

## Agency for Change Podcast: John Zaring, Managing Partner, The Zaring Group

- Connect with John on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/johnzaring/>
- Learn more about The Zaring Group: <http://www.thezaringgroup.com/>
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### **John Zaring:**

Your reputation is your capital, so spend it wisely.

### **Announcer:**

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

### **Lyn Wineman:**

We've all heard the saying, "Sell the sizzle, not the steak." I'm excited to talk to today's guest because that is his specialty. Hey everyone, this is Lyn Wineman, president and chief strategist at KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of the Agency for Change Podcast. Today we're welcoming John Zaring, managing partner at The Zaring Group, an entertainment agency based out of sunny LA. The Zaring Group specializes in creating media exposure by using the sizzle of star power as a promotional tool. They work on top-notch entertainment and sports events ranging from exclusive parties, gala fundraisers, comedy shows and tours, to golf tournaments and ski festivals to generate lasting positive buzz. John, I'm eager to talk about this. Welcome to the podcast.

### **John Zaring:**

Hey, Lyn. Great to be here. I'm excited to have our little chat today. Although, I have to correct one thing from your intro.

### **Lyn Wineman:**

What?

### **John Zaring:**

It hasn't been sunny California for the last week or so, we've had lots of rain and even snow in my yard in Santa Clarita, which is a place where snow is not supposed to be.

### **Lyn Wineman:**

Being based out of Nebraska, I don't feel one bit sorry for you there though, John.

### **John Zaring:**

Well, and having come from Pennsylvania.

### **Lyn Wineman:**

Oh yeah.

**John Zaring:**

I know how silly it is. But the bottom line is everybody here is excited when there's weather, 'cause it's sunny 355 days of the year.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh, it's such a problem to have-

**John Zaring:**

It is.

**Lyn Wineman:**

When there's just too much sun. So, well, John, I have been looking forward to this chat as well, and I wonder, could we just get started by you telling us a bit more about your company and the work that you do?

**John Zaring:**

Sure. We specialize in delivering once in a lifetime experiences for people. That ranges from corporate clients, special events, a lot of charity fundraisers. They're all centered around celebrities. They're usually things that people are excited to go to. And so we thrill people, we give them access that they wouldn't otherwise get. We do it in places where celebrities aren't common for the most part. And I've been doing that for over three decades now. And it's always fun when somebody gets to meet a celebrity that they've wanted to meet their whole life.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh yeah.

**John Zaring:**

I'm sure you have one. And then they finally do. And the key here is they're not disappointed.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I love it. John, you had me at "once in a lifetime experiences" and then you added thrilling and then you added celebrities and that all sounds fantastic. I'm really curious, how does one get in this line of work? Was young John Zaring on the playground saying, "I want to do celebrity events when I grow up."

**John Zaring:**

In my case, it was by accident. Yeah, I grew up in Pennsylvania and went to Penn State University and then down to Florida to Nova Southeastern had a degree in marketing and PR, a business degree.

**Lyn Wineman:**

It's a great field to be in John, marketing and PR.

**John Zaring:**

But while growing up, I always pined for California and the movie business. And by the time I was done with school, I was ready to give it a shot and everybody said I was crazy. Literally everybody, because I knew no one in California. Fortunately, while I was in school, I was working as a bartender and I was making pretty good money actually.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah. Bartenders do make good money, right? Yeah.

**John Zaring:**

For a 21, 22-year-old kid, I was making good money and that allowed me to fly out to LA a couple of times. And I will never forget the first time I got on the 405 freeway. Yeah. I rented a car at LAX and north on the 405 and there were 10 lanes of traffic and I was like, "Oh, this is nice." Yeah, 'cause I think the biggest freeway I'd ever been on was maybe three lanes in each direction, and this was five or maybe six. Now it's up to eight lanes, 10 lanes in each direction.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I love it. So, you weren't overwhelmed by that? You were like, "I am... I've made it. This is fantastic."

**John Zaring:**

You know what, I got my... On the last trip out here before I moved here, I got an apartment, I opened a bank account, I joined an athletic club.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Wow.

**John Zaring:**

Yeah. I went and got my California license. I was coming and there was no stopping me. And I came out to work in... I wanted to be in the entertainment business. I wanted to make movies. I didn't know what that meant. I'd never, I'm not Steven Spielberg, who grew up with a little camera making home movies. I just was enamored with the whole industry and the process. And I figured, well, I'm sure as heck not going to do it if I stay in Pennsylvania. And I ended up using that college degree to get my foot in the door. I landed at a PR firm that represented celebrities, got hired to answer the phones, and two years later I was running the talent department at that PR firm.

**Lyn Wineman:**

A man with a plan and a dream and the talent to get there.

**John Zaring:**

And again, it was an accident. I didn't say, "Okay, I want to be an entertainment publicist." And in fact, my next career move from publicist to talent manager was also an accident. One of my clients, in fact, the first client that I signed on my own without the agency partner there by my side to close the deal, was an actor named Jack Coleman, who at the time was one of the stars of Dynasty.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh yeah.

**John Zaring:**

And Jack had graduated from Duke University two years earlier, similar to me. He went to New York, got hired immediately on, I think it was Days of Our Lives, it might have been All My Children, no it was Days of Our Lives, the soap opera. And out of that got cast in Dynasty, so he was like 24.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Wow.

**John Zaring:**

And couple years removed from college. But the important part is he's from Allentown, Pennsylvania. I'm from Redding, Pennsylvania. They're about 45 miles apart. Very similar.

**Lyn Wineman:**

You guys had a connection there.

**John Zaring:**

Exactly.

**Lyn Wineman:**

A Pennsylvania connection.

**John Zaring:**

And we both played basketball. And so, we hit it off. And because of that relationship, cut to a year or so later of me handling his PR, Jack, because of Dynasty, was getting all of these big offers and he started handing me scripts to read to say, "Hey, I've been offered this movie, would you read this and tell me what you think?" And I was like, "Sure, I'll read it." And literally, that's the first screenplay I'd ever read. And then he got another offer and another offer, and I was reading scripts. And at one point he looked at me and he said, "Hey, you're kind of already helping me. Do you want to be my manager?" And I was like, "Sure, why not?"

And I went into the head of the agency, and we had a staff meeting, and at the end of the meeting, everybody else filed out. And I stayed to talk to my boss whose name was Wendy Wilkinson, Company was Wilkinson and Associates, which still exists to this day, but it's gone through five or six name changes. And Wendy's been gone for 30 years. But I stuck her right after the meeting. And I said to Wendy, "Hey, Jack asked me to manage him, so I'm going to do that, and I just want to let you know, but don't worry, it'll be after hours. I've been helping him, and it won't impact my job." And she looked at me and she goes, "No, you're not." And I said, "What? What do you mean?" And she said, "You can't be a manager and work at my publicity agency." And I said, "Why?" And I was totally naive, and I'd been in LA a couple of years at this point, and I was fairly familiar with the dog-eat-dog nature of Hollywood, but it wasn't hitting me until she said, "If you're a manager, no other manager is going to send us their clients because they'll be worried that you're going to poach."

**Lyn Wineman:**

You're going to steal them.

**John Zaring:**

And I said, "I'm going to do that. I'm just helping Jack. It's like an unofficial official thing." She's like, "Oh no, it's not. So, you need to decide, what are you going to do?" And that led to me leaving and joining a talent management company that was run by a film producer at the time who had done the Three Men and a Baby movies, the Revenge of the Nerds Film series, and lots of other big studio movies. And his niece was an actress named Emma Sams.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh yeah.

**John Zaring:**

Who was Fallon on Dynasty. That's how I knew Peter Samuelson, that producer who's still a producer and big philanthropist to this day. I was talking to Peter and Emma's uncle on the set of Dynasty and explaining the conundrum I found myself in. And he looked at me and he was like, "You just solved my problem." And I said, "How did I solve your problem?" And he said, "I'm only managing Emma because she's my niece. And my brother told me I was going to look after her in Hollywood. I don't have time to be her manager. I need someone to come in and handle all the day-to-day business." And that's how I transitioned into being a talent manager. And I helped build out a talent agency that brought Jack along and eventually started signing other clients. And I was a manager completely by accident, and it hadn't set out to be one.

And in doing that, Peter started handing me scripts to read because he needed help with his film company. And we were developing projects for Jack and Emma and today in Hollywood, every manager is a producer. In the 1980s, no managers were producers. So, it was very unique to have Peter with a production company housed in the same offices as a management company. And so, it gave me an opportunity to spread my wings. And I was reading all these scripts for Peter, and one day I went into his office, and I said, "I can't read another one of these scripts." And he said, "What do you mean?" And I said, "They're horrible. How do people think that these are worthy movies?" And he looked at me and he said, "Oh, you think it's so easy, you should write one and just see how hard it is."

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh, yeah.

**John Zaring:**

And I said, "Okay, I will."

**Lyn Wineman:**

Challenge accepted.

**John Zaring:**

And I wrote a film, took me, I don't know, six months of nights and weekends, and I brought it in to Peter, and Peter looked at me and he goes, "You actually wrote one?" I said, "I told you I would." And he said, "All right, I'll read it this weekend." And he came in on Monday and he had that look again in his eyes. And he is like, "This is really good."

**Lyn Wineman:**

Wow.

**John Zaring:**

"I think we can set this up."

**Lyn Wineman:**

Wow.

**John Zaring:**

And sure enough, we did. A couple of producers at Columbia picked it up, wanted to make it, and they were looking for a project for a TV actor named Tom Hanks. You might have heard of him?

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh, I've heard of Tom Hanks. Is there anybody who hasn't heard of Tom Hanks?

**John Zaring:**

Yeah. Who was looking to do a romantic comedy and they wanted to get him my film. And it's a very long story, but how it ended up was there was a period, very brief, where Tom Hanks was going to do my movie, and they were looking for an actress to play opposite him. And in the meantime, the head of that studio got fired and all of her projects were put in, excuse me, all of his projects were put into what's called turnaround, which in Hollywood means purgatory, they're not getting done. The new studio president came in, it was a woman, she didn't like. I don't even know if she ever read my script, but my script got dumped. And Tom Hanks when went off and made a little movie, you might have heard, called Sleepless in Seattle.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah, that's what I just was wondering about. Sleepless in Seattle. Wow. You could have had the before Sleepless in Seattle.

**John Zaring:**

Well, 10 years later, that movie finally got made. My movie finally got made.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Nice. That's awesome. That's awesome, John. We're going to link that movie in our show notes as well if we can.

**John Zaring:**

Fantastic.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Okay. Fantastic. All right. So, John, tell me this, you have made a career of working with celebrities, and I have in my mind that celebrities might be difficult to work with. Is that true or false?

**John Zaring:**

It's true and false.

**Lyn Wineman:**

All right. That's fair. That's fair.

**John Zaring:**

Yeah. Look, wherever there are people, and people are involved, some of them are great to work with, and some of them are... People very familiar with stories of celebrities misbehaving, because America is so fascinated with the celebrity culture, more so now than ever. But going back decades, you always heard about Clark Gable and the drinking or whatever. Those stories made it out, whether it was by Hedda Hopper or some Instagram influencer in today's world. I find that if you do your job right upfront, you end up with few problems on the backend. And what I mean by that, is we spend an awful lot of time making certain that we're partnering with people who aren't problems.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh, yeah.

**John Zaring:**

And it's really easy. Hollywood is a talk town, so it's really easy to get a fairly good idea for who's going to be a problem and who's not. Now, I'll give you one exception to that. I had to have Paris Hilton for an event that it was a New Year's Eve party that we were producing in Cabo San Lucas. And they really wanted Paris. And I had heard that Paris can be really difficult, but I said, "Okay, we'll do it." And let me just tell you, Paris Hilton turned out to be one of the nicest celebrities I ever dealt with, ever. She was fantastic, not only with me and my team, but the people. She would walk onto the beach, and this was at the height of Paris Hilton. She would leave the hotel and walk onto the beach and get swarmed by 20, 30, 50 people in a big circle around her pictures, autographs, pictures, autographs. One day she wanted to ride jet skis, and she literally only had to walk about 50 yards from the gate of the hotel down to the water's edge, where we had a jet ski waiting for her. She never made it, because she got surrounded by everybody. And she stood there and took pictures and was polite to everybody. And at the end of it, there was no time. And she said, "That's okay. That's okay." And she was awesome.

And when we work with celebrities, you spend an intense amount of time with people in a very close circumstance, right?

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah.

**John Zaring:**

Like six months later, I walk into a restaurant in Hollywood, and they seat me at a table. And right next to me is Paris Hilton. And when I sat down, she looked up and she went, "John, oh my God."

**Lyn Wineman:**

Wow.

**John Zaring:**

And to this day, if you go to the Zaring Group Twitter account, you'll see that Paris Hilton follows us on Twitter.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I love that.

**John Zaring:**

So, there you go. That's my one exception to the rule. Normally, you know who's going to be a problem before you ever take them. And so, there's ways to mitigate that.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I appreciate that.

**John Zaring:**

Sometimes you get surprised. Usually in a good way though, like with Paris.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's awesome. So, tell me, you've mentioned a couple of partnerships here. I'm curious, do you have a favorite celebrity partnership you can share?

**John Zaring:**

God. So, I mean, I've worked with some great people, Sam Jackson, Dennis Quaid.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh, those are great people.

**John Zaring:**

Meatloaf. I guess if I had to pick one favorite, I know people at home can't see what our Zoom feed here, but yeah, right over this shoulder, you see R. Lee Ermey. R. Lee Ermey is an actor who's a former Marine, and we produced an event for him for a bunch of years that benefited military families. Lee was a real deal Marine, fought in Vietnam. He was the military advisor on Apocalypse Now and other military movies, which led to him becoming an actor. He started a movie called Full Metal Jacket, where he played, it's a famous movie, and he played the drill sergeant in that movie. "What is your major malfunction?" That guy.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's awesome.

**John Zaring:**

And Lee had a great career playing cops, firefighters, military guys, tough guys. But he was the sweetest, nicest, most caring and considerate celebrity that I've ever worked with. And when he passed away a few years ago, I went to the service for him. And there were so many people there who felt exactly the same way. He had this gruff exterior; it was all image. All image.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's awesome.



**John Zaring:**

Just because of that part from Full Metal Jacket.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah. Wow. I love that story.

**John Zaring:**

I'd have to say R. Lee Ermey. Look 'em up, folks. Kids at home, look 'em up.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Okay. Because that's not what I expected to hear you say. So that's fantastic. I'd love, John, to get a little philosophical here. And I have a two-part question. The first part is, why do you think humans are so fascinated with fame and celebrity? And then how do you channel that into a successful event or promotion?

**John Zaring:**

That's a good question. I think people are fascinated by celebrities because it helps distract them from all of our lives. I mean, look, life is hard. And by the way, it's hard for celebrities too. I don't care how much fame or money you have, look at how many of them have flamed out. Again, wherever there are people, there are people peopling.

**Lyn Wineman:**

People peopling. That's one of my new favorite phrases. I love that.

**John Zaring:**

But I just think that it's a distraction. We all like to point and look. In America, in particular here, we like to build people up. Then when they get too big for their britches, we like to tear them down. And then we love a comeback. And I've made a career literally out of supplying people's fascination with celebrities or servicing people's fascination with celebrities. Literally, when I've gone through phases in my career as a celebrity wrangler, we produced a lot of major, major, big, multi-day celebrity events that had 10, 20, 30, 40 some 80 to a hundred celebrities participating in them, depending upon -

**Lyn Wineman:**

It's a big event.

**John Zaring:**

When the economy collapsed in 2008, we were faced with a challenge of no one, no sponsors were spending money on celebrity events. Big events like the Olympics, the Super Bowl they went on in 2008 and 2009 and 2010. But a lot of charity events, smaller events that weren't sports relevant, went away, including my Dennis Quaid event, my Lee Ermey event, my Bill Murray event. All of these sponsors pulled out. So, we had to figure out what we were going to do.

And in 2009, we were in Cabo doing a celebrity golf tournament. And it was a nice success. It was a small event. It wasn't as big as they'd been, but for Cabo, it was unique and special. And the hotel that was hosting, the celebrities had just opened. And so, the general manager who was young and understood,

the American mind and his American customers very well said to me after the event, "I don't know what I'm going to do." And I looked at them and I said, "About what?" He said, "I've got this big, beautiful new hotel, but there's a lot of big, beautiful hotels in Cabo, and I've got to put customers into the... Heads on these beds, and we're getting a ton of press out of this event. And that's fantastic. You have Entertainment Tonight here, you've got a reporter from People Magazine. That's cool. We're going to get great press out of this, but what am I going to do when you leave?"

And I looked at him and I just had this flash, and I said, "Well, I don't know, Victor, why don't we just do it again?" And he yelled at me, he goes, "I can't have 30 celebrities. I can't afford that all the time." I'm like, "No, no, not 30, just one. We'll, like, we'll do a birthday party for a celebrity, or I don't know. We'll just put some pretty actress in a bikini on the beach and take her picture and put it in People Magazine." And he looked at me, he goes, "You can do that?" And I said, "Yeah, why not? I've got a talent department that can book the talent. I've got a PR person who can get the media coverage. Hell, I can babysit them. Why not?" And he looked at me, he goes, "You're hired." I said, "I'm hired." He said, "Yeah, what's that going to cost me?"

**Lyn Wineman:**

And you're like, I wasn't even looking for a project here.

**John Zaring:**

I literally said, I have no idea. And he said, "Well, figure it out, and I want somebody here next month. And the month after that and the month." And literally had that conversation not happened, Lyn. Yeah, I probably would've gone out of business. Wow. Our company probably would've gone under, because all of our celebrity events were collapsing around us because of the economy. And for the hotel in Cabo, they were also dealing with a collapsing economy and a tightening tourism market. And they had to find ways to stand out among all the other hotels. And that general manager who specialized in opening hotels left like six months later and opened up another hotel in another market, and he hired us there. And now we had two hotel clients saving our asses. The owners of that hotel who had 13 hotels at that time around Mexico, at all the top tourist destinations, saw what we were doing, in this brand-new hotel, in a brand-new market. It's Loreto. You've probably never even heard of it. Most people go, Laredo, isn't that in Texas?

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yes.

**John Zaring:**

No. Loreto, which is-

Loreto, Baja California Sur, and it's a little town. It's not a big tourist market. Only Alaska Airlines was flying there at the time. And they saw what we were doing by bringing celebrities in and getting exposure for their hotel. They hired us for several of their other hotels.

And my business changed. Again, I talk about that happy accident. My business changed primarily from producing major celebrity driven events to recruiting and coordinating the trips of stars to five-star resorts in beach resorts or ski mountain towns, you name it. Places that tourists go and getting exposure for the hotel by virtue of the celebrity being there. So, you'd see a picture of a celebrity on the beach, and it would say, "So-and-so was in Cabo, celebrating their 25th birthday at the 'such and such' hotel." And that's what the caption read. And we were able to get the magazines and the websites and Entertainment Tonight, and whoever, if we sent video footage, the shows that cover Hollywood, to

mention the hotels, because we were giving them that footage or those pictures for free, whereas they normally have to buy photos from the paparazzi. And so, we created a new business by accident.

**Lyn Wineman:**

John, I love it. What I love about it though, is we've talked about these happy accidents, but the happy accidents happen because you work hard, you're good at what you do, and you have the courage to step forward and try something new when the opportunity arises. And I admire that in you. And obviously too, you've had a long career, you've been through a lot. You survived the economic recession of the early 2000s, but then you've obviously also survived a little thing that happened in the last few years called the COVID-19 pandemic. What effect did the pandemic have on your work? I mean, as things were shutting down all over the world, what does that do to a business like yours?

**John Zaring:**

It killed us, as the kids say, I'm not going to lie. March of 2020, we had, I don't know, seven or eight resorts that we were taking celebrities to literally every month, and they all closed.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I mean, who would imagine something like that, that could just shut everything down?

**John Zaring:**

And at first, we all thought three weeks, six weeks, you know?

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah.

**John Zaring:**

And then six months later, our resorts were all still closed. No one was paying us. Yeah, thank God the Biden administration put forth those government loans, disaster assistance loans. That kept us afloat for a while. But I'm still, to this day, dealing with it. We're slowly recovering, sending celebrities places, but in one-off terms, not in an ongoing retainer based annual contract like we were before, but we've managed to stay afloat.

But you talk about, and I don't know that this one was such a happy accident, but I think there's a possible happy ending for me. I mentioned earlier in my career when I wrote that film, and my boss said, "This is pretty good." Well, those producers that were at Columbia that wanted to make that film, and they eventually got a couple other films off the ground, and because they felt bad for me that they didn't make my script, they hired me as a producer on their films.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Nice.

**John Zaring:**

And basically, mentored me and taught me how to produce films. So, along the way, and through working with Peter and those producers, I learned how to produce. And I've been fortunate enough to be a producer on three feature films and one ABC TV movie. And I sold several scripts that I wrote, one

of which eventually, that first one got made in 2000 and was released in 2001. It was... When I wrote it originally, it was called Paper Boats when it was released, distribution company changed the title to Pursuit of Happiness, not to be confused with The Will Smith, The Pursuit of Happiness, that came out a few years later that got a nice little release and lived on Showtime for a couple of years. But after that film was released in 2001, I had two young children and I was producing celebrity events. And my wife and I had a conversation that went something along the lines of, "It's great that you got that movie made, but we have a mortgage. Kids are expensive. We need to put food on the table, and we can't have you spending six months to a year writing a script, and then six months to a year trying to sell that script. And then a year later, that movie comes out and you get a big paycheck when it all happens. But what if it doesn't?"

**Lyn Wineman:**

And what do we do in the meantime with our mortgage and our daycare and all the things?

**John Zaring:**

Exactly.

**Lyn Wineman:**

All the things.

**John Zaring:**

And so, I jumped feet first full-time really into producing those, the events that we've talked about with people like Dennis Quaid and Sam Jackson and Lee Ermev and Bill Murray, and Meatloaf and others. And that's what I did, literally until 2008 and 2009 when the economy collapsed, then we side stepped into resort promotion. Really proud of the fact that I've raised several million dollars for charities through those events.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That is something to definitely be proud of. I think that's fantastic.

**John Zaring:**

And we did it in a way that was different than the way other celebrity event producers were doing it. Because going back to when I was Emma Samms's manager, she launched a charity with Peter. They co-founded a charity called the Starlight Foundation, which is now a huge international charity. But in the mid '80s, it was Emma's little dream to just fulfill wishes for sick children. It's kind of Make a Wish, but Make a Wishes case, at least at the time, the children had to be dying. Emma didn't want to do that, and she wanted it to be kids that were sick and just needed their day brightened, and she would provide experiences for them. So, I started producing celebrity events as a natural extension of my job as her manager. And that's how I got into event producing. And one of my clients in the nineties was an actor named Richard Karn, who was Al on Home Improvement, which was, yeah, the number one show in the country all through '90s with Tim Allen. Al was the sidekick on Tool Time.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah.

**John Zaring:**

Richard had just lost his mother right before he became famous to breast cancer. And so, he wanted to do an event for cancer research. And so, we started producing an event for him in Seattle that grew into the Olympics of celebrity events. And literally in the first year, there were 30 celebrities. It was a three-day golf tournament. In the last year, 10 years later, it was a 10-day event that had over a hundred celebrities attending. And we did a four-day golf tournament, a baseball game, a celebrity basketball game, all three of which were televised on ESPN. And I produced not only the live event, but also the television coverage. We did a comedy benefit, concerts. We did a Karnival with a K for Karn that was sponsored by AT&T, that was a state fair without animals. It was a huge, huge amusement ride setting with constant entertainment going on and celebrities and dunk tanks and raised a lot of money for cancer research.

And when you asked about maybe my favorite experience, Richard was a close second because that, we got to the end of Home Improvement and Richard felt that he didn't want to overstay his welcome. The show went off the air, and he just didn't want to be that celebrity. That was like, "Okay, what are you known for?" And so, he ended his event, which of course, he immediately regretted, and I knew he was going to regret it. But that event, the great thing from that event is that all these celebrities that were coming started asking me to do events for them. And that's how we started... That's how we moved into doing events for other people that weren't our management clients that we weren't representing, and the light bulb went off and I went, "Oh, this is a much better way to make a living."

But to bring that full circle, having been the guy who stood there with Emma, with the event producer at the end of the event and said to him, "But where'd all the money go?" I never wanted to be put in that position. So, the way we did it, and were we to be doing big celebrity events now, would still do it, is the costs of the event are underwritten by the sponsorships, the money that came in from the event we didn't even handle.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah.

**John Zaring:**

We required the charities to take in all the money, so all the foursome sales went directly to the charities, all the gala tables. You bought a table or tickets to the gala, that money went straight to the charity. The charity sold those tickets so that no one could ever come to me at the end of the event and say, "But where did all the money go?"

**Lyn Wineman:**

Where did all the money go? You never want to be on the end of that question. That's never a good question to be on-

**John Zaring:**

No, it's not. It also limits how much money you could make as an event producer. And I'm not going to lie. It's hard work. Putting on those big events is huge. All year long, we worked... We had, for Richard's event for the decade that happened, I had a staff of 10, 11, 12 people depended what time of the year it was.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh yeah.

**John Zaring:**

For the three months leading up to the event, it expanded to 40 people in Seattle. I was flying up there spending a week minimum. Every month, I would fly up on a Monday and fly home on a Friday night. And I lived at the Sheridan, Seattle and oversaw production of that event. And it was hard work.

**Lyn Wineman:**

John, I think some people don't realize that. They think about business travel and the event business being glamorous and parties, but it is perhaps some of the hardest work because it's long hours, lots of details, and there's no more pressure than knowing people have spent a lot of money and a lot of time preparing for this one event. And we've got X number of, it's showtime and got X number of hours to make it work. It has to work.

**John Zaring:**

It's stressful. I thrive in stressful environments. And if you don't, don't be an event producer, you have to be the calm in the center of the storm, because everybody else is running around chickens with their heads cut off, to use a well-worn cliché. You have to be the person, and you have to have a team of people around you who know how to stay calm.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah.

**John Zaring:**

And herd cats, because that's what event producing is. And especially when you're producing big charity events. We had that Richard Karn event. We had over a thousand volunteers. We had over a thousand volunteers just managing the volunteers, took a full-time team of people.

But why are people volunteers? They're volunteers because they're able to be, because they don't have full-time jobs, or they don't have any jobs at all, they're stay at home moms, or stay at home dads, or they're unemployed. And so, they volunteer for the celebrity event, and they want to be around celebrities. They're not necessarily always the best workers. So, you have to figure out-

**Lyn Wineman:**

And you can't threaten them with firing. Right? You can't fire them because they're volunteers.

**John Zaring:**

You can't fire a volunteer.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Right?

**John Zaring:**

Right. So just managing the volunteers is a big enough job, but let alone all the sponsors, and it's a charity event, and money's being raised for charity, and that's a great thing. But as well as I do that, if a

sponsor corporation is plunked down a quarter of a million dollars sponsoring event, and they're bringing their executives and their top customers to that event.

**Lyn Wineman:**

You're taking care of them.

**John Zaring:**

Guess what? It better go the way they want it to, or you're in trouble. And so, there's all that level of stress. And then put on top of that 30, 40, 50, however many celebrities you're bringing in, celebrities are used to having someone out in front of them sweeping, clearing their path. They want everything when they want it, and they don't want it a minute later. And so now you've layered into this already crazy house of cards, a bunch of people who have demands and expectations. That's a whole other level of stress.

**Lyn Wineman:**

You're giving me anxiety just thinking about it, John. I'm feeling it bubble. I'm feeling it bubble up. I'm feeling it bubble up. Actually-

**John Zaring:**

Well, if there's anybody listening to this who's considering a career in event producing, you have to ask yourself the question, am I cut out for it?

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah, for sure. For sure. I'm going to second that. It's not my career. I've done a few events in my career and well, the adrenaline rush of having completed an amazing event is one of the biggest highs I think you can ever have, the steps that lead up to it to make it happen, it's a lot of work, a lot of steps.

**John Zaring:**

Yeah. You have to be an adrenaline junkie. I mean, there's no two ways about it. And one of the great things about the last 10 years is that we were still producing celebrity events, but we were doing them on a smaller scale. I learned the hard way that bigger isn't always better, and that there are ways to do events with fewer celebrities, which minimizes the costs and stress. But instead of needing a team of 20 ops specialists, operations folks, we were able to lower that number to some supervisor type people. And we relied on the hotel staffs who have a hotel filled with people who every day, it's like they have an event every day at their hotel, if not 10 of them. So, we were able to turn over a lot of the operational logistics stuff to the hotels and just manage them. So, my stress level has come down tremendously in the last 10 years.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's good. You don't seem stressed out right now.

**John Zaring:**

Yeah. No, I'm pretty good in the stress. I like that.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's awesome.

**John Zaring:**

I thrive on it. It drives my wife crazy that I can just, it is what it is. And we got to figure out how to solve it. Right. That's my job. How do we solve it?

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's right. That's right.

**John Zaring:**

But I've been thrown a big curve ball. The pandemic has, it's thrown me a curve ball that I got bounced in the dirt and squibbed back to the backstop.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah. What do you think the future looks like for the celebrity event industry?

**John Zaring:**

I think it will come back and it is coming back. I just think until we're out of the pandemic entirely, it's going to be fits and starts. I mean, we've had a couple of times over the last three years where we thought, "Okay, we're back." And then Delta happened.

**Lyn Wineman:**

And then something comes up, right?

**John Zaring:**

And then, okay, we're back. And then Omicron happened, and okay, we've got vaccines now. But not everybody took the shots. And so, people are still getting sick. So, it's not back. My business is not back. And to bring it full circle, I think I started 10 minutes ago talking about how happy accidents, what this pandemic has allowed me to do is put my screenwriter hat back on. And I've been writing scripts, and I've got four projects, three of which are out in the market. One is almost done. It's kind of reviewing what I call my gauntlet of truth tellers.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Nice.

**John Zaring:**

Or notes. One of them, I was told two weeks ago that a company is going to produce it. And that all put me back in as a producer. And it's a script that I wrote, which will potentially put me back in the acceptable world of Hollywood screenwriters, because it's been 20 years since I did that. So, who knows how I'll spend the next 10 years of my life? I imagine it'll be a little bit of this and a little bit of that. I'll still be doing the celebrity projects, because I've got so many connections and contacts and clients that rely on us that I never see that going away. And I do enjoy it. And I love what I do, it's fun. I mentioned earlier about putting smiles on people's faces. Just that example of Paris Hilton on the beach, those 50 people that were surrounding her, and-



**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh, just thrill.

**John Zaring:**

The most exciting thing. They're on vacation in Cabo. Suddenly they forgot about that.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah. Right.

**John Zaring:**

They met Paris Hilton. She took a picture with them.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Pretty cool.

**John Zaring:**

It's just a good feeling.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Pretty cool, John. I love this. And we're going to have to keep tabs on you. And as these scripts get produced, you'll have to let us know, and we'll have you back on the podcast to talk about them. But I'm going to have you, since you're a writer, I'm going to have you craft some words for us. Everyone who listens to the podcast knows, this is my favorite question. I would love a John Zaring original quote to inspire our listeners.

**John Zaring:**

Oh boy.

**Lyn Wineman:**

You're on the hot seat.

**John Zaring:**

Yeah, no kidding. Well, you know something I always say to people, there's a saying that your reputation precedes you.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah.

**John Zaring:**

And that's true. And in fact, I've made my living for going on four decades now, largely based on my reputation, but I've twisted it a little bit. I prefer to say, your reputation is your capital, so spend it wisely.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

**John Zaring:**

How you use your capital, your reputation is the most important, it's the most important asset you have. So, you have to make decisions about what you're going to do, who it's going to impact, where it's going to take you next, what it leaves behind in its wake, that's to me, something that everyone has to consider and very few people do.

**Lyn Wineman:**

John, that is pure gold right there. I think that is really good. And that is why a person like you has a career that builds on happy accidents, because you have protected and built your reputation and leveraged that into new opportunities. And I think sometimes as business owners, there might be a temptation to make a decision for an easy gain, but it's always the long game. It's always the long game and doing the right thing that leads to the better outcome. So that is pure gold. So, for our listeners, who'd like to learn more about The Zaring Group, maybe they've got an event they want to produce, they want you to help connect them with Paris Hilton, all of the above. What's the best way to get in touch with you and find more?

**John Zaring:**

Well, if they want to learn more, they can follow us on Instagram @zaringgroup. That's quick and easy. We have a website, of course, it is thezaringgroup, Z-A-R-I-N-G group.com. Very creative. I know.

**Lyn Wineman:**

You know what? In some cases, you just need people to be able to find you. So, I think that's fantastic.

**John Zaring:**

Yeah. Keep it simple, stupid.

**Lyn Wineman:**

There you go.

**John Zaring:**

And my email is john@thezaringgroup.com, so that's also easy.

**Lyn Wineman:**

All right.

**John Zaring:**

John with an H.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Ah, that's a good distinction. We'll also have all of those links in the show notes on the KidGlov website as well. So John, as we wrap up this really fascinating and fun conversation, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

**John Zaring:**

I think a lot of people think that doing things with celebrities is next to impossible.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah.

**John Zaring:**

I will say that if you know someone in Hollywood who does what I do, it's very easy.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Okay.

**John Zaring:**

And we've been successful because we know the game. When we call an agent or a manager or a publicist, we know the game because I was a publicist and a manager, never an agent, but managers and agents are cut from the same cloth. And if someone from the outside calls and says, "I want to book so-and-so for this event." They'll say, "Great, that's \$100,000." And they'll get people who will pay them \$100,000 for that celebrity to show up. I know that it's not \$100,000.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Yeah.

**John Zaring:**

I know what, if there is a price, what that price is? And I know if somebody will do something without a price, and I mean, I can't tell you that the charity events that we've done, people would say to me all the time, "You are never going to get 40 celebrities to go to Seattle for the weekend and play golf." And I'd say, "Oh, yes, I am."

**Lyn Wineman:**

Watch me.

**John Zaring:**

Yep. Watch me. And we didn't pay any of them. Ever. We have never paid a celebrity for a charity event.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Wow.

**John Zaring:**

Never. So-

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's amazing. That's amazing. That is the value of the work that you do. I think that's fantastic. John, I have loved this conversation. It's been so much fun. You have such an interesting career. And-

**John Zaring:**

Thanks, Lyn.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I believe-

**John Zaring:**

It's been fun for me too. I appreciate it.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Hey, all right. I believe the world needs more people like you. So, it's been my pleasure to talk with you, and I just thank you for your time.

**John Zaring:**

Have a great day.

**Announcer:**

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