whether you like it, learn whether you. And then find the next thing, when it doesn't work out. All right. And other than that, what is your passionate, what are you currently pursuing?

That's keeping you happy and fulfilled?

**Gresh:** Yeah, I think writing a line, you know, with everything my process has always been [00:11:00] like, how do I create content to help, support a lot of the things that I'm most passionate about. Obviously entrepreneurship is very high on that list. So you get an opportunity to really like interview entrepreneurs and business owners find out what makes them tick.

I get to learn a tremendous amount, as well and learning, exactly what they do to be successful. But one of the things that it has come about, from me doing these interviews is I have this site called CEO hacks, which is tangible apps, books, habits, things that people use on a regular basis to be more effective and efficient.

And I completely dig out on all those things. So I, what I did was like, create like a directory of different hacks that people can leverage and use and implement whether they're trying to save time or these are phenomenal books to read or podcasts and check out or habits that people have, but just having a list of those things so just as we were talking about. It doesn't necessarily mean that there's one set way, but there's just a list of things that you can try out personally for you, if you have a business or even if you don't. So hopefully [00:12:00] figure out how to be succesful

**Nikki:** And I think that's important because so many of us keep starting from scratch and people feel like, oh, I've got to do it all myself, I have to figure it all out myself. And now there's a wealth of resources and the more you can collect them together and Hey it, start out and say, Hey these five people all recommended this thing. You gives you a little bit of a jumpstart, go from there. So that's fantastic.

**Gresh:** Yes, absolutely.

**Nikki:**  For me, I think as much as you giving back is really important there was a lot of people as I was growing up who helped me and they also stilled in me that it was important to continue giving back as I got older. And so for you, what makes you stand up? How do you use your super powers for good and what causes have affected your life that make you want to improve them for a future generation?

**Gresh:**  I think it really goes back to, and I'm still kind of incorporating some of these things, but entrepreneurship, especially youth entrepreneurship is something that's huge for me, like I mentioned, you know, my story and being someone who I think had quote on quote entrepreneurial tendencies, I want to do a lot of things that kind of help support, the youth, [00:13:00] especially if they have those tendencies, especially if they are somewhat troubled or not going down a quote on quote right path, or feel like, they're frustrated or whatever that might be. I've always said for me, entrepreneurship has always equal hope. And what I didn't mention is that I got laid off from the job, actually working with kids, I loved it, but I got laid off and I was going to get laid off again from another job I had just right after that. So I was kind of like in a, um, you know, a frustrating place, and the reason I say entrepreneurship equals hope to me, for me, is because I felt like that kind of, reminded me of the ability to create, the life that you want to have to some degree and not to say that it's easy not to say that it's perfect, but that you have ownership that you can take. So, Especially for young kids, I definitely want to, try to implement that more into what I do, but for the, like the digital marketing that I do, we donate services, so there are certain causes like veterans, cause my dad was a veteran as well, too, certain organizations that help support [00:14:00] kids. I try to basically If not discount sometimes, donate those services for them to help them to work on the cause that they want to do while we take care of some of the back end things. And those are just some of the things that I try to do to try to use what I have in place to not try to do everything, but help support those that are doing really, really great work.

**Nikki:** That's fantastic because I remember too that time, it was so tough that transition of you're not really working full time. When I came out of school, a lot of my friends were getting laid off from different startups that didn't last for very long. And it's scary because that's how you're starting to see the world.

And giving back to them, I think is really important. And giving them that chance, I remember scraping change out of my couch cushions to get taco bell. You know, if you have a passion and you want to pursue it, I think that there's lots of people like you that are going to help and give them services and at least mentoring and training that can give them a leg up, then probably people in the past might've had, that's fantastic.

[00:15:00] **Gresh:** I appreciate

All right, Greg. Now for the pop quiz time I always like to see a little bit of insight into what people are getting inspired by, and I know right now there's no shortage of things. It could be books and songs or movies or other people's podcasts. So why don't you share a couple of things that are inspiring you.

Yeah, absolutely. It's so funny, I'm going through this book called "Range," and this is my current read audio book that is definitely a, you know, top of buy for me. And the thing that attracted me to attracted me to it the most is that so many times we're talking about being specialized in how you have to like laser focus and that's always been like my tension because I think it's important to co of course specialize and get your quote unquote, 10,000 hours, but "Range" goes through... this idea of how to be a generalist in a specialized world. And the reason for it that really attracted me to it was because it has a lot of stories about how people are able to think outside of the box, largely because they have that generalized knowledge, [00:16:00] so it almost doesn't necessarily say you shouldn't specialize, it just says you shouldn't specialize without having that general knowledge, because that will allow you to think outside of the box, create new norms and solve certain problems. So those are, that's a book that, I'm still going through, but it's something that's always interested to me.

If I could pick one. Yeah. If I could pick one more book that I always go back to I don't know if you've ever heard of the Alchemists by Paulo Coehlo, yes.

**Nikki:** I just finished that.

**Gresh:** I swear by the book is one of my favorites just because it's a parable and it really tells a story that a lot of times we forget about in life or the journey, and sometimes thinking that we get to the destination and we aren't there and then we get something that kind of takes us down another path and that ends up being like, even better than what we thought. So it was one of the things that, is my favorite book and story, and I always try to go back to it.

**Nikki:** Oh, that's fantastic. I love that one. And it kind of parallels a lot of what we've been talking about today. Right?

It's been great catching up with you and Gesh I hope [00:17:00] we'll do a couple more episodes. We'll think of new topics. We'll keep going back and forth then I'm sure we'll keep starting a few more companies, both, you and I.

For more information about Gresh you can check out my website at https://www.greenchameleoncollective.com/podcast and we'll have a page dedicated to Gresh and link forward to all of his wonderful companies and the great things that he's doing.

Thanks everybody.

**Gresh:** Thank you.

**Nikki:**

Well, thanks for joining us today. And I hope you enjoyed this episode. Don't forget to follow us wherever the cool kids hang out the do podcasts, Spotify, Google, Apple, and you can also subscribe to Nicki Green's YouTube channel to see the video versions of each show. Plus additional bonus content.

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