

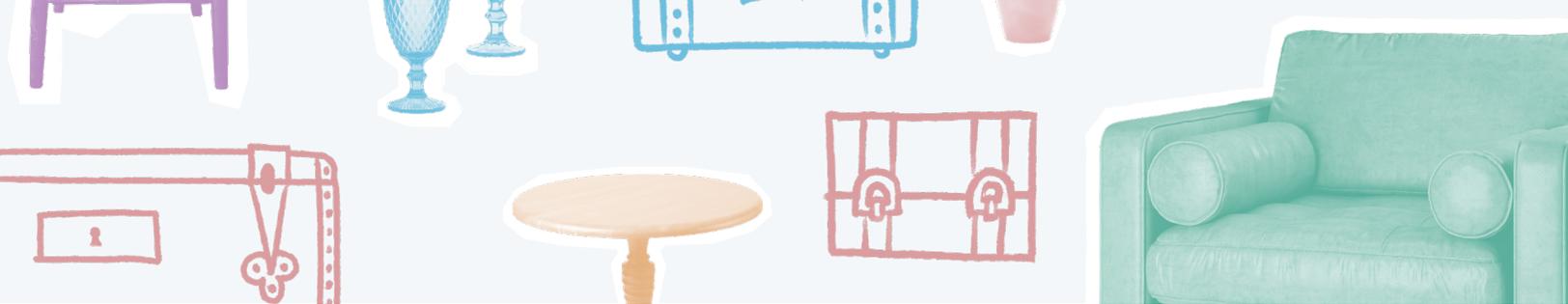
*The*  
**TRUNK  
SHOW**

*With* RW ELEPHANT

SEASON 4 EPISODE 1



**“A BRAND IDENTITY THAT ATTRACTS  
THE CLIENTS YOU WANT AND THE  
TEAM YOU NEED” WITH ASHTON  
POLLOCK, FOUNDER OF BESPOKE  
DECOR**



**WELCOME BACK TO THE TRUNK SHOW,**  
hosted by Allison Howell and brought to you by RW  
Elephant. We're kicking off our fourth season with **Ashton  
Pollock of Bespoke Decor**, talking about creating and  
maintaining a brand identity throughout years of growth.

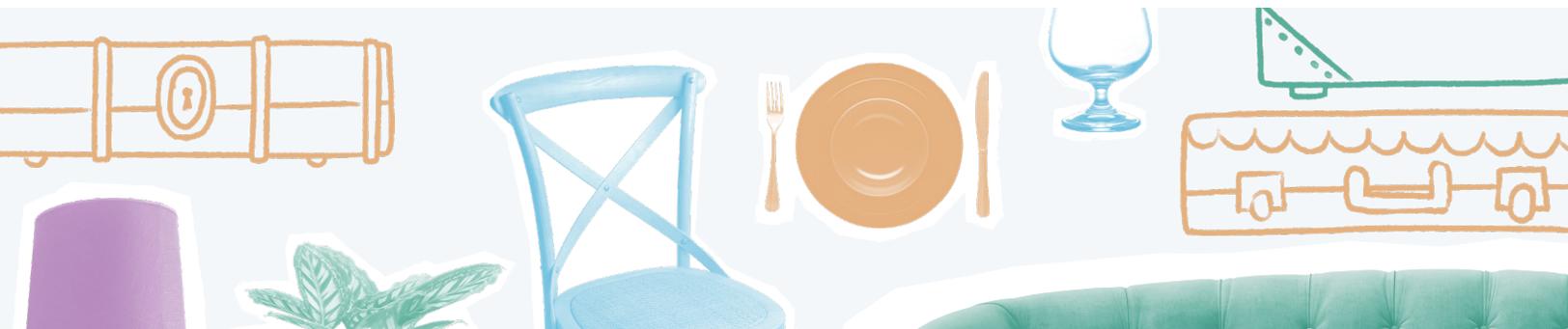


Ashton Pollock is the founder of Bespoke Decor — a design-forward event rental company based in Vancouver, BC. What started 12 years ago with a few vintage finds has grown into one of Vancouver's leading rental companies. Today, Bespoke is powered by a tight-knit, woman-led team



### **What's in this episode**

- Best practices for creating culture
- Handling conflict within your team
- Being self-aware as a leader
- Trusting your company to your people
- Setting yourself apart with branding



## QUOTES:

“People know what they're doing here. They're good at what they do because the environment has been set up to learn and to grow and to do these things and to give freedom to make decisions.”

- Ashton Pollock

“If you were to strip everything back, you just have to simply respect and be kind to the people that you are with, even in moments of frustration, and trusting their attention, trusting who they are as a person, and communicating as frequently as possible.”

- Ashton Pollock

“I just don't understand when people say, oh, it's not personal. Like, \*\*\*\* that, it's personal. Of course it's personal. It is my entire livelihood.”

- Ashton Pollock

“I have a rule. I'm not allowed in the building if I'm a 'Stressy Bessy.' I have to check myself. If I'm a 'Stressy Bessy,' I work from home. Because I'll project. I know I will. And that's not what I want.”

- Ashton Pollock

“It takes a lot of, “Nope, you know what? I'm not going to say anything right now. I'm going to shower. I'm going to reset. I'm going to have a sleep, and then tomorrow I'm going to know what to do.” But it can be tempting to be like, X, Y, and Z has happened. We're going to talk about this right now, but that's never the best case.”

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“So I am a lover of change, baby. I really like to see things change. So we have rebranded every two years pretty loyally.”

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“Everything has been a pain in my \*\*\* at some point. Team included, inventory, trucks, whatever it is. But at the end of the day, like I've met some of the people in my life that will be there until I'm a little old lady carrying around a chair. And that is just a gift in itself.”

- Ashton Pollock

## Episode Transcription:

**Intro:** Hello and welcome to season 4 of the Trunk Show. I'm your host, Allison Howell, and I'm so excited to share more event rental business wisdom from some amazing rental pros this season.

The show is brought to you by RW Elephant, mighty inventory management software designed to help you conquer the chaos in your event rental business and reclaim your creativity because the world needs more of the beautiful events and environments you create.

Our first guest this season is Ashton Pollock, founder of Bespoke Rentals in British Columbia, Canada. We chat about creating a brand identity from the ground up and how to maintain that brand throughout years of growth.

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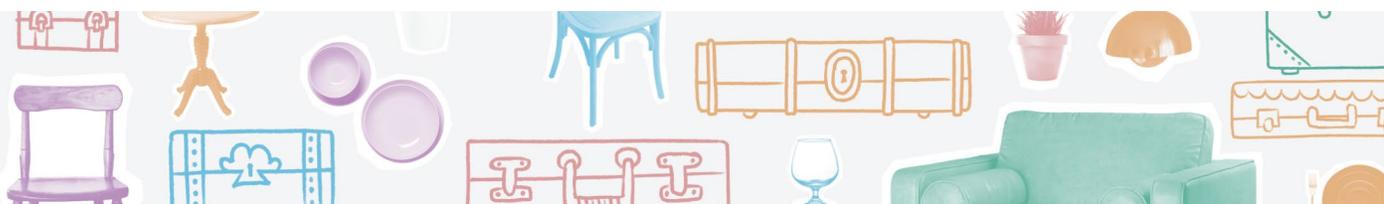
**Allison Howell:** Well, you've grown your rental business from the ground up, and you've navigated a whole lot of challenges along the way. How many warehouse spaces have you had along your adventures?

**Ashton Pollock:** So it started in my mom's garage, then a storage locker, then I shared the front showroom of a warehouse, and then I moved into the back of that warehouse, then across the place into our own teeny tiny one. And then we were in a couple demo buildings because Vancouver doesn't have a ton of industrial space. And so they're kind of taking it over for new condos and things to go up. So we're kind of moving around based on that too. 7, 8, 8. If you include my mom's garage.

**Allison Howell:** So what were you looking for in your first space? Outside of your mom's garage? I think when you were in your mom's garage, you're mostly looking for a place to keep your stuff. But as soon as you were trying to move out of that, what were you looking for? Was it just space? Was it convenience? Was it something dry? What was the objective?

**Ashton Pollock:** The first one, honestly, I wanted to be in Vancouver. I wanted to be within City Bounds. But other than that, I think I was just so excited. I actually didn't really care. It was like a mishmash. It had a really teeny, like 3 teeny tiny offices that we would store candles in. And then we were able to fit one rack downstairs. And it was just really Lois and I at the time. So it was great, but I don't remember looking for anything specific. Once we had moved a few times, and of course we have a checklist of like, we need this for that and this for that and access to whichever.

**Allison Howell:** What are some of those this's?





**Allison Howell:** Yeah, and it seems like you said you've kind of had to throw a lot of rules of thumb out the window since COVID happened. In the event industry, it was like, okay, 2020 hit, you kind of had to just like, everybody held on to see who would survive. And then once survival happened, then there was the rush of events, right? So everyone who was still standing, then was like, who can survive through the recovery time of all the events trying to catch up? And then there's been this lull of like, okay, all the events happened. Now no one's having events or everyone's sort of waiting to see what happens. And so everybody's kind of in a spot right now saying what's happening next? And the question is still open, right? So what does that make you think as far as your future growth? Are you kind of in an optimistic place? Are you sort of thinking like, oh, there's nowhere to go but up? Or are you in a kind of tentative place? Like, oh, I'm not sure. So I'm not committing a lot or somewhere in between.

**Ashton Pollock:** I'm usually in an optimistic place. I like it here. It feels good to be in an optimistic place. I think that certainly can vary by the day. Like certain days I'll be like, oh, that feels bad. But overall, I do believe in what we do. And I believe that we have a unique thing we offer to our clients and offer to our community. So I really do trust in that. I rely on that. I rely on the work ethic of the people that are in this building. Like if we can make it through what we made it through, oh, please, nothing can take us down now. It's just a matter of trusting in that enough that when things start to sway, it's not so, freaky. But there's a bit of a plan in place for high end, low end.

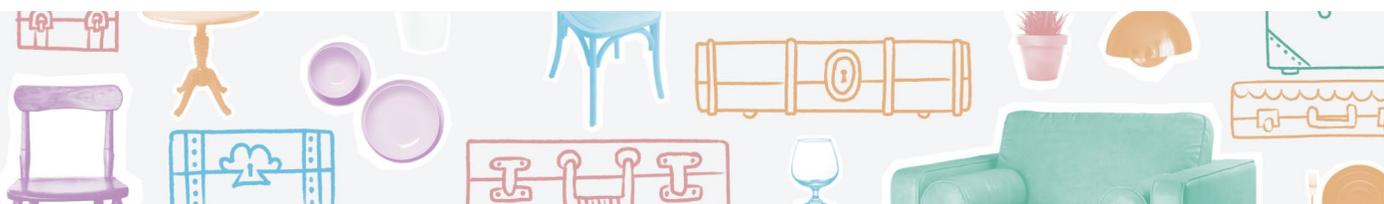
**Allison Howell:** Tell me how many employees you have now.

**Ashton Pollock:** We have 18 full-time now. And then we go up in the summer, we hire our seasonal crews. So that could double.

**Allison Howell:** Leading a team can be quite a big challenge, but it seems like you've been really intentional about building a thriving culture at Bespoke. What practices do you have in place that have really created the culture that you have?

**Ashton Pollock:** If you were to strip everything back, you just have to simply respect and be kind to the people that you are with, even in moments of frustration, and trusting their attention, trusting who they are as a person, and communicating as frequently as possible. Never letting anything build up, never letting resentment get there, speaking your mind, feeling like you have a seat at the table to speak your mind when you need to. I think that those are all really important things.

We just went through a really challenging time in terms of layoffs. We just did two rounds of layoffs and that was a new thing for me because we'd been in this really good place of growth and the team could see that it was growing and all of that. And it just got to this







**Ashton Pollock:** So. It takes a lot of, nope, you know what? I'm not going to say anything right now. I'm going to shower. I'm going to reset. I'm going to have a sleep, and then tomorrow I'm going to know what to do. But it can be tempting to be like, X, Y, and Z has happened. We're going to talk about this right now, but that's never the best case.

**Allison Howell:** Okay, this is kind of a little bit of a different take, but still employee related. Have you ever had a situation where you knew you didn't have the right person in the right seat and you knew that was preventing the business from growing? What'd you do in that situation?

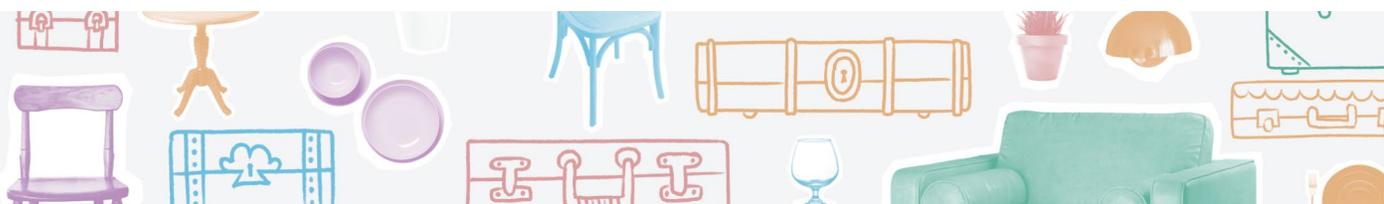
**Ashton Pollock:** Let them go pretty quick.

**Allison Howell:** Why do you think that was the right choice? Why did you, how did you eventually come to that decision?

**Ashton Pollock:** Honestly, it's happened a lot. Like I think, not in an obnoxious amount, but it's going to happen. Like we've had hundreds of people through the doors of Bespoke, so it's, we're bound to not be the right fit for somebody and vice versa. I think it comes to the confidence in myself and knowing, hey, did this person have all of the training that they needed? Did they have the resources that they needed? Did they know how to execute X, Y, and Z and still were falling short?

Or if it's a cultural thing, right? If there's a clash, if it feels like there's some new energy that's entered the room, whatever that may be, it's just clocking that, communicating where appropriate. And that's kind of, that can be a difficult thing to decide when it is appropriate to have a conversation and when it's not. If it's just straight not a good culture fit, that kind of sucks, right? Because that feels extra personal. But if it's because these really tangible things happened and that's why it's not going to work out, that's a different thing. So I've experienced both, if I'm being honest, and neither one is easier than the other.

When I really struggle with that and I start to feel like, who am I protecting? I'm protecting the people in the building that have stood by me. They've been here, they've been loyal. This person has come in and they're not a good culture fit. I'm protecting the people that have had my back, and that's kind of a good reminder for me. Not that this new person may not or they may not eventually find their place or whatnot, but these things are sensitive, right? And you want your team to be happy and you want your team to feel as though if something isn't going right or if somebody is dropping the ball, that is my responsibility to take care of. And so I want them to know that I will take care of them in that kind of abstract way.



**Allison Howell:** Yeah. Well, you know, and it's interesting because I think if you don't do something when there's an obvious situation where either someone's not meeting a standard that you've set or where somebody is kind of tanking the rest of the team, then the rest of the team feels like you aren't protecting them and you aren't valuing them. In order to maintain that, in order to value them, you have to maintain that standard.

**Ashton Pollock:** Yep. We've also, we really try to move people within the building if we can. Like if it's like, okay, this is our bad. We brought you in for this role. It turns out that that's not actually your top tier skill set. And so if we can, we move within the building. But it's not often that it really works out. But I hope it shows that there's some effort in seeing people for whatever their best skill set is that they can offer and vice versa. But it's tricky. It's really tricky stuff. It's personal.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah. Well, back in 2020, you took some extended time off. This is pre-COVID. And you did something in your business that I thought was really exciting at the time. I remember thinking how impressed I was that you were able to walk away and leave things in the hands of your team.

**Ashton Pollock:** My husband, Charlie, and I went to London for the majority of it. And then we went to Morocco for, I think, less than a week.

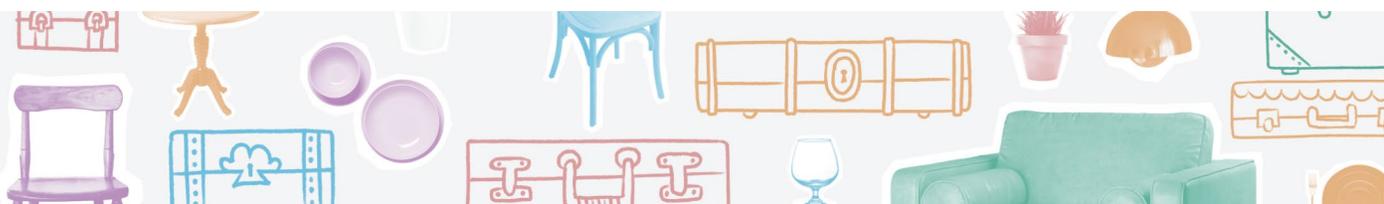
**Allison Howell:** Okay, but London. And then you were gone for several weeks, right?

**Ashton Pollock:** Yeah, we were gone for about two months.

**Allison Howell:** Okay, yeah. So most business owners don't feel the freedom to leave their business for two months. At what point did you think, oh yeah, I can leave my small business and walk away for two months?

**Ashton Pollock:** It just really comes down to who you have here. Like who I had in the building, I would have trusted with it entirely. They run the show, for sure. We have this value that we've had for since I can remember, but it's just that everybody sweeps, which means that everybody kind of has a sense of what is going on and what other people may need. And in a week that somebody needs support, how can we support them? And that kind of stuff just happens semi-organically.

So having trust in the people that are here and knowing that they've got this, and if something were to go wrong with a client, I know that it's going to be seen in a way that I would love to see it through. And even if something wasn't exactly how I would do it, cool, how'd you do it and why? That ability to trust your company to people, I think is, it's challenging. Like I know that I certainly had challenges and I still do, like every once in a



while, I'll just be like super hyper-focused and \*\*\*\* about something that is happening currently.

And I'm like, oh my gosh, no, chill. People know what they're doing here. They're good at what they do because the environment has been set up to learn and to grow and to do these things and to give freedom to make decisions. And I think that ability to make decisions and knowing that it was going to be supported is really all it takes because it's not a spooky thing to be like, oh, I did this but you're gone. I hope that's okay. You know, it's more confident than that.

**Allison Howell:** And so it sounds like that speaks a lot to how you react when people make mistakes. Not just that they do things differently than you, but when they actually screw things up.

**Ashton Pollock:** Yeah, for sure, for sure. Like it'll happen, right? So it's nothing that we can avoid. It's just a matter of the moment. Okay, cool. Anything we can immediately do to fix it? No? Okay, then let's talk about how it happened, why it happened, and what the ripple effect of this might be and what we would do differently next time. And for me, it just comes down to ownership. Like if there was a bunch of defensiveness or a bunch of it only happened because this happened. And then that person said this and this person, no, hang on. Let's strip it back. What actually happened? And if somebody's able to say, hey, I made the wrong call. This was the information that I had. I felt good about it. But as soon as it was starting to unravel, I knew I had made a mistake. Absolutely great. \*\*\*\* happens, man. I make mistakes all the time. So who am I to say like, oh, we don't make mistakes. Like, no, we do all the time. That's fine. Everything moves on.

**Allison Howell:** Did that feel good while you were away? Like was being away good? Was it like a refreshing retreat time or was it like, oh, you just felt like you were working from thousands of miles away?

**Ashton Pollock:** A little bit of both, I would say. Like this was right before COVID. Like we were coming home when the airport was selling out of hand sanitizer. So it was kind of like this weird end to it where we were like, oh gosh, like we should probably not be here. We should probably be there. And I distinctly remember Charlie and I were sitting in this Airbnb, and we were talking about what we were seeing on the news with COVID, and we both went, this could probably really affect Bespoke, actually. Oh my gosh, if I could only. So at that point, it started to feel like I needed to be back. But no, it felt really easy to trust the people that were here. And it was actually really cute when I got back. They had prepared a big taco feast and a slideshow of all of the inside jokes that I missed so that I could participate when they came up. And I was like, okay, yeah. And I learned all of these



things that people have said so that I could also joke about it. was really touching. It was really really sweet. It feels fine. Yeah. It feels good. You just got to love and trust your people.

**Allison Howell:** Talk to me about what the recipe is that you've used for building a recognizable design and rental brand.

**Ashton Pollock:** So I do work with a graphic designer you have met, Meg White. Yeah. I think you've met her, or at least virtually you've met her. Anyway, she is still here and we are working together constantly. So I am a lover of change, baby. I really like to see things change. So we have rebranded every two years pretty loyally. So we've probably done 5, 6, 7 small tweaks and updates to the website, updates to the logo and the colors and all of that kind of stuff, because I want it to be modern and I want it to still look like Bespoke. I love Starbucks branding as an example. Take it or leave it if you like Starbucks, but I do think that they have such a recognizable brand in the sense of their holiday cup, you know it from a mile away. You know it as a Starbucks cup, even though it does not have the white cup and the green mermaid, like what it is. And so I've always kind of adopted that as like we need to recognize Bespoke, but it can have all of these fun little adventures as Bespoke with this new brand, right?

So we'll kind of have our main brand and then we'll do things that are on the outside of it. And I think it's that constant change that has kept us creeping forward and kept our website relevant. And I also think that you have to consider things like people are more occupied in their brains now. TikTok is a constant movement. So it's like, okay, a website that is just static probably isn't going to hold the attention anymore because people's attention spans like movement and they like to see these things. So it's also taking that into consideration and making sure that is through all of your marketing and it's consistent and da, da, da, da. But it's a lot of fun, I will say. So maybe that's also why I really love it. It's because the branding is just so flipping fun, get to do all these new things. Are you kidding? What a good time. And Megan, I just fight constantly. It's so fun.

**Allison Howell:** Yeah, and I don't think it stops there for you, though. I mean, you've created these really memorable experiences, like the prom that you put on as a branding event. And you've sent stickers out in the mail. And I mean, it's not just a logo for you. It's a whole experience, right?

**Ashton Pollock:** Okay, listen, keep this in the podcast or not, but from one expert to another. You do very, very well at this. So I feel like you know what you're doing.

**Allison Howell:** Thank you.





And I think that is a hard thing to wrap your head around. But I think that you do it well. And I think it's an important skill to learn, even though it feels really unnatural. I do think it comes back. In some way. And that recognition and that presence, a lot of it, we've been lucky enough, has come just through being gracious with our knowledge or education of what we're doing or lending a helping hand to somebody that we could say, hey, I don't actually really need to lend a helping hand. I got my own stuff going on. That makes a huge difference in terms of people recognizing your brand and feeling relief when they see your trucks pull up. That's a big one. And I think you do that well.

**Allison Howell:** Thank you. Well, I know that what you've done in that generosity is elevate the industry. And that's one of the things that we really hope to do as well is elevate the industry.

**Ashton Pollock:** Oh, you do. You do for sure.

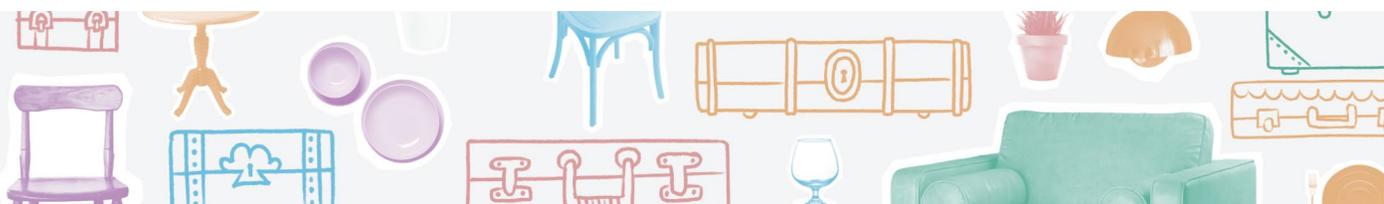
**Allison Howell:** What we want is for all of us to get better, right? Because the more we can all educate one another or say, hey, look at this inspiring thing or I was just looking through your Instagram and saying like, wow, you guys made DIY velvet ornaments. How would I do that? I got to look at that, you know?

And I thought, you know, like it's just, it's fun that you do that, but it's also inspiring and it also does help us all get better, right? And to recognize like instead of having this attitude like this is mine and I'm not going to share it, to be able to say like, hey, we want to be inspiring and helpful. Help everybody get better, like, and we want to be a resource, it can be a great way for the whole industry to get better, which is actually better for everyone.

**Ashton Pollock:** So. Oh yeah, like someone just taught us how to fold drapes better than we've been doing it. I'm like, Thank you. Oh my gosh. And you just love it. And now that person, top tier. You will get my referral every time because if you're willing to give that information to me, you're gonna treat your clients well too. So hopefully it's just a win-win in the long term.

**Allison Howell:** Okay, well I have one final question for you. It is, what do you enjoy most about your rental adventures?

**Ashton Pollock:** Oh, that's an easy one. That's the team for sure. That's so freaking easy. Everything else has been, well, no, you know what? Everything has been a pain in my \*\*\* at some point. Team included, inventory, trucks, whatever it is. But at the end of the day, like I've met some of the people in my life that will be there until I'm a little old lady carrying around a chair. And that is just a gift in itself. And I think that is another thing you don't think about. You don't think about the fact that you're about to have moving trucks and



you're going to have to figure out how to strap these things and whatever else, but you also don't think like, hey, I could actually meet somebody that becomes a very, very, very important person in my life.

Like, I... did a speech at Lois's wedding. Did I know that when I met Lois? No. But to be able to see that happen is really wonderful. And to see people gain confidence and deepen their skills and want to try something new, that's one side of it. And then just if you allow them to be wholehearted humans and their mistakes and their weirdness and their drive to do various things, it's pretty incredible what you can accomplish. So without a doubt, it's the people within the building. I marvel at them all the time that they are willing to go above and beyond in so many things and everything that they do for clients, for me, they just show up in such a way that it's impossible not to feel touched all the time. So the easy answer is the team. Everything else, it's great. I love it. But that's one that if I were to close shop and do something else, I'd want everyone to come with me. So I think that's how I know it's the right answer.

**Allison Howell:** Thank you to Ashton from Bespoke for that insight into brand identity and how a company's culture makes a difference. And thank you for listening to the Trunk Show brought to you by RW Elephant. I can't wait to dive into more event rental insights this season. Be sure to tune in next time for a new episode. As always, I'm your host, Allison Howell. Happy renting.

