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VARIETY PACK

Episode 17: Our Favorite Things – Part II

Introduction: You are listening to the Slack Variety Pack. A collection of stories about work, life, and everything in between. Brought to you by Slack. If you don't know what Slack is head over to Slack.com and change your working life forever. On this episode, more fabulous podcast recommendations from the team at Slack to keep your ears occupied well into the New Year, and some favorite Variety Pack stories from 2015.

Male 1: Slack Variety Pack?

Male 2: Yeah.

Male 1: Cool.

Host: Making work less worky.

Evie: Hi, I'm Evie. I work at Slack on the editorial team. My favorite podcast is Doug Loves Movies.

Doug: My name is Doug and I love movies.

Evie: It is the comedian Doug Benson, and he has a panel of anywhere from 3 to, he's even done it with like 10 comedians, actors, people who can be entertaining, and they talk about movies. Then they play games about movies, so it's almost like a game show. It's sometimes unexpected people. There are some regulars like John [Hamp 00:01:09].

John: Name calling is going to get you nowhere, Paul. I'm just ashamed.

Evie: Then you also get to know comedians that you might not know as well through this. Sometimes it'll be someone like a comedian, Dan Van Kirk, who comes in, who does an incredible Mark Wahlberg impersonation.

Dan: I was like, "Hey, you know what? I'm a movie star, but I can do a comedy too, okay?"

Evie: That will happen like every couple of episodes. Yeah, it's just a really fun kind of thing that you can just listen to over and over again because the conversation never gets too heavy, or too emotional, or anything like that. Yeah, that's my recommendation.

Host: Doug Benson from Doug Loves Movies sounds like a pretty connected guy, but he's no Ashton Kutcher.

Ashton Reporter: Kevin Bacon. Famous for his dance steps in Footloose. Famous for fighting sand snakes in Tremors. Famous for his basketball coaching in The Air Up There. Well, maybe not that last one, but he is famous for his game, the Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon Game. If you don't already know it, it's where you can connect any

Hollywood celebrity back to Kevin Bacon in six easy steps through their film credits. But did you know that Silicon Valley has its own celebrity connection game? It's called the Six Degrees of Ashton Kutcher.

The rules are basically the same. In six easy steps you can connect any celebrity investor to Ashton Kutcher through their investment portfolio. I'll show you what I mean, starting with Nicki Minaj. Nicki Minaj invested in a French picture messaging app called Pleek with P. Diddy. P. Diddy invested in a chat website called Tiny Chat. Tiny Chat was also invested by Justin Bieber. Justin Bieber invested in Spotify, but so did his manager Scooter Brawn. Scooter Brawn invested in a health and music company called BioBeats, which is also backed by Will Smith. Will Smith invested in [Videy 00:03:27] the failed Instagram for video app with Jay Z, and Jay Z invested in the Uber for private planes called Black Jet with Ashton Kutcher. Nicki Minaj to Ashton Kutcher in six easy investments.

Let's try another round, starting with Jonah Hill. Jonah Hill is an investor in the Silicon Valley loved coffee retailer Phil's Coffee. Now, Phil's Coffee is also backed by hip hop legend Nas. Now, Nas is an interesting one because he has invested in over 31 companies, and was an early investor in Drop Box with Bono. Now, Bono loves his coffee too and has given some money to the other Silicon Valley loved coffee chain Blue Bottle Coffee. Blue Bottle Coffee also gets money from Jared Leto, and Jared Leto is an investor in Reddit. Reddit loves to get high and count dollars with Snoop Dogg. Snoop Dogg helped get the app Secret off the ground along with NFL Hall of Fame legend Joe Montana, and Joe Montana invests in a flower delivery company called Bloom That with, you guessed it, Ashton Kutcher. Jonah Hill to Ashton Kutcher in six easy payments.

Now, for my final trick I will connect Kevin Bacon to Ashton Kutcher. Kevin Bacon lost millions when he invested with Bernie Madoff. Now, Bernie Madoff also ripped off legendary venture capitalist Arthur Rock, who was an early investor in Apple. Now, Arthur Rock was played by JK Simmons in the 2013 film adaptation of Steve Job's life Jobs, and Steve Jobs was played by Ashton Kutcher. Kevin Bacon to Ashton Kutcher in less than six easy steps. Proving that Ashton Kutcher really is the Kevin Bacon of the tech world.

- Mari: Hi, I'm Mari. I'm on the product marketing team at Slack and one of my favorite podcasts is Women of the Hour.
- Lena Dunham: Welcome to Women of the Hour. I'm Lena Dunham, and I am a delicate flower.
- Mari: Talk about really great topics that have to do with women today. She always has some really great guests.
- Amy Sedaris : Hi, I'm Amy Sedaris, and I'm sitting here talking to Todd Oldham at his studio.
- Todd Oldham: Are we going to only speak in low FM voices throughout this entire thing?

Amy Sedaris : Yes. Yeah, that's a terrific idea.

Mari: She had this one woman in one of their recent episodes named Mindy who is a skateboarder, really cool girl overall, and then at the end she kind of dropped in, "By the way, her legs are amputated."

Mindy: I get angry, and what I really want to do is be sarcastic and annoying. Like, "I just lost my legs in the parking lot." I'm just coming in here and I'm shorter than you. There's no trauma around that.

Mari: It's just really awesome people.

Host: Slack, working better together. This episode is chock full of great podcast recommendations, but have you ever stopped to think, "Where does the word podcast actually come from?" Well, we dug into that earlier this year and found the inventor of the term.

Ben Hammersley: I have seen lots of articles which say, "Well, it's podcast for play on demand cast," or something like that. They say it was invented by an Apple branding agency, where it was just written by a slight hair journalist with a couple of minutes left until the newspaper went off stone and I had to stretch an article out.

My name is Ben Hammersley. I'm a writer, and consultant, and speaker about the internet, and I'm here with my 7 month old daughter Ripley. You might hear her in the background. I invented the word podcast.

It was in an article in The Guardian, the newspaper in the UK, which I wrote for at the time. It was an article about this new phenomenon in 2004 of the automatically downloading audio program that you could subscribe to using an RSS reader. I wrote it very late one afternoon, and it was coming up close to a deadline. If you've ever written for newspapers you'll know that the final deadline on a newspaper it's extraordinarily hard deadline. You literally cannot go past that deadline, and I managed to get a piece in pretty early on in the afternoon, and then I got an e-mail from one of the copy editors with about 5 or 10 minutes to go before the papers went off stone where they said, "The article is about 20 words short, and we don't have time to redesign the page or anything. So can you write us an extra couple of sentences please?" To make sure the article fit the page. I had a few minutes to do it, so I just pulled out sort of a nonsense sentence really, and threw it into the middle of it, which was something, "But what shall we call this phenomenon?" Then I made up 3 or 4 silly words, and the last one, I think, was podcast.

That went into the paper, and I didn't really think anything more about it. 6 or 8 months later I had an e-mail from the Oxford English Dictionary saying, "In this article your wrote for The Guardian, where did you get this word podcast?" I had to tell them that I had sort of made it up, and I felt slightly ashamed about

that fact. When the dictionary says, "Where did you find this word?" To say that you made it up seems somewhat presumptuous. They said that they felt that was the case as well because they hadn't found any previous citations of it, and, "Congratulations it was 2004 word of the year!" I think it's a perfectly crumbly line word. That was kind of it. You don't get a certificate. You don't get any acknowledgement from Apple or anything like that.

Now, what happens is I speak about it at conferences, and corporate events, and stuff around the world about different things, and it's one of the lines that people like to introduce me by. "Here's our new speaker," blah, blah, blah, "and he invented the word podcast." For certain types of audience, certain people, that always gets a big, "Oooo," from the crowd. Everybody thought that audio was dying, and in fact we found it to be completely the opposite. The podcast thing is the perfect medium for the modern age.

Matt: I'm Matt [Kump 00:10:48]. I'm a product designer at Slack. I really like Eleven Radio. Very deep material for a podcast. It explores all sorts of different things regarding sex, drugs, corners of the Earth you wouldn't normally get, and really delves into stories of real people who lived through this stuff. Everything from online dominatrixes to people who have been committed of sex offense, and are working for sex offenders rights, and because it's a podcast there's no holds barred. There's nobody to really restrict what they talk about. I really like the show called My Brother, My Brother, and Me.

Male 3: My Brother, my brother, and me.

Matt: It's 3 brothers.

Male 3: Another boring night of staring at each other.

Matt: By the McElroy brothers and they just give advice to people. People write in with their questions and they also take in Yahoo! Answers questions ...

Male 3: I'm a sophomore in high school and want to throw a party. My parents are kind of strict, but please give me ideas and advice to get them out of the house so I can have a party. Don't?

Matt: ... that weren't sent in for them to be very serious about, but they give really, really humorous responses to them. Very long too, so it's a nice long one to go on your transit.

There's a podcast called Selected Shorts, which is real actors coming in and reading short stories. Rather than acting out the story itself, just presenting the short story in a way that they're very good at doing. These can be either short stories you haven't heard of that are from new and upcoming writers, or they can be cherished and old short stories. Each episode kind of follows a theme. They have 2 to 3 stories read live on stage, and it's a really good way to get a

story from somebody who can really express it rather than just reading it on paper.

Male 4: They stopped talking, but I could hear them moving. They made sounds. Can we have some sugarplums?

Matt: It's kind of like the same reason that it's nice to have somebody read to you rather than you read to yourself, but you can have that like every week on a podcast. They're really, really well-written stories and really well-performed by the actors.

Host: Matt also throws a shout out to the Truth, Slates: The Gist, and Comedy Bang Bang. He had so many good podcasts to recommend we could barely squeeze all of them in. The kids in our next piece have their own version of shout out in the form of an open letter to their grandparents.

Kid 1: Dear Grandma ...

Kid 2: Dear Granddad ...

Kid 3: Dear Grandma ...

Kid 1: It's me, your Granddaughter.

Kid 2: It's me, your Grandson. I have a bad news.

Kid 1: You are using the internet wrong again.

Kid 3: Again.

Kid 2: Again.

Kid 3: Remember when you asked me last weekend why I don't reply back to your e-mails?

Kid 1: It's because I never use e-mail.

Kid 2: No one my age ever uses e-mails, ever.

Kid 3: Ever.

Kid 1: Ever. You asking me why I don't reply to your e-mail is like someone asking you why you have not replied back to their telegrams.

Kid 3: In the future, if you'd like to get in touch your best bet is to DM or tag me on Instagram.

Kid 1: Or shoot me a message on WhatsApp.

Kid 2: Talk to you soon, but not on e-mail.

Kid 3: But not on e-mail.

Kid 1: But not on e-mail.

AOL Guy: You've got mail!

Lima: Hi, I'm Lima. I'm a writer here at Slack. I was really struck earlier in the year when I found out there was a podcast called

Taz: Good Muslim Bad Muslim.

Lima: It's produced and hosted by-

Taz: This is Taz.

Zahra: This is Ara.

Lima: They're 2 good friends. They're artists and activists, and both Muslim American women. It's really interesting they sort of look at this perceptions of identity around what it means to be a Muslim having grown up in North America. Sort of one of them is the good Muslim.

Zahra: I don't eat pork. I don't drink Muslim, but I go cray.

Taz: What about the premarital sex part?

Lima: She follows the rules of the faith quite faithfully, and then the other is sort of the bad Muslim.

Taz: I identify as the pork eating, alcohol drinking, premarital sex having kind of Muslim.

Lima: It's really interesting because they take this sort of very, very complex set of ideas and they unpack them, but they do it sort of brazenly and really unapologetically. It's filled with humor. It comes out once a month, and it's always pretty topical, so in times like ours right now it's sort of a nice way of have a little bit of education around that experience in North American culture and what it's like to grow up with so many dualities to your identity. My favorite segments are-

Taz: The Good Muslim Award.

Lima: Every month they feature a good Muslim or someone who is very representative of the faith. They also have a segment called Creeping Sharia. It's where they sort of poke fun at ironic Islamophobic representation of Muslims in American media and politics. It's a really informative podcast, but still somehow takes a really serious topic and makes it lighthearted and really approachable to listen to. For me, personally, it's just been interesting because I always used to say I'm a bad Muslim and now it's this joke that's sort of bigger than I am in and then just my own experience, which it's really nice to identify with.

Host: You're listening to the Slack Variety Pack, and on this episode we're hearing from some of the team at Slack recommending their favorite podcasts. We're also playing some of our most popular stories from 2015. One of our favorites is an interview we did with artist and illustrator Christoph Neimann about his creative process. We especially love how he likes to see a different perspective of the world by literally tilting his head sideways.

Christoph: Hello, my name is Christoph Neimann. I'm an illustrator, an author, and artist. I draw, and write, and animate for The New York Times, for The New Yorker. I do books and kids apps.

Host: You may not know Christoph Neimann by name, but chances are you've seen his work. Your kids may have even played with the whimsical animals on his iOS app Petting Zoo. In fact, much of Christoph's work is playful and humorous. He looks at the world by tilting his head and the illustrated results are not just fun, they capture a simple elegance and joy of everyday things and experiences. We talk to him on a busy New York Street, and he shares his wisdom on something he calls creative pain.

Christoph: Creative pain is like your constant companion, and I think that what it is, is that, of course, the idea of creation means that you are doing something that isn't there yet. You base it on your experience and your routine, but ultimately you have to create something out of thin air more or less, and that is always scary and daunting. The more you rely on things you already know, the more boring the outcome. I think the more you can free yourself from your past experiences the greater the chance is that it's going to be something great, but it's a very scary process. In these moments there's a lot of failure, a lot of frustration because a lot of things just don't work out, and it's just never fun.

Host: When it comes to the notion of failure, Christoph doesn't believe in sugarcoating.

Christoph: There's all this talk with, failure's important and failure's good. Failure stinks. It's great when you then end up having that good idea at the end, but more often than not it's like you actually don't come up with a good idea. You just kind of come up with something second rate, and the failure's not necessarily an important step trying to go towards that. It's just failure.

Host: Besides his magazine cover illustrations, Christoph also does long form story telling through images and words, like his blog for The New York Times Magazine called Abstract Sunday. There he presents pictorial essays about modern society, politics, and culture using everyday objects like candy or Lego as the creative impetus for his drawings.

Christoph: The process for my Abstract Sunday sketching piece to take an object, to look at it without any preconceived ideas. I'm not saying, "Oh, I'm gonna do a brain, so I'm looking for broccoli because I think that's going to look like it," but really taking a piece of broccoli and then just really staring at it from such an odd angle until you actually see something that's not kind of imaginable from the get go.

I did one thing with a tangerine. It was like right after the holidays, and I was just like sitting there thinking, "I have to come up with something." I was staring at that thing and all it is, is just big, and orange, and bloated, and felt like, "Oh, actually I've eaten far too much food." I looked at it and made this guy sitting on a chair with his belly just sticking out. Breaking out of his pants with his belt open being obviously exhausted from having too many celebratory dinners.

I did another thing where I had this pair of bananas, and of course there's so many obvious things you can do with a banana. Whether it's a moon, or a smile, or something. I looked it so long until all the sudden I saw a horses behind in there. Again, a very complicated drawing to actually make that works a very odd angle in these 2 bananas, but I guess it worked.

Host: One last piece of advice. How to be your most productive self.

Christoph: In my experience the best thing you can do is having sustainable, 5 days a week, 8 hour work day. If you really manage to get 6 hours in one day of concentrated, real, thinking, editing, drawing, coding ... 6 hours for 5 days, this I think is more productive than 99.9% of all people. Not e-mailing, not checking Twitter if you have any like, but real quality 6 hours that's the best you can possibly hope for. I think that only works if you're really trying to be very steady about it, and being very alert of when you're having a good moment.

Host: Check out Abstract Sunday's Instagram page, or for his fuller portfolio follow Christoph Neimann on Tumblr.

Shandeep: Hi, my name is Shandeep Sharma. I'm a project manager here at Slack. A good podcast to recommend? It's not terribly famous, but it's one that I listen to a lot when I'm commuting to work. It's called ...

Grace: Not Too Deep.

Shandeep: Which is hosted by Grace Helbig. She's a YouTube star and she is my spirit animal in a human form. It's just a fun podcast where she has a ton of fun with

her friends, with different people that are in her industry. I think my favorite episode, and the reason I got hooked onto it, was an episode she did with her gay best friend.

Grace: Tyler Oakley.

Shandeep: Who is another YouTube star, who's really big. I don't know. Just the way they talked about being gay ... Well, he's gay. She's not. Just about acceptance and openness to people, and I really identified with that because I come from a background which isn't as accepting on that front for me. It made me laugh. It made me cry. I would recommend that because it has a high level of hilarity, but also isn't too deep.

Breese: Hi, my name is Breese Roach, and I work at Slack in field marketing and events. The podcast that I'm going to recommend is ...

Female 1: This is Death, Sex and Money.

Breese: I just love it because one, it's a female host and she just does a really great job talking about subjects that everyone thinks about every day, like death, sex, and money. It's not necessarily polite to talk about.

Female 1: It's still something we don't talk about at all.

Breese: She brings up really interesting case studies of people.

Female 1: It gets really exciting.

Breese: Who've actually been through really crazy experiences, and I just love hearing people postulate about it. Plus I think hearing people's funny sex stories definitely because ...

Female 1: She's with a much younger woman.

Breese: ... even my friends don't tell me theirs, so you get some dirt.

Host: The team at Slack are not only avid podcast listeners, they also like to crack a good dad joke every once in a while. In fact one staffer is a master of the pun. Food truck owners, this one's for you.

Marc: My name is Marc Christian. I work on the web app team at Slack. I came up with my first food truck pun by accident. I was watching Terminator 2 and Arnold says of course, "Hasta la vista, baby!" I'm like, "Boy, Pasta La Vista, Baby would be a really good food truck name."

Male 5: Pasta la vista, baby.

Marc: Then it just kind of snowballed onward. I started seeing puns everywhere. They actually come to me at the weirdest times. Last week I was walking along the waterfront in San Francisco and I saw an ad for fresh Dungeness crab and I was like, "Oh, Dungeness Liaisons, that would be a really classy food truck name." I think pun like names work for some places, but you probably don't really want your dentist to have a pun. Funeral homes, probably not a great pun sort of growth business. It really depends on whether the concept is inherently absurd. That's what makes a good pun is the absurdity of the situation, and getting pretty good food out of the back of a gross diesel is inherently a ridiculous situation.

Male 6: Faster Pussycat Grill, Grill. The Feast and the Furious. Stupendous, All Stews No Soups. The Crepes of Wrath.

Marc: Puns are derided as being the lowest form of humor. I don't know why people call puns dad jokes. My dad has never made a pun in his life. Also, I am not a dad. It makes me a little bit sad when people say that they don't like puns. I think that just means that they don't get it or they don't see why anyone would ever find it funny. Love the puns.

Male 6: License to Grill. Kale Caesar. Get Quiche or Die Trying. Tofu Think You Can Dance?

Marc: I think puns use your brain in a really creative way. They let you look at the world from 2 angles. You see what the person's actually saying and then you see also, "Oh, it's funny because it rhymes with this '80s movie that nobody's ever heard of." I like that. I like the duality. It's deep thoughts on food trucks.

Male 6: What About Kabob? Pancakes One to Know One. The Peas Corps. Slogan: Give Peas a Chance. Entrée the Giant. I Pita the Fool.

Marc: No food trucks, as far as I know have used any of my suggestions, but I would be honored if they ever did.

Male 6: The Nonstop Naan Stop. That would be a 24/7 Indian food place.

Host: Before we wrap part 2 of our favorite things pack, let's switch gears from podcasts to music. Here are some music recommendations from this year and for the new year from Slack's resident DJ, front end engineer, and all around great person JR.

Johnny: Hi. I'm Johnny Rogers. I'm a front end engineer at Slack. I work in our Vancouver office. I'm a little bit known as the office DJ in Vancouver mostly just because I always like to listen to music out loud. When it was just a couple of us in the office we always did and it's never changed. Some of the music I loved best this year from 2015, the record I listened to probably the most by the Canadian

band Viet Cong. It just is one of those albums that grabs you, and is relentless, and sounds so good.

I was also surprised by this EP by Gabriel Garzon-Montano called Bishoune. I guess he got sampled by Drake, and so he kind of bubbled up in people's feeds. It's just this perfect little EP kind of like a Motown, soul, throwback, but with really nice production. The first track in particular is one of my favorite songs of the year.

Finally, I listened to Unknown Mortal Orchestra's album Multi Love a ton this year. They're one of those bands that just keeps getting better. Just a bunch of quirky really good songs. Great album for a party or for just working away on your own.

2016, I think this is the year that we're finally going to hear J. Paul's album drop. It's been rumored for 5 years. We've all got the leaked copy of it, which sounds terrible but amazing at the same time because the songs are so good. Every single that's come out is perfect. He's like the Prince of electronic music. He's just waiting for the right time to come out with his album. Happy New Year from Slack, and I hope you have another great year listening to fantastic music on the internet.

Male 7: Have a Happy New Year. Have a great New year. Have a wonderful New Year.

Host: Okay, one big one.

Male 7: Happy New Year! Here's to a prosperous, healthy 2016. Have a great New Year.

Group: Happy New Year!

Host: See you in 2016.

Male 1: Slack.

Host: Making work less worky.