

Welcome to the Event Brew, where event professionals from different backgrounds talk about the latest, most controversial and interesting topics dominating the minds of the industry right now. This is a candid conversation the likes of which can only otherwise be found late a night in host hotel lobby bars during industry conferences. So relax and drop in on what event pros really say when no one else is around. This show is brought to you by Endless Events, the event AV company who tells you how it really is. Now, let's brew something up.

Will Curran:

Hey, what's up Brew Crew? All our homies out there in the interwebs, this is Will Curran from Endless Events.

Nick Borelli:

This is not Dustin Westling because your name is supposed to be second but I'll do it anyway. This is Nick Borelli from Borelli Strategies.

Will Curran:

This is Dustin Westling with OneWest Events.

Thuy Diep:

New decade, new tea. This is Thuy with PRA business events.

Will Curran:

And man-

Will Curran:

We're all together. This is so unusual.

Will Curran:

My gosh. This is... I know we... Everyone's probably been missing everybody and they're like, man, no one is all together, but.

Thuy Diep:

It was tough, the holiday season.

Will Curran:

Yeah, it's always tough. We're all so busy. We all have lives. We're all also event professional, so we are at the mercy of our clients in some way as well.

Will Curran:

Thuy, you brought up new tea, new year, new tea. Let's talk about what we're drinking real quick. What tea you got going on right now, Thuy?

Thuy Diep:

So for-

Will Curran:

Whoa, say that seven times fast, "What tea you drinking, Thuy."

Thuy Diep:

So for Christmas I got one of those fancy tea kettles that you can track the... Depending on what type of tea, it tells you what temperature you can put it at. It's like 180 degrees, 195, you can hold it. It's like super tech savvy, fancy. And then I-

Will Curran:

Is it the one like the Breville one that like that drops like automatically into your tea kettle?

Thuy Diep:

No, it's called COSORI, I believe, it's the black one with the big long goose neck. You can even have like an app, then you can turn it on and everything. I got a fancy tea, no one can see it, but I just went to show you guys. And then I received a bunch of these DAVIDsTEAs, like loose leaves. So I've upgraded to loose leaf teas now. What are you drinking, Will?

Will Curran:

I'm drinking, I think the first time it's made an appearance on this podcast. It's kind of weird to say that about my tea, but a white coconut cream tea that I picked up from Art of Tea about two years ago. It's one of my favorites. It's kind of creamy kind of coconuty and it's nice, light, and refreshing. So, one of my favorites for sure. What about you Dustin? What you got going on in your cup?

Will Curran:

Thuy and I both look horrified at the sound of your tea.

Nick Borelli:

So complex and-

Will Curran:

Yeah, it's a crisp -30 here in Calgary today. It's very, very cold. So I'm just warming up to the office Keurig coffee. Nothing fancy for me again. My apologies everyone.

Nick Borelli:

I'm in Fahrenheit land, so it is 18 degrees Fahrenheit. If someone's doing the math at home, I don't know what that is. That's the first thing I do when I go to a hotel in Canada is press the button that switches the Celsius to Fahrenheit so I know what's going on.

Will Curran:

How cultured of you.

Nick Borelli:

I just refuse to be in the place I'm at. My... I went from, cause it's cold, I went from coffee to the beverage I'm having right now, which I'm asking all of you not to hate the game but hate my Game Fuel, which is brought to you by Mountain Dew and it is a Charged Tropical Strike, which sounds like a very American drink. It sounds like a kind of an operation to like bomb some nice place, a charged tropical strike. So I guess I can own that part of it. It doesn't taste tropical in as much as it tastes functional.

Will Curran:

You know, something really interesting, I realize this group pretty much defines what people usually drink in the events industry. I realized because I know people who just only drink energy drinks and I'm like, you're crazy, that's horrible for you, and you all make fun of them. And then like obviously there's people like me and Thuy who are like super into it who are like super into teas and you know, alternative drinks and things like that. And then you're like, Dustin's like coffee, black.

Will Curran:

Will, you can get off the tea high horse. I saw you drinking a mountain Dew at the hockey game in Phoenix. So I don't know what the hell you're talking about.

Will Curran:

It was true. But it was also like, it was such a long day and it was... I can't get fresh loose leaf tea and a Arizona hockey game.

Will Curran:

So you drink Mountain Dew?

Will Curran:

Maybe. Maybe in LA we can.

Nick Borelli:

Yeah, I thought Arizona is the place where you get tea, like they have that famous tea that is a, probably really-

Thuy Diep:

That's just sugar.

Will Curran:

Arizona tea? You know, they don't even brew that. They don't even brew it. It's like a Coca Cola product brewed in... Somewhere else. I normally would. I'm realizing though, like I think we talked about resolutions... This is kind of off topic, but like if you want to drink better things you

need to build like a habit. Like movie theaters for example, I have to drink like either a really sugary tea or soda because there's no other option available. But I got to figure out some habits.

Will Curran:

All right, no more Mountain Dew at hockey games, saying it right now.

Will Curran:

Rough. Rough.

Thuy Diep:

Yay, special guests.

Will Curran:

All right, well we're not talking to... Special guests? But we're not talking today about Mountain Dew and what we're drinking all day, even though this is the Event Brew show. Today we're talking about controversial speakers, manels, all the recent news that's been breaking recently. Oh my gosh. Nick, why don't you hit us with what's been going on in the news and maybe start off with a little bit of a history lesson.

Nick Borelli:

Yeah, I guess I want to do a real broad thing first and then get into the more specifics. Broadly speaking, once you crest over a certain scale of event, I don't know if there really is anyone who isn't controversial at all these days. I think everyone is, every decision is, it's a calculated risk. I remember in like 2016, 2017 asking people on my Facebook account, and I try to stay really politically neutral when I'm online and then face to face I have no problem going completely telling you what I believe just because I just find that the internet is a poor place for that. So that said, I said, "Hey, would you planners," who are the people that predominantly follow me on Facebook, "would you host an event at a Trump location?" You know, neutral. I was just curious.

Nick Borelli:

And people went crazy. So you can't say a word and not get an extreme response, and not only that, there were people saying the worst things, the best things. And then there were people like, it's just too, it would be too distracting. So I think that there's a lot of different takes on what associating your event in any way with a cult of personality. And I think that there's just no real way for people in this busy world to not differentiate themselves by taking a stand on one side or the other of enough things. So I will first say like I think all keynote decision making at a certain scale has some level of controversy. It could be minute, it could be huge. So I just think that's where we're at right now.

Will Curran:

I think you bring up a good point that you're always going to piss someone off. Brandt and I did a presentation on 5G technologies and there's going to be... Even though we aren't network

engineers, cellular technology geniuses, we're here to distill some complex things into a little bit simpler knowledge. There's always going been that one person going all, "They didn't talk about the spectrum of this and this and that," and, "Oh my gosh, they're the worst speaker ever," down rate. And they're going to say they're horrible, we're horrible. When in reality, it's like, okay, well you're always going to kind of piss someone off, even if it's not controversial. Sometimes there's just always someone that's going to have an opinion. What they say everyone's opinions, it's like assholes, everyone has one.

Nick Borelli:

Yeah, I don't know. I just think that people's values anymore are so tied into everything and they can't divorce themselves with any kind of association of one value with another person. So like if one person believes one thing that isn't even what we're talking about, it's like you have to boycott and ban it and can't be associated with it. Even the idea of people's favorite actors or musicians like, I liked their music but they were this way with kids or before they, after they did thriller or something. There's a lot of being able to divorce the artist from the art. And I think that people just can't do that anymore. I think that they're intrinsically tied and because of that everything comes with a caveat. Everything must be weighed and there's no freebies and there's no "let's just not think about this" or dig in. And because of that, we're in a situation where people bank one of the most recognizable aspects of attendance of events on their keynote speakers, and that's a human being who can say anything in any given moment.

Thuy Diep:

So you both just gave away the whole plot line to The Good Place on Netflix.

Will Curran:

Really?

Thuy Diep:

Yes. That's the whole entire conflict-

Will Curran:

Never seen it.

Thuy Diep:

Of the good place. It's basically, everyone's tied into... like everyone's... It's harder to get into the Good Place because everything is tied into something. Even myself, I'm like, "Oh, I love Chick-fil-A, but I don't believe in their values."

Will Curran:

All right. We can't hear Thuy right now.

Thuy Diep:

Oh, I had myself muted. Sorry.

Will Curran:

Start at, you love Chick-fil-A.

Thuy Diep:

I love Chick-fil-A, but I don't believe in some of their values and so it's like the struggle, but their chicken is so good. Anyway, so I shared an article with everyone when it came out. It was a MeetingsNet article on January 2nd and it was "Read This Before Booking Your Next Speaker." The whole industry was going bananas over this because the CES announced that Ivanka Trump was going to be the keynote speaker, and shared it with everyone and then just sat back and then sip some tea because it was so interesting, all the dialogue that was happening.

Will Curran:

My gut reaction is... The safest gut reaction I have to this initially is not a natural fit, when I think tech.

Will Curran:

Before I think about the politics behind it, the first thing I thought of is why the hell is she speaking at CES? And is this more about... Maybe this is about creating controversy and conversation and I think that whole families have it a bit offside in a lot of ways, to put that really gently. But I think Ivanka ran a really successful business prior to all this craziness and I don't... I just... It's not about her, not about her personally. I just don't understand why she's speaking there. And I think it kind of goes back to Nick's point a little bit about she's a controversial figure and you have to wonder if that played into the decision to bring her on board.

Thuy Diep:

You know what, I think it was actually everyone, this whole manel situation and this was their potential solution to bring on a female. And it was the wrong in a lot of people's cases, it was just a big no. Good, not even good try, but yikes. And I think actually-

Nick Borelli:

Thuy, what's a manel?

Thuy Diep:

A manel.

Nick Borelli:

I want to set you up for this. I know it, but to be-

Will Curran:

Well, no jargon jail.

Nick Borelli:

Will inspires me.

Thuy Diep:

So manel it's... has been... We've been talking about a couple episodes now where it's a panel of men and there's been a lot of issues in the past because it's not going into diversity. There's not that much representative of females up on stage, especially since a majority of this industry is made by females. And so Nick, I know one thing I'm like, I always actually brag about you, cause I say, I know in your contract you have a percentage, right? You put in your contracts that you want it to be split or something?

Nick Borelli:

Yeah. It's a little bit more open than that. It says that the... If I'm going to be on a day S in a panel, then I require the planner to do their due diligence in order to make diversity a priority. And if I believe that they have not made diversity a priority, then I will exclude myself to make room for someone else who should be there.

Thuy Diep:

Yay, Nick.

Nick Borelli:

Plus, I'm fine, I don't need it. So, I'm good, I can just a... and I hate panels on top of it, so there's one more reason.

Will Curran:

And we can't like necessarily talk from like our high horse 100% and, granted, I'm the one who helped select this group of people, but hi Nick and hi Dustin and thank you Thuy for being representative in this. But we obviously, as Event Brew recognize where we are coming from when saying this as well. So we know we're not necessarily perfect.

Nick Borelli:

Gender is one component of diversity. Obviously there's lots of other angles. In the tech world, the reason that gender specifically is a very important thing is that it is a challenge industry-wide at all levels to have adoption of women into their workforce, which requires a visible thought leaders for attraction and to be able to have female voices guiding ships in order to diversify their entire industry.

Nick Borelli:

So it's even more important that that specific line of diversity is met in that industry because they have huge failings historically. Like even if you look at fairly, on paper, progressive organizations such as like let's say Facebook or Google, like they lag way behind in other industries when it comes to gender balance because they claim that the attraction to that, to the people who can code has never really been historically there. So they have had to invest in education at the earliest levels in order to create an industry that is more diverse and

sustainable at that point. So that's why I think of all levels of diversity, CES has to emphasize gender balance. So importantly and yet they fail.

Will Curran:

Well, I have a question to ask you guys to see what you guys think. But like at what point though too, I get the idea that someone is not an authority to speak on a topic they get brought in. I think that has almost less to do with the controversy of it as well. Obviously, this one is the person's controversial plus the fact that they would definitely weren't knowledgeable in that topic according to everybody, even though I guess technically the White House trying to defend it and be like, "Hey, Oh she's in charge of our technology stuff and all this," whatever. You can decide whether you think she's an authority.

Will Curran:

But my question to you guys is what point should we be pushing though for planners to bring in outside opinions outside of our own? Because far too often it's like a silo of associations bringing in people just talking about the things that they want to hear about. When in reality like maybe it's time... Granted they have to be knowledgeable, come from fact-based stuff, all these things like that and not be a jerk, but like when should we be challenging our clients to bring in more controversial speakers? Dustin, you're kind of nodding your head. What do you think?

Dustin Westling:

Yeah, I totally agree. I think that there's... Or I don't agree. I think that there's... PCMA was a great example of that. They did their convening leaders event in San Francisco just a couple of weeks ago and they had Condoleezza Rice as their closing keynote who really has very little to do with the industry that PCMA represents. But she had a great story and she had a great message that everybody should hear in business. Whether you're in the event or travel tourism industry or you're just a human being on this earth. And I think balancing those out is... There's absolutely nothing wrong with it. And I think people should do that more often. I do find that often our event industry specific conferences, we're just talking about events. We're often not talking about the big world outside of events. And then we all start learning in a silo and we then wonder why we can't run with the rest of the world. And I wonder if those two things are related.

Thuy Diep:

So, my feedback back on the whole hiring speakers, when I was director of education, that was my main goal is to source and vet speakers, and I think a lot of times people in our industry forget that just because you're good at something in your niche doesn't mean that you're a great speaker on stage. And so that's something that's really important. Especially you could be great in security and safety and you're high up and you have that knowledge. But can you really like captivate an audience-

Will Curran:

Tell a story.



Thuy Diep:

And have those skillsets? Exactly. Tell that story and to... Because that in itself is a skill set. And so that's... I think our industry gets lost in just actually hiring speakers that are speakers, not someone that's just great at their job. So going back, Ivanka Trump talked about the path to the future of work and Nick you shared an article about just how that went. What was your thoughts?

Nick Borelli:

I read two or three and it's rare that I get to read the word milquetoast so frequently. I was like, "Oh yeah, it's a word I use-"

Thuy Diep:

Please don't mind this coconut, creamy coconut tea, milquetoast.

Nick Borelli:

It's a word that I use but I rarely write cause it like looks weird. So that's why jumped out at me. But it's just a way of saying a nothing thing, like a placeholder waste of time. And I think that, anyway, everyone was like a real controvert... Like all the articles leading up to it, they're like, this is such a controversial thing. And what does this mean? And then at the end of it they were like, well that just sort of happened and it didn't really say anything. It was not only was it like extremely safe-

Thuy Diep:

Sorry, guys. My gong went off. My gong, sorry about that.

Nick Borelli:

So, do I have to come off the stage now.

Will Curran:

Sorry everyone.

Nick Borelli:

Cede my time.

Nick Borelli:

It was just like uneventful. So to me, I think that they probably knew that because I was like, Oh maybe they're doing that because they're going to announce some kind of initiative. And she is like some kind of... So I would see like leading up to that, I can see like maybe that was the point and there wasn't a point. So I think the point was the PR stunt, hiring of her to be able to say maybe they came from a really misguided place of, see we have women, we have Ivanka Trump. Or it was a stunt to say, look, the technology industry, the tech industry itself and the current U.S. Administration are at odds, we're going to do this as an olive branch, as a some way to get people talking again so they can say like, well look, we had a member of their, I have

no idea what she is, an advisor, there... Someone in this Royal family that we've elected that was there. So technically, we're doing something like that. Maybe that was it. Or maybe it was just to get PR noise.

Nick Borelli:

So I will tell you this, I used to work for a company that worked with CES. So I worked for a company called Showstoppers. Produce is a trade show, events associated with CES, EFA Berlin, EFA China, Copytech and Mobile World Congress or Consumer Electronics Shows. It was the day before the show and the only people who were allowed to come to our event the day before the big shows, and it was coordinated with, it wasn't off the books, were journalists.

Nick Borelli:

So all I did was vet journalists and, and help them create the stories they needed based on matchmaking them with the people at these shows. That was part of my job was the vetting as well as the marketing. And I can tell you that all of them are looking just for an angle of why they were there. So to be able to use the only word that seems to get everyone to pay attention to news these days, which is Trump. I think that maybe it was, how do we make a splash on Twitter, which frankly is dominated by him. I think that it was a PR move and then everything leading up to it was the dog and then the tail was the presentation.

Will Curran:

I agree.

Will Curran:

Interesting. Very interesting.

Thuy Diep:

The whole reason-

Nick Borelli:

Those moves are made, too. Because I hung out with the journalists the entire time at the shows too. Cause they have their own stage and they make announcements like every 30 minutes to an hour depending on how there's news happening at CES the entire time and they're in a constant battle for attention. And I think the show itself needs to do some big splashes too. And in a world right now where there's only a few things that really get the attention of people, I think that they can for good or for bad try to play, it's sort of neutral by like we didn't say that we're on board with them, but we just gave them an opportunity. I think that they again, they get the attention that they were looking for. And that could be a reason why a organization would do that. You just have to really know your audience.

Will Curran:

Do you think-

Will Curran:  
One interesting-

Will Curran:

Now I know I don't fully understand all the inner workings of CES and I've gone to the show, and if you ever want your mind blown, go to the CES trade show. It's crazy. But do you think that there was any other reason that they might have chosen her? Is there any reason for them to need a friend in politics? Is there... Do they advocate, do they push agendas in any way that having her ear and being in good with the Trump family would serve them?

Nick Borelli:

Possibly, and possibly their stakeholders. Because I have no idea, and they probably wouldn't publicize this, while she was there that there's 0% chance that she just did that and got off. Likely there were meetings with high level people, all the high level CEOs of any kind of tech organization are there, and having private meetings the entire time. Was there a summit that took place? There have been a number of summits with technology companies and the Trump administration previously. It's a big part of, American jobs are a big part of his platform and having the quote unquote "job creators" in a sector that we still have dominance in globally. So I don't know. I think that there... I wouldn't discount the fact that it was a political move to buy. I mean I think that this administration is pretty transparent that if you are say nice things about it get favors.

Will Curran:

I think an interesting point to think about as well with this is not only, I think that's so smart to think like that, well if there's a larger strategy is just then her be making an appearance. But also the fact that who she actually did the actual panel with, and... not the panel but the presentation, but it was all with Gary Shapiro, who's the president of CES, basically the Consumer Technology Association, which is like the association that plan CES.

Nick Borelli:

They had to, and imagine how much risk there is putting another human being up there. Anyone would be able to like throw away their business for a chance to talk directly to somebody in a tangential piece of power to be able to make them speak to their specific issue. It's really savvy to just say, not only do we give them the respect of the highest person that we have, but also we can there's no rogue element that's going to happen there.

Will Curran:  
Absolutely.

Will Curran:

All right guys, any other thoughts on controversial speakers for today's episode?

Nick Borelli:

Dustin, I know that you've been, as Thuy has... Actually, maybe you have as well, Will. In an association world, been part of the process of selecting speakers. Do you, when you look at feedback, do you like the people who have some ones and some fives let's say versus the just the fours and fives group? Does that make sense?

Will Curran:

I think that if you get a few ones in a few five, you've probably hit the balance perfectly. I don't personally go out and look for controversial people. I could think of a few names off the top of my head. I send him my love. But I don't-

Nick Borelli:

He's not listening.

Dustin Westling:

I don't go out and find controversial people. I want it to be timely. I always think to myself, what can this person do that is going to immediately help improve somebody's business or personal life? And I look for people that can... We often put so much stock on speakers and what it is that they're going to accomplish. And I don't look at it as you need to change somebody's life. You need to give them all the secrets to success. I look for what are those little nuggets and how is it going to impact the audience? So with that in mind, I don't know that I really care if they're Ivanka Trump speaking to a bunch of Consumer Electronic people. I think what is the content and is there something here that can be taken away and put into practice in somebody's business life or personal life.

Dustin Westling:

And I do always like that balance of it doesn't always have to be business, it doesn't always have to be about the conference that you're at and to be successful in this world, you need to balance both of those things and creating a space and an opportunity for a speaker to do that is the way I think about it.

Will Curran:

I think that's a really good point, Dustin.

Nick Borelli:

I think there is, looking at speakers to say these people possess knowledge and they're quite good at distributing the knowledge and insemminating the knowledge into people's minds in order for it to stick. The other aspect of it is that people who are there to disrupt ways of thinking and to challenge. Those, I think will come with a level of something and you may call it controversial or you may call it... It just isn't something that that person's ready to hear at that time. Like the lines between those two things. I think it's probably not actually controversial in that way. I think it's probably just their message won't resonate with people that aren't ready. And I've seen those people get sort of bad marks and be said like that... And then... And you know the ones and the fives on that. And then I've seen people who are there specifically to rile people up in order to

create an emotional response. Which, it depends on the curriculum, I could take or leave, probably not, I wouldn't have it, the whole product. But I just think that like the way you define controversy could be different.

Will Curran:

I have left a session, whether it's a keynote or just a regular good old session. And I've walked out and been like, that was awful. Like I don't... What the hell was that guy talking about? And then I give them a one and then a couple of weeks later after the message kind of goes into practice in the real life I've gone, Holy shit. There it is. It's there.

Dustin Westling:

It takes, sometimes it takes taking that content and being open minded and letting it resonate. And then when you take it out to the real world, you're like, Oh no, I understand what he's talking about. That's why sometimes I take, when we're talking about the rating the one in the five and the way you feel the minute you walk out as opposed to how that message resonates once you're back into your real world. I think those things are often different. And for that reason, I give everybody a fair shake and they go at it with an open mind and you've got to trust that the people that are putting them on that stage or have done their job properly. So even when you disagree that's a great thing, and that that creates an opportunity.

Thuy Diep:

I will say one thing that I did enjoy, doesn't basically like ditto Dustin, about just the balance of that. ILEA Live in New Orleans did a deep dive, or the way that they structured giving the audience the choice and to choose their experience. I believe they had four speakers and it was the topic. So in the schedule, you're looking at it. So I was like, Oh, this is the topic I'm interested in. This is probably what I'm going to. But I believe each speaker had like five minutes on stage prior to us choosing which one we're going to. And I loved that because I ended up choosing someone completely different because of that speaker. I was like, I didn't want to learn about transportation, but I guess I'm going to go into logistics and because I wanted to hear this specific person, I love that. I love that the, whoever planned that conference, gave the audience a choice. And I, right now... No, go ahead, Will.

Will Curran:

I was just going to say, it was a very unconferecelike to do, to do the pre present sort of thing to convince people to go.

Nick Borelli:

Was that Terry, I think that they did the education on that one?

Will Curran:

I think it was, yeah.

Thuy Diep:

Go Terry.

Nick Borelli:

It was after I think that was one of his last ones. Yeah I did the same thing honestly. I really enjoyed the, I think it was either Ignite or PechaKutcha style, a short abbreviated kind of trailer for our presentation that either wets their appetite or goes "Oh I don't want this." Or content-wise you're like, "I'm not exactly 100% sure on the content but boy am I locking in on the speaker." And that's where a syllabus wouldn't do it enough justice to know that this person is not going to work for you. I've known some people who are like really smart in the events industry who put me to sleep immediately when they open their mouth. And I'm just better reading your stuff than I am seeing you try to perform cause it's not something you should be doing.

Nick Borelli:

So from a formatting perspective, I think that you would potentially have the opportunity to have a bunch of controversial quote unquote "speakers" who maybe live a little bit on the edge or have a really defined piece as long as you let people kind of choose to go the way they are, as opposed looking for the desired result of having a vanilla speaker speak down in the middle. It's like well what if we you did this style that Thuy is remembering being resonant and saying give people an opportunity to see these points of view. So it may be break some out of their echo chamber and allows them to choose their own adventure.

Nick Borelli:

I was at a show in Washington D.C. Last year and it was a very red room. It was a very Republican room and they had this former DNC chair as a lunch keynote. And they just did a Q and A and they were basically calling her and her party to task on things. And it was fascinating cause it was like they put the person who the things exactly opposite of them in the room and they had a dialogue back and forth and it was really interesting from a perspective of, Oh yeah, they didn't just take one of their own and put them in the room and then just preach to the choir. They really had a dialogue that was pretty raw and pretty fun.

Will Curran:

That's what I was thinking is like the big goal, ultimately, with these controversial speakers is just yeah, break people out of echo chambers and get people a different viewpoint but maybe-

Nick Borelli:

But not crass.

Will Curran:

Also, make sure that to have someone who can speak to the topic and is not a non authority, that'd be like someone trying to hire me to go talk about like bio-sciences and be like, Oh we're going to get some controversial named Will, but he knows nothing about bio sciences.

Nick Borelli:

I just think it's stunt casting. I think that there's people that are maybe sometimes brought on things because they have large platforms and they've gained their large platforms by being controversial. But all they really want is the large platform because they use them as a marketing piece and not as the actual content. And I know a number of shows where I'm looking at the keynote and I'm like, wait a minute, what is the show about? Why are they speaking there? And it's because you know their name.

Will Curran:

A lot of times too, like I think like Gary V. is a good example of this. He used to... I, honestly, there's some things I really love about Gary V. There's things I absolutely hate but people like it, cause he cusses and he's controversial and he'll call people on their shit. But then sometimes I sit there, I'm like, what's really the value that I'm getting that I can't get from YouTube or something. I don't know, like he...

Nick Borelli:

I don't know. I agree with him. I liked him for a while and then I got to a point where I'm like, he's not talking to me anymore. He is a person that is brought on because he's a known quantity. And like if you want, if you have anything to do with small business or marketing or sales or something like that, there's a small group and I don't know how many times in total I've seen Seth Godin, Simon Sinek, and Gary V, but it's been a bunch for all three. And they will continue to be those people because they're safe because they're known quantities and because they bring their own kind of, what do you call, gravity to them.

Nick Borelli:

So they're a marketing move in addition to their... I mean, their content as Seth Godin especially, is good. It's not terrible. His is, I think, exceptional amongst those three. But more than that, they are a marketing move. You invest this much money and you should get this much out of it. So like sometimes controversial speakers, it's a PR thing where they're like, look they have an audience or people will talk about this. And to me, working in experienced design like that's not what I care about. I care about the impact on the attendee and like if it's a bait and switch then I feel bad about it. If I got... And the retention numbers probably will show that it's not a strong strategy.

Thuy Diep:

And it just... Is it worth the sacrifice? Because reading these articles is it worth it to have those like #boycott see you guys going back to Ivanka. Because I think at the end of the day it is that balance. It is like, okay, is it worth taking that risk? Because from the females who are in the tech industry that like their feedback was, it's an insult. These are the people. Like this woman is going to represent us and there's a small amount of us and we're trying to progress and head towards this direction. I think that it's just figuring out in anything when, when you are sourcing that speaker, is it... Okay, going back to the marketing, is it substan... And we were trying to get people more engaged. It's just... Everyone has to realize there's a sacrifice to that. And is that in this case, was it worth the lack of representation?

Will Curran:

Yeah, I think it's worth it. I don't think they're going to, I don't think CES is going to see a speck of damage from this in the big picture. I think outrage culture is a flash in the pan. And I think we get to be upset for a minute and by the time CES rolls around next year, we're going to be excited about the new flying robot that makes our coffee and we're going to forget all about this. And I think they know that. And I think they're not the business that they are because they make uncalculated moves. I don't think this is one of the largest gatherings in the world and with the biggest and brightest of business and every CEO that matters in the tech industry around the world is making moves that are uncalculated. So you better believe they put a lot of thought to this and I am sure that boycott CES, the hashtag is ended or ending and you won't see it again.

Nick Borelli:

I think you will see it again. I think you'll see it every year for something different.

Will Curran:

Now it's set a bit of a... The eyes are on them now.

Will Curran:

Precedent for why you should boycott.

Nick Borelli:

This isn't the first time they've had that. Like the manel thing brought up the same hashtag literally this is just an annual thing. It's just they rotate the problem around. And so like I was about to really be like, well there's one angle where maybe not. I never really liked the too big to fail argument because in a time now where it takes very little to organize around values, and to get people together to create change and optics are so important. And they're almost like fashion at this point. I think that there is all these like institutions are all on shaky ground regardless of how powerful they are and how smart they are. Just if it takes the right kind of like, it says something if you're not at this thing.

Nick Borelli:

If the right female founders all put together their own show that it was like that. And then if everyone felt the political pressure of not being involved in that show that I could see that a momentum of a parallel show in the U.S. To compete with that could potentially come up. That said, you're right, the news cycle is so short. People already found out about this.

Will Curran:

And in this case this is a male dominated industry as well. So it's not like there's this huge-

Dustin Westling:

But it's a progressive dominated too. So I agree that it's that, but the males do want to, even in the most cynical way, look like they're more woke. And maybe they are, and probably



percentage wise they probably are higher. So while, again, like Google's like, we don't have the workforce, we can prove it to you, but we don't want to stop there. We're going to create the workforce at age five and six and create these educational... We're not just saying, look, this is not our fault. We did inherit the problems. They're like, we're going to dig deep and create it. So like this is the same kind of industry that fixes things. So I don't know, honestly. But the one thing that you said that really resonated with me that changed my mind a lot was people are already on a heading and the next thing you know, so I mean you could make a calculated risk if you're a really smart PR person to know this will piss off certain amount of people for a certain amount of radio activity of time. And then it'll just dissipate to nothing.

Dustin Westling:

And I think if you're positioning yourself to change, so if you're saying, yes, we acknowledge that we need to do better and we need to change, then what better way than to put such a spotlight on it because the eyes are going to be on this show to do better next year and to... And my guess is they're going to and they're going to actually get noted for doing it as opposed to the quiet pressure that was there before.

Will Curran:

Well Dustin, I think that's a great way to wrap up on a happy note rather than us just bashing them. I think you guys bring up a good point that maybe we'll see to the future of CES 2021 where #boycott CES is because someone developed a robot that's going to take over the world. So be prepared everyone, there always be one next thing. But we do want to start wrapping this one up guys. So thank you so much, Nick, Dustin, Thuy for joining on this lovely conversation about controversial speakers.

Will Curran:

All right guys. Well we're going to start wrapping on up. So if you are listening to this week's Event Brew, make sure to head on over to [EventBrew.com](https://EventBrew.com). Sign up to get the show notes, the links to all the resources, all the articles that we share that deep dive into this a little bit further, transcripts. And also if you're listening to this on a platform you don't like, that's where all of our links to subscribe are Spotify, PocketCasts, all the things right there. Speaking of those platforms, make sure to give us a review. We really want to hear from you, even if you hate us and you want to totally just knock on us. Can you please give us a review right on the Apple podcast store or in Google Play or on Spotify. We want to hear from you. Also, if you do really love us, this helps people find our podcast and we want people to find out about our controversial topics that we have.

Will Curran:

So let us know also what you think a contact us. You can do that two ways on social media #Event Brew or you can also all tag us on our accounts and let us know. We love hearing from you. We respond to every comment. I'm impressed, these guys are like so good about staying on top of every single comment you guys send us. But if you also have a specific topic in mind or you have a question that you don't want to necessarily blast out on social media, you can

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Thuy Diep:

Bye.

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