CG GARAGE PODCAST #264 | EJ HASSENFRATZ
3D CREATIVE DIRECTOR, SCHOOL OF MOTION

From public broadcasting to online presenting: EJ Hassenfratz tells Chris about the path to becoming a respected Cinema 4D instructor and 3D Creative Director.

Want to learn how to do 3D in motion graphics? EJ Hassenfratz is your man. After landing on his feet in motion graphics for NBC, PBS and ABC, EJ wound up giving a presentation for Cinema 4D company Maxon, which inspired him to learn more about the software and start creating tutorials. Today, EJ works as a freelance motion designer while crafting courses for the renowned online learning platform, School of Motion.

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Chris Nichols	These are the Heil PR 40s.
EJ Hassenfratz	Man. They sound nice.
Chris Nichols	They sound good?
EJ Hassenfratz	Yeah. I just got a new microphone, what the hell were they? I forget what the. I used to have Yetis. And like they are nice. But then I got this one, it was like 125 bucks and it sounds like really nice and crisp. Which is surprising.
Chris Nichols	Yeah. These are not cheap. These are like $400, I think. But they're like, this is the thing you want to get for podcasts. This is what I first invested in. And I said, okay, here's my deal. And you and I are graphic people. We've already started recording by the way. You can ==fix bad== picture. It's hard to fix bad sounds. So if you get a good microphone then you don't have to worry about it too much. So that was my idea when we got these. Like, okay, we get good microphones, good audio. If we don't talk about anything, at least we'll sound good.
EJ Hassenfratz	Garbage in, garbage out.
Chris Nichols	Because if you have really good content but it doesn't sound good, it's not going to work. But we will have both today, I'm sure.
EJ Hassenfratz	Yeah. Let's hope on that.
Chris Nichols	I know we will. I know I will. All right. So I think what ==wouldn't== be cool for our audience is to get a little backstory. Everyone loves an origin story. Especially when you get into the superhero films. So tell us a little about your origin story. You've been teaching at School Of Motion, which we'll get to in a second. What was that journey that got you to do that kind of stuff?
EJ Hassenfratz	Well, I got bit by a radioactive spider. So that old chestnut. I think I had a very similar story to maybe a lot of artists that are, how old am I now? 37. So I've been in the industry for 12, 13, 14 years. It's getting up there though. But motion graphics really wasn't a thing when I was in college. So my dad and my uncle, they worked at ABC, NBC and they were art directors there. So they went to graphic design school. Like they drew a lot. They cut things out and ==paste== it together and took photos of them and then digitized it. I learned on Quantel Paintboxes and stuff. That dates me a little bit. My dad always did art. He drew and as a child I always liked to draw as well. I would be tracing Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles at the time. Like my dad would just draw them and I was so amazed. Like, you can just draw that really well and you're not tracing it. So I always knew I loved art. But-

Chris Nichols	And where was this?
EJ Hassenfratz	I grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I knew I liked art and my dad worked in Pittsburgh at NBC, one of the local news stations down there. Even before that, when I was growing up and I was like two and three, we lived in Manhattan or in Jersey at least. And my dad worked in Manhattan at the ABC affiliate there. And like, he'd bring me into work and that was like, I was doing Quantel Paintboxes when I was two and three years old. Like, that was fun to draw. That's like the coolest way to draw when you're three years old. I was always surrounded by that and I just think that always stuck with me. I really loved drawing and all that stuff, and that's really all I knew is I knew I liked to draw.
EJ Hassenfratz	So how do I make money off that? Like I'm not good enough to be a cartoonist or comic book ==artists== or anything like that. And again, motion graphics really wasn't a thing. Like no one I knew did it. Like even when I went to school, like I went to just ... and my dad actually gave me some really good advice. He's like, "We're going to take you to the state university. You're not going to the art institute, because it's a lot of money. It's only two years. Get a well rounded education and figure out what the heck you want to do." Because at the time I just didn't know what I wanted to do. I just knew I liked art. So I went and got a fine art degree. And I think all in all I spent, my parents spent like maybe 40 grand on my four years of school back then, which is really good.
Chris Nichols	Okay. It's a big deal. In the US that's a huge deal.
EJ Hassenfratz	So no debt. I might be wrong on how much my parents spent, but it wasn't like hundreds of thousands of dollars, which is what a lot. Yeah, exactly. So I got out and I learned a little bit of Photoshop. I did sculpting, I did photography and like, we weren't even talking digital cameras. Like we were actually in the chemical room snorting all kinds of bad chemicals I think. But, that was a fun, tactile experience. I think that's a good experience to have. And maybe I think what a lot of people that have been so far in the digital world kind of crave that now is they need that tactile outlet. So I feel like we're kind of getting back to that a little bit. Like Procreate is a big thing now. But then I got out and I was like, "Okay, what do I do now?" I had some stuff in Photoshop.
EJ Hassenfratz	I was building flyers and stuff like designing flyers and I just didn't know what the heck to do. I worked at Fossil watches for a while and just trying to figure out what I wanted. And luckily, like I said, my dad was the art director at ABC or NBC and he's like, "Hey, do you want an internship?" And put in your work and you're doing a good job. And a little bit of nepotism thrown in there too. But that doesn't hurt anyone. I got an internship there and man, like that really accelerated my growth because

now I was seeing like, okay, outside of Photoshop and like going on the Quantel Paintboxes and building like, were building over the shoulders and stuff like that. And that was like my direct translation from like, okay, I know how to use Photoshop from school and know how to design stuff. And-

Chris Nichols   But now you're using it for something practical.

EJ Hassenfratz   Now I'm like getting paid an internship rate, which is fine. Better than nothing.

Chris Nichols   And it's NBC. So that's great.

EJ Hassenfratz   Exactly. Yeah. So I mean, that was really my first foray. I started learning After Effects and man, that jumped from designing a still frame to how do I make something look-

Chris Nichols   Move.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. Move and look interesting over 10 seconds or something like that. So that was a huge learning curve. And luckily we had an amazing artist, Steve Benton, who he was the After Effects artists there and the senior designer animator. And man, I just sat right next to him every day and just watched him and slowly started fumbling my way through After Effects. And I was like, "This is fun." And Steve would show me-

Chris Nichols   What year is this, approximate? So people can get an approximate idea.

EJ Hassenfratz   Let's see, this is probably like 2004.

Chris Nichols   Okay. After Effects, it was a little new.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah, it was like After Effects 5 or 5.5 or something. The little radio antenna.

Chris Nichols   Yes. The radio antenna.

EJ Hassenfratz   It was radio antenna days.

Chris Nichols   It didn't have any 3D yet. Right?

EJ Hassenfratz   It had 2.5D.

Chris Nichols   2.5D. It was like putting planes behind planes.

EJ Hassenfratz   Exactly. That like blew my mind. I can't even make something look good in 2D now you threw a 3D in there, I'm like, I'm screwed. But he would

introduce me at all these like motion design studios in New York City in LA. Like mk12. They were like cutting edge stuff. Especially 3D in After Effects, just seeing how like what was possible and that really spurred my passion. Like, okay, this is what I want to do now. This is art. Like this is my creative outlet, this is what I want to make money doing. My internship was up and had to search for another job, got a job at PBS in DC. And started working there and same kind of thing where I was learning After Effects on the fly and I was actually-

Chris Nichols   That's hard, right? Because if you're working for local stations, you've got to come up with stuff in like a half an hour. Right?

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. We call it the fast food of graphics. It's funny, it's something I think I struggled to this day because I worked in that fast food of graphics mentality where you have a day max, maybe two. Like if you had three days on a project you're like, "My God, I don't know what to do with myself. There's so much time." Where now you're working, when I went freelance and it's like hey, we've got a three month gig. I'm like, "What?" That amount of time to work on something is just foreign.

Chris Nichols   I think my wife when she was doing motion graphics and stuff, she was like my, honestly speaking a joke, but my dream job would be to do graphics for like *The Daily Show*.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. One of my dad's friends, Joe Dettmore, actually worked at *The Daily Show*.

Chris Nichols   Really? Because the graphics that are on there are so funny. It's like you get to do this really stupid, but hilarious graphics all day long. But I'm sure their deadlines are crazy.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. I mean, Stephen Colbert, I think you're seeing a lot of really cool stuff. I think they do After Effects, their character animator tool for their cartoon Trump and all that stuff. I mean that's really cool to see like how graphics has kind of transcended to this whole nother medium. Like you have a cartoon sitting down in the chair opposite of Steven Colbert and he's doing this interview and it's all live and real time.

Chris Nichols   Yes. Crazy, crazy, crazy. All right. So didn't mean to distract you. Go back to you're at PBS in DC.

Making the jump to 3D

EJ Hassenfratz	PBS, and I worked there for about six, eight months and ended up getting a job at ABC in DC. And started working there and one of the guys there was using Cinema 4D. Now I went from, yeah, I feel comfortable in After Effects, but now I'm seeing this 3D stuff and then he's introducing me-
Chris Nichols	And this is like real 3D?
EJ Hassenfratz	Yeah. This is real 3D and this was, we're talking 2006, 2007 ish. So that's when-
Chris Nichols	And you're on a Mac, I'm assuming or?
EJ Hassenfratz	Yeah. Everything was Mac. We were on those a teal plastic shell kind deals. The teal towers. And then we had the cheese grater, the old school cheese graters which, I still have one.
Chris Nichols	Yeah. Those were pretty good.
EJ Hassenfratz	Yeah. I have one of those to this day. So yeah, all Macs and I would just sit there, just like I sat next to Steve, and watched him do his wizardry in After Effects. I would sit there and would watch some of the artists there use Cinema 4D and I was just like, "Wow! That's really crazy stuff." And at the time, the only 3D I did was like using Zaxwerks Invigorator, which was a plugin for After Effects at the time. So you could kind of inject that. I know Element 3D is kind of like a supercharged version, like a modern version of that today. You're learning 3D but you're still on that ecosystem of After Effects and Adobe. Then my buddy that was a senior artist there left and my art director came up to me, he's like, "Hey, do you want to be a senior artists there?"
Chris Nichols	You hadn't been there that long, I'm assuming, right?
EJ Hassenfratz	I was there probably a couple of years.
Chris Nichols	A couple of years. Okay.
EJ Hassenfratz	Like the senior designer was like the 2D and 3D person. Like if you knew 3D you're like a magician. Because people that knew 3D in like the mid 2000s, like that was pretty cutting edge. That's Houdini now, back then. Like if you know Houdini-

Chris Nichols   We'll get to that part of the conversation. But I get what you're saying now. All right. Knowing 3D was a big step. Those were the wizards, those were the flame artists of compositors.

EJ Hassenfratz   Exactly. Because, I mean you're talking about how much After Effects was and that was before Creative Cloud. After Effects was like what, 600 bucks a year? 600 bucks for like a-

Chris Nichols   For a ==licenses,== it's perpetual.

EJ Hassenfratz   For a license, perpetual. And Cinema 4D, like 3D software, Maya, 3D Studio Max talking like almost four grand. So that's a jump.

Chris Nichols   Yeah. Not anymore, but yes.

EJ Hassenfratz   Not anymore. Yeah. But I mean, especially for like ==local== TV news station where their budget's razor thin anyways, it's hard to get anything updated. My buddy, the senior designer guy left and I took the position and immediately like, I knew nothing about 3D at all other than just like looking over my buddy's shoulder. And we had some guys from an affiliate station say like, Hey, we need a 3D logo, animated and all this stuff. And my art director is like, "Can you do that?" I'm like, "Yeah, sure." No idea how to do that.

Chris Nichols   How many times have I heard on this podcast, I said yes, but I had no idea how to do it. Just advice to anyone, like just do it.

EJ Hassenfratz   Say yes to anything.

Chris Nichols   Say yes to anything.

EJ Hassenfratz   Figure it out. Yeah. I mean, when you challenge yourself like that and you don't know something, you got a deadline. That's the best way to learn. ==Those are one that gains really common man.== Like I went from like Monday knowing nothing about 3D to Friday delivering a final 3D logo animation of like an ABC logo. And they loved it. And it's like, I'm sure if I saw that now, it'd be like, what a piece of crap. I mean they loved it. You didn't have to do much in 3D back then to impress some people. They were just like, "That's a shiny thing flying on the screen and rotating. That's cool." So that was kinda my first foray.

Chris Nichols   That was the first 3D thing you did?

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. It was a 3D ABC logo for channel seven, whatever.

Chris Nichols   That's pretty good. You had seven days to do it or five days.

EJ Hassenfratz   A week. Yeah. From Monday to Friday I had to figure out. And one of the difficult things was back then is you had no YouTube. Was YouTube even around 2000? I don't even know. It's crazy-

Chris Nichols   It certainly was not the resource you have now.

EJ Hassenfratz   Exactly. It's crazy how you go back just like 10 ,15 years and you're like, yeah, Amazon didn't exist. Like iPhones weren't a thing.

Chris Nichols   There were no iPhones until 2007.

EJ Hassenfratz   Exactly. So it's just crazy how you go back and you're like, "Yeah, that didn't even." Like Google Maps, that was not a thing. How did we drive?

Chris Nichols   GPS on your phone did not exist until 2008.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. To get here, I would have had to print out MapQuest directions from my hotel. Now you just plug it in your phone. You just don't think. It's just crazy the amount of technology.

Chris Nichols   It's so funny you said that. That wasn't that long ago.

EJ Hassenfratz   No, it wasn't. I mean we're talking 12 years, everything was completely different. But I mean back then when I was learning stuff, there was absolutely no tutorials on it. Now, like everyone's doing a tutorial about any given subject. You can learn anything. How to throw an ax. There's a YouTube video, how to throw an ax the correct way.

Chris Nichols   Yep. I've been looking at a lot of fly fishing videos recently.

EJ Hassenfratz   I mean there's just like, where do I begin? And back then, there was really nothing. So you had like the thick Maxon Bible and you're just thumbing through it and some of it was outdated. It's translated from German because Maxon's a German company. That's how I learned. And then they had, man, like 3D Fluff I think was like the, we had DVDs, that you'd pop in the DVD drive. Remember those?

Chris Nichols   Guilty as charged. Yes. I used to make those for Gnomon. I made V-Ray training DVDs for Gnomon like way, 2005, 2006, I made Gnomon training DVDs. And the were very popular. And I don't know, they're probably on the internet somewhere now.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. Whenever you see those, those are like collector's items, now. It's like, can you remember this?

Chris Nichols   Funny you said that. I actually went to Blizzard and they have a library at Blizzard where it's all kinds of reference stuff. You can walk around the library. It's pretty cool. They decorated it so it totally looks like something that Blizzard would do. But they had a huge like training library of DVDs there and like, Whoa, huge. And I was like, "Who really looks at these anymore?" So I was like, they got it. I found my two DVDs in the Blizzard library, I was like, "My God." And they were like collectors items, like you said.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. I just went to Maxon's offices yesterday. Always like to say hi when I'm in town and they have like a whole wall of like the old boxes. The old DVDs and even like the floppy disks and stuff.

Chris Nichols   Nice. I remember when Maya came out. I felt like I could justify, because I was teaching at my university at the time and Maya costs a fortune. It was, I think it was 50 grand literally for a copy of Maya.

EJ Hassenfratz   Wow! Take out a mortgage for Maya.

Chris Nichols   But I felt like I could justify the cost of Maya because it had all the manuals, which was like boxes about like four feet long of manuals to do it. Because that was the only way to learn it. It was literally paper.

EJ Hassenfratz   Right, right. Yeah. So like fast forward ahead now, you're-

Chris Nichols   Sorry.

EJ Hassenfratz   No, no, I love the reminiscing. Again, things are so drastically different in a very short amount of time. That growth curve is. But I mean, now, there's just so much information out there. I started learning 3D and there was a guy, Nick Campbell, I'm sure if anyone's listening to this, they know Greyscalegorilla. Anyone who uses Cinema 4D knows Greyscalegorilla. Just like anyone who knows After Effects, they know Andrew Kramer. And like Andrew Kramer, he was the only guy doing really cool VFX tutorials back in the day. There was another guy, a Japanese guy, Yato I believe it is, and he did some really cool 3D like particle stuff.

EJ Hassenfratz   So there's like three websites. Greyscalegorilla, like he was doing really like he was the only guy doing Cinema 4D tutorials and I think he single-handedly like helped put stuff on the map along with some of the MoGraph tools that came out with Cinema 4D that just really made 3D accessible. And I think that was the key for me getting into 3D in general was just because you'd open up Cinema 4D and it had that integration with After Effects.

EJ Hassenfratz	And I was used to that Adobe ecosystem. It was just such an easy translation over to 3D where everything just kind of made sense and I didn't need to know any program, didn't need to write any code. I remember I got a version of Maya, not official version, I'll just say that. And you just open it up and I'm just like, I don't even know what to do. Like, I think you see that with like Houdini now. Where you open it up it's like, I don't even know how to begin to make a thing. Like how do I even make a cube here?
Chris Nichols	I remember I was at DD a long, long time ago. I was doing Maya. I was pretty good in Maya. I could do all this stuff. I was building this stuff and I was like, I said, "You know what? I'm going to start doing Houdini. I want to learn Houdini." And my supervisor is like, "Before you do that, you may want to take up smoking again."
EJ Hassenfratz	There's a reason why we have a stock bottle of whiskey.
Chris Nichols	The stress was high. It wasn't really funny. But anyway, Houdini is still a great program. Not going to knock it. It's an amazing program. It's just very powerful and it's just a little overwhelming when you see it.
EJ Hassenfratz	Yeah. I mean that's the thing where Cinema 4D it's super easy to get in there, start making stuff. But then I think you easily hit a wall. I mean you can really push, like the one thing I'm seeing a lot with Houdini is like dynamics and cloth sims and particle sims and fluid sims and like you hit a wall pretty quickly and I mean it's just because man, those systems haven't been updated in Cinema 4D for a while now. We're talking maybe six, seven years.
Chris Nichols	That's not their priority, right?
EJ Hassenfratz	Right. I mean-
Chris Nichols	That's not their market.
EJ Hassenfratz	Yeah, they got a lot of stuff going on. But I mean it's fun for me as an educator to like, yeah, I see that stuff in Houdini. Let's see if we can use the really easy to use tools in Cinema and figure that out and it's amazing how you can do that.
Chris Nichols	Cinema 4D has been a ==stable== for the motion graphics world for a long time and it's because it, you have to be able to do that in the situation where you are. Like you said, the fast food of graphics. You got to be able to, I got to bang something out of nothing in like a couple hours. And that's a great tool to do that with. You may not necessarily be able to do some of the very hardcore rigging or whatever it is, but you can bang out

some graphics really fast and you can do it on multiple platforms. So that's really cool, yeah.

EJ Hassenfratz   We've got 500 hamburgers to make. I'm using Cinema 4D.

Chris Nichols   Yeah, totally. Totally.

EJ Hassenfratz   All that to say, I'm completely self taught at everything that I've learned. And Nick really I think was someone out there that, and Andrew Kramer, that really inspired me to get out and get active in the community too.

Chris Nichols   Did you get in touch with them on the internet or just were inspired by them and it's like, I'm going to just try to do this?

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. Because even back then we talk about how different things are. We spoke off-mic about going to conferences and stuff, and I feel like motion graphics artists didn't really do NAB or Siggraph at all ==and it really want== this big community event. Where now, it's a nerdfest and it's an amazing week that you get to spend just nerding out whatever you want. And just the community aspect is just so much different now because I mean, again, when was Facebook around? Like when did Facebook first come out in the scene? 2003, 2004. Like, I remember at the very end of college, which I graduated in 2004, Facebook was just beginning to be a thing. So social media, like how you can connect with people from all over the world.

Chris Nichols   Or Myspace before that.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah, exactly. So I mean it's pretty incredible when you think about like when, and it's such an interesting time as like a motion graphics artist where you start, you went to school, I went to school when motion graphics was just beginning to be a term or even an avenue of a career to where it is now. And you have students that know exactly what they want to do because motion graphics has been around for 15 years and 20 years.

Chris Nichols   Because it used to be you're a graphic designer that happens to know how to animate. And now it's like its own thing.

EJ Hassenfratz   Now you have to, like the bare minimum, you know how to animate. And like I think we're moving to an area now where it's like, if you don't know 3D now too, like you're kind of, you're not very marketable.

Chris Nichols   Interesting.

EJ Hassenfratz   Because I think you're seeing that if you have a client and it's like you have to be a really good animator or like I think something that is kind of maybe

a push back to like infographics videos and stuff where everything's like, looks like clip art and like just very soulless kind of look and stuff. And you're seeing this resurgence of cell animation, which is incredible. You have studios like Golden Wolf that they, that's their bread and butter is like these really cool cel animations. So I think you're getting this resurgence or renaissance of really good 2D animation like with a lot of style. And breaking away from the clip-arty look that you might've seen in like the early 2010s or something like that. But going back to, yeah, training and just learning stuff, there was really nothing.

EJ Hassenfratz   You get active in the community and in DC, there wasn't a really huge community for motion designers. I think it's starting to get bigger now just because I think the community's really exploding and there's a lot of outlets for that to connect with other people. There was an animator's group in DC and they, I went to a couple of them because I was like, I work in this little edit booth by myself. No one else in the entire company knows 3D at all. Like the only outlet for me to connect with other people was going onto Greyscalegorilla in the comments section and stuff and like going on Twitter and just chatting with like minded people, seeing what other people are doing. Because I was so insulated back then.

EJ Hassenfratz   So it was really hard for a self-taught artist to really get ahead because I wasn't working at a studio where there was like three other animators or three other 3D artists there that I could see how they were working and all that stuff. But now it's like you see how everyone works. Like the curtain is pulled and you could see all the tricks and all that stuff. And that's one of the really great things about the industry today is that everyone's so giving and willing to share their knowledge, which is really awesome. I went to this meet up and one of the meetups they had in the next month was Cinema 4D artists and what's Cinema 4D can do? And I guess it was sponsored by Maxon. Me and another buddy of mine that I met through social media, he was like the only other guy in DC that I knew. One of the hard things about DC is like, everyone's working for government contractors.

EJ Hassenfratz   So like no one can really show their work because it's all top secret or all the red tape and stuff you have to get through. So like Discovery Channel was like a big industry in DC. Like there was very little, all the shops that existed, they did Discovery. And I think that's changed now. Like a lot of the Discovery work went to New York, but that's a whole other story. So I rang up my friend, I was like, "David," his name is Dave Glens. I was like, "Do you want to present at this thing?" Because the guy was looking for Cinema 4D artists. And I asked him, I was like, "did you find anyone yet?" He's like, "No." I was like, "Well I could do it if you want." He's like, "Yes, please. Like we need people." So I was like, "Well, me and my buddy Dave will go do it." And I've never done public speaking before. Excited from my public speaking class in college, which I got a C minus in. That's setting

the stage. I might get a B now, maybe B minus. But yeah, I've gotten a little better.

Chris Nichols   You don't actually have an audience visible, but you do have an audience.

Presenting Cinema 4D

EJ Hassenfratz   Sure. But I mean, man, it was tough. I went and did like a 20-minute presentation and like clammy hands. But I got through it and David did as well and he did really well and that was cool. I was like, that was fun. I met a lot of 3D artists there and a lot of people were really interested in learning more and I think one of the cool things was and why I still get a kick out of today is just showing how easy certain things are. Because I know for me personally, if I look at something like character rigging and I'm like, that looks super like, that looks like that's, it's a lot of technical stuff and some creative, like you can build your character, but then good luck rigging it and going through all that complexity. So I just stay away from it. I look at something like Houdini and I'm like, "Come back to me when it works a little bit easier, like Cinema 4D or something like that." Because it's like I don't want to be trying to find a script or code or whatever because then my eyes glaze over. I'm just like, I did not-

Chris Nichols   Riggers are some of the most technical people in the VFX world.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. Exactly. That just sort of totally turns me off. I'm like, I want to make things and not code things. But little did I know they were recording our presentations at this meetup. I found this out later and I was just like, man. And a couple of weeks later-

Chris Nichols   They should tell you. You have to sign a document about that.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. I had no idea, which is good because I was nervous enough as it is. If they were like, "Hey Maxon. We're recording this for Maxon and they want to see this stuff." And I'm like, I would have been worse. The bar was very low as it was. So I wouldn't even want to know how much lower I could've went. But I got this call from a really good friend of mine to this, I'm actually going to meet him after this, Mathias Omotola. He was the community outreach manager at Maxon, still is to this day. And this was like 2011 I think it was. He and the team over at Maxon is like the big reason why there's such an awesome community around Cinema 4D. I think just that really inspires people to get out and teach and spread their knowledge and stuff like that. Mathias calls me up. He's like, "Hey, we saw

your presentation. Thought you did really good. Would you want to present at NAB for us in Vegas?" And I was like, "What!"

Chris Nichols   Bigger audience.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. It's like, yeah, you get like 2000 people online at any given time and 50 to 100 people in person. I was just like, my God. And so it was one of these things where you harked back to like, I didn't know 3D at all and I had to do a logo by the end of the week. I was like, I don't know what I'm going to do, but I'll say yes. And we'll see where this goes because this is a big stage and maybe I want to go freelance, like this is a good pivot point. Decided I'm like, I'm going to work on my public speaking skills and started just for practice recording tutorials and there's this really good book by Austin Kleon, it's called *Show Your Work*, and just the mere thing of making something and knowing that you're going to put it online for everyone to see and pick apart that really lets you add in the extra quality and really make sure that you're trying hard and making sure that it looks great, it sounds great, that you let that thing out and wait for it to be just totally destroyed by the internet.

EJ Hassenfratz   So that kind of inspired me to be like, okay, I'm going to do these tutorials and when I get to a point where I think I'm doing okay, I'm going to post these because that's really going to put me in a different mindset or the right mindset I need to be in when I actually am ready to go in front of people live and do a presentation. And so I started posting a few and slowly got some traffic. People would reach out, they're like, "That ==was== really cool technique. I didn't know about that. Like you, you broke it down in a way that it really spoke to me." And I was like, "Okay. Well that's awesome." I'm just sitting here talking. I have no rhyme and reason to what I'm doing. It's just like, I know I'm self-taught and I know how my brain works and I know that if I break things down to the most basic terms and I don't try to show off by being super technical or trying to, here's this piece of code that does this thing and like that's just not me.

Chris Nichols   That's not you.

EJ Hassenfratz   That's not me. And again, like when that stuff happens, that just like kind of turns me off. So if there's any complicated stuff whatsoever, probably not teaching it unless it seems complicated, but it's really not. That's why I like to shine lights on is like, yeah, this looks really amazing. It looks complex, but like, check this out. Like it's really not that hard at all.

Chris Nichols   That's great.

EJ Hassenfratz   So yeah, that was kind of like how I got into teaching and I went to-

Chris Nichols	Don't you think a lot of people like to make things more complicated than they need to be because they're trying to show off some of the knowledge they know and therefore they're just teaching bad habits to people.
EJ Hassenfratz	Which I fell in the habit of as well. At a certain point I was like, I see what other people are doing now. And I was like, okay. Well, especially for presenting in front of a big audience, like my first NAB presentations, I feel like everyone was trying to one up each other with like the complexity of their setups and now I think it's completely different because it's like when you're presenting for Maxon, you don't want to be like, yeah, let's show how technical and complex this could be and totally lose people. It's like, no, no, no, no. You want to speak to the everyman.
Chris Nichols	By the way, look how amazing it looks and look how simple the journey was to get there.
EJ Hassenfratz	Precisely. Yeah. I think if you go back 10 years, the presentations that were happening then to now is completely different. Like they're speaking to a different audience. I feel like back then they were kind of preaching to the choir like, you already know Cinema 4D, let's do this really cool technical stuff. And now it's like, no, that's not marketing. You want to get new users in. So you want to show how easy this is. So yeah, that kind of took off and I started doing stuff for Lynda.com which is LinkedIn Learning now. And that was like the first paid training gig that I ever did. It just got momentum and I just saw that as a good marketing thing, just like you're doing podcast now. Like that was for me, I got a lot of leads and clients reaching out to me-
Chris Nichols	Through that platform.
EJ Hassenfratz	Through tutorials on Vimeo back then. And so, I was still working at ABC and recordings tutorials and doing some like moonlighting as a freelancer and just went eventually, six years after working at ABC, I went full time freelance and every year since 2012, I've spoken for Maxon at NAB like to this day. I'm going again in April, which is great. It's funny because that call from Mathias, I always tell him like, "Dude, you changed the trajectory of my career. Like if I would've done that presentation and then just called it a day, like, who knows what I'd be doing?" I might be still working at ABC, who knows. But just that challenge put in front of me where it's like, we're going to invite you to Vegas, you're going to teach this stuff in front of people. And that just totally opened the door to do in tutorials and teaching online.
EJ Hassenfratz	And I just discovered that I really loved teaching people and showing people how easy things were because what I was speaking to is me 10 years ago. Where they're completely self-taught. They didn't go to SCAD or

Ringling or anything like that. And like that really was fulfilling for me because I know I wouldn't have gotten to where I was at that point without Andrew Kramer, Nick Campbell, Greyscalegorilla because they're giving out really great free knowledge. I think when I started doing tutorials, that was back in maybe 2013 and there wasn't a lot of people doing them back then either. But now it's like there's incredible tutorial artists all over the place teaching everything in the production value now, it's crazy. Like you go look back at like 2013 it's like some crappy web cam video and people are like, you're not even shaved yet. You just look like garbage.

Chris Nichols   But ==know== they're making them like full on.

Starting at School of Motion

EJ Hassenfratz   Now it's like, they've got really good cameras. Really good mics. So the production value ==is== definitely gone up. I rode the freelance ride for quite a bit and started doing more training for Maxon and their training website called Cineversity and stuff for LinkedIn. And I got approached by Joey Korenman, who's the CEO of School of Motion. He said, "Hey, your Cinema 4D stuff is great, we're looking to make some courses on the 3D side and we'd love to have you do like an intro to Cinema 4D course." And I was like, "Heck yes." So did that. And that was like six months of recording stuff and writing outlines and just the care and effort that goes into a single course, like from the idea to like conception to completion. It's like a year. And that's just because the quality level has to be there. Like we want to set ourselves above the rest. Like we want to be one of the best places for people to go to learn something. So it's very rigorous.

Chris Nichols   I know the struggle because I did one for Gnomon, a long time ago, like 2005. And it seems like, yeah, I know all this information. I'm just going to say it out loud in front of a microphone and show people what to do. And it turns out that's not that simple. You have to create the content. You have to really master the material. You have to do it over and over again. It's a lot. And it can take a year sometimes just to make a good curriculum in a course.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. And I mean talking to people that, because I think at NAB I spoke in terms of like, you already know this software. So like that's the baseline that I can kind of speak from. Meanwhile, like when I started doing the Cinema 4D course, it was aimed at people who've never touched 3D before. So like for now, like all the terms in your jingle, what the hell is that? What is reflected? What is ambient occlusion? What the hell is all

this stuff? That was definitely a struggle. And I think going through that again, like I've never done a massive, it's like 10 weeks of course material. It's over 35 hours of videos. And I'm talking the entire time and I was on camera, so like you couldn't just, like you could edit this podcast if I drop an F bomb or something. Like you could just, I'm going to edit that out.

EJ Hassenfratz   But when you're on camera, if you do a lot of edits, you're just like in the lower left corner and you're like just Max Headroom, where your head's just bopping all over. Max Headroom, that's another call back to showing my age here. But it definitely made me a better teacher. To speak at a level in terms that like, someone's who's never used 3D could understand. And like, I felt like I grew as just an educator, even a speaker. Like I was much more thoughtful about what I was going to say. Because again, like I'm on camera the entire time, so if I have to edit something, like I probably have to rerecord like a half hour of stuff if I screwed something up. So I'd have to pause, be very thoughtful about what I'm talking about. Have all my notes laid out.

Chris Nichols   Think about where you can go back to what, edit. What part of your outline and start recording from there.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. So you just like, I'm just going to pause here and if I screw up at least I can always come back to this point kind of deal. But what I found through that was just seeing people make the jump from zero 3D to going through the same journey that I went through, where you're afraid of 3D, you're afraid of this new thing. You get your feet wet in it, you start having fun. You're like, this isn't that hard. And then you really, it clicks and then you just see what the students do and they just take off and that you just see the enthusiasm and like, man, I've never had that kind of, like making that course to this day is one of the most fulfilling things I've ever done in my career. Just seeing the impacts on these students. They'd come to me and say, "You got me hired at this studio and it's my dream job. Thank you so much."

EJ Hassenfratz   I wouldn't be able to do it without you." And it's like, "No, you did it. Like I just laid out stuff in front of you, you did all the work. But just to see like you're helping people on their journey to, they're self-taught and they do it and they get through it and they land whatever job they want. Like that was way cooler than like any client project I ever did and getting whatever kind of feedback. I've discovered I really like that and wanted to try to change my career and pivot to a point where, it was probably like five years ago I was maybe doing 20% of my income off training and 80% client. Then it got to 50-50 a few years ago and then the School of Motion course just really kind of ==tip== the scales for me.

EJ Hassenfratz   And I just approached Joey, I was like, "Hey, like I had a lot of fun doing that." And I told him, I was like, "This is the most rewarding thing I've ever

done." And I was like, "You have a lot of After Effects and 2D content. But like I think timing's right to start building out the 3D thing." I'm like, "I don't want to just do this one course and be done. I want to continue teaching and continue interacting with the community in that capacity is like, let me pitch this idea: What if I was your 3D creative director and helped build up the 3D side of things?" Because at the time he was just 2D and he's like, "All right." So over the-

Chris Nichols   Actually that's a good point. Let's go back to that. Tell us a little bit about School of Motion. Obviously you're still there now, right?

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah.

Chris Nichols   So tell us a little bit about that school. Where did that start? ==What that's== about?

EJ Hassenfratz   So School of Motion was created by Joey Korenman, I think in like 2013. And it was just like an After Effects tutorial site. And so he was working at a studio, he built a studio called Toil in Boston and he worked there for a few years and he was just like, this is a lot more work. This is kind of getting me away from the stuff that I wanted to do. And I think he just kind of like got burnt out from the studio game, which I think you're seeing a lot these days, which, that's a whole ==nother== subject.

EJ Hassenfratz   So he decided that he wanted to start teaching and he went down to Florida and started teaching at Ringling and he actually taught Cinema 4D there. And just being in that system there and just seeing all the bureaucracy and just how much students were paying to go there and just getting out of school, having all that debt saddled on your back, it was like, okay, good luck in your career. You're $200K in debt. Good luck. Have fun with that. I can't even imagine. Like if that was me when I got out of college, I'd be working at Fossil, I'd be working for Uber, which didn't even exist back then. But like I'd be trying to like-

Chris Nichols   Anything to supplement.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. And so like at that point, are my skills. Like I can't keep building my ==skill unless I have a job with that I'm just wasting time.== So I can only imagine what some students are dealing with where if they don't have a job immediately out of school, like what are they doing and are they, whatever they're doing, is that taking away from them continuing to build and refine their skills and-

Chris Nichols   I think it's a very dangerous slope. I mean, there are some very good schools that are for-profit, but you got to be very careful and really think about it. And when someone claims that they have, let's just put it this way, if their financial aid department is larger than their faculty

department. There are certain schools that way. Just ask how many people work in their financial aid department and how many people work in their faculty department. And you will know the ratio of the debt that these students are acquiring. So just something to be aware of. Anyway, go back it's fascinating. So he decided he was going to do something different, right?

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. Like with clear conscious he couldn't continue like doing what he was doing. So he had this idea for like, "I see what's wrong in the brick and mortar system and I see how expensive it is." And some students they get out and they do great. But even if you do great, how long is it taking for that really super talented person to pay off their student loan? Like 15, 20 years, even more. And was that worth it?

Chris Nichols   And they may not even like what they're doing after they figured out and they went through school and now they're all in this debt and they haven't.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. I listened to a podcast, Dave Ramsey podcast, which is all about financial stuff. You just see how mentally and psychologically just having debt affects you and affects your decision making. Like, and I see it every day where one of the problems with our industry is people just not having confidence in talking with clients when you're a freelancer to just like get paid your rate or know your worth. It's hard to have that confidence when, I just got to pay my bills, like I'll take anything. It's the scarcity mindset that just creeps in and it's just crazy how much, just the simple thing of having debt can just totally destroy your confidence and like totally change the arc of your career because you're always worried about that.

EJ Hassenfratz   So yeah. Joey ended up building his own website, School of Motion. It started as like a tutorial website. He did 30 days of After Effects, so every single day for a month. He like built up his newsletter, subscriber list. And he started working on a single course. It was just animation and After Effects. I knew of his website, I knew he did tutorials and he reached out to me. He's like, "Hey, wanted to get some tutorial people like check out my new course for free. There you go." And I went through it and again, being self-taught, like I did not take an animation class, so I didn't know animation fundamentals. I did not know of the term other than ease-in, ease-out. I didn't know anticipation, I didn't know all these other things. And so I took his course and I was like, wow, like this totally filled in all of these gaps in my foundation. Like my work just totally changed where like I started having fun animating because I knew how to, like I would look at an animation, I'd be like, I know why that looks good now.

Chris Nichols   As opposed to just knowing it's good and you don't know why.

EJ Hassenfratz   Exactly. There's something about this animation. It looks great, but I don't know what it is. Like I guess there's ease-in and ease-out, like a lot of ease-in ease-out. Because that's the thing. You just do that.

Chris Nichols   Some people don't even do that though.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah, exactly. I mean, that was me. So I think that's kind of one of the downsides of being self-taught is, especially now there's so much noise as far as tutorials go that like it can be completely overwhelming. And of course, like if you go to a school, there's a set curriculum and you go through this path and you know exactly what to learn. So Joey did this animation boot camp class and it did really well. And then he did a design bootcamp class with one of his old buddies that works at a studio in Boston as well. And it just slowly started taking off.

Chris Nichols   Nice. This was about 2013 he started, you said?

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah, I think 2015 is where he really started to build it out, like added a second course. And then he did like a character animation bootcamp with one of his colleagues that still works at Ringling. He saw the bureaucracy in the system and he just really wanted to disrupt that. And he saw that success and the word of mouth spread like wildfire. Like it was insane how big and fast it grew. And to this day, like that's how we get students in is because the quality, the content there is so good. The instructors are so good. We have like some of the best well-known instructors around like.

How School of Motion works

Chris Nichols   But, how does it work? Let's say, okay, I want to learn motion graphics through School of Motion. You just buy a bunch of tutorials, there's packages, how does it work?

EJ Hassenfratz   So that's what makes School of Motion unlike anything else that's out there. So it's not passive. So it's not like you sign up, you purchase a course and you download and you watch it at your own leisure.

Chris Nichols   Right. Because there's plenty of that on YouTube, right?

EJ Hassenfratz   Exactly. Yeah. I mean basically that's like a curated YouTube playlist where it's like, here's your path. Just watch it at your own leisure. It's kind of like, just being in college in general where it's not about the school, it's

what you do with that knowledge. Are you actually digesting? Are you doing the work? Because you could spend $250,000 at a school and get absolutely nothing from it because you just sit there and just jerk around or whatever. But how the School of Motion system works is you sign up for a course. Most of our courses are priced around $800 to $1,000. And they're eight to 12-week courses. And when you sign up, it's like it's fed to you over time. So week one, every single day there is a new piece of content out every single day for what is that? Two and a half months or something like that, depending on the length of the course.

EJ Hassenfratz   And you also have this amazing support staff of teaching assistants. So you're doing homework and you're also getting critiqued on it. And I think that's one of the things where that's where the real growth comes is when you're just, cause I mean, when I was doing tutorials, I'd follow it and I'd make something. And again going back to that, that show your workbook. The reason why you want to show stuff is because you want to get that feedback and hopefully it's constructive and people aren't just crapping all over. But once you put that out in the world, people see like this is great, but you could, check this out and maybe tighten this up over here or the animation or whatever. And you don't get that feedback when you're looking at something for a very long time. You just get used to it. And I think the teaching assistant aspect of School of Motion and just the we have Facebook groups for every single course. That's like your virtual classroom. So you see-

Chris Nichols   Interesting that Facebook has now become the forum, right?

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. Another subject is a lot of people are like wanting us to get off of it, just because of all the stuff going on with Facebook, which.

Chris Nichols   That's interesting too, but that's a long conversation. But okay. But anyway, you basically have a community of some kind, you have a direct link to your teaching assistants. And you pay for a series of classes and you come away with knowledge, right? You're not offering a degree because no one really needs a bachelor's of After Effects, right?

EJ Hassenfratz   No, no. Yeah. Right.

Chris Nichols   But you do need knowledge in After Effects, and this is a great resource for you to get it. And yeah, it sounds like it's an expensive course, but it's really not if you think about it compared to college. Right?

EJ Hassenfratz   Right, exactly. And I mean, it's one of those things where you're investing in yourself then like, okay, you spend $1,000.

Chris Nichols   Or you want to supplement your knowledge.

EJ Hassenfratz   Or you want to supplement your knowledge. When you add that skill to your skillset, you can market that. You're talking $1,000 billable hours wise. You'd probably pay that off in two months and that's a skill that you always have for the rest of your career. So you're always getting the gains from that short little, that $1,000. So that's like if we're talking 80% returns, that's way better than stock market. So you should just always invest in yourself.

Chris Nichols   Always.

EJ Hassenfratz   Always.

Chris Nichols   Always.

EJ Hassenfratz   But again, it goes back to like, you have to go into that course. You have to keep up, you have to turn in your homework because you want to take advantage of the teaching assistance feedback. So it's just like a normal college where you get what you put in.

Chris Nichols   Yeah. And if you put in $1,000 and you don't do anything with it, then you wasted $1,000.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. You have $1,000, you can pay that off really quickly. Meanwhile, if you went through two years or four years of regular college and now you got $200,000 or whatever-

Chris Nichols   Now it's a little bit more stressful.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. Now it's a little bit-

Chris Nichols   And you didn't take advantage of it because you were drinking the whole time.

EJ Hassenfratz   Exactly. Just partying. The education is just there, but it's what you bring to it. What you do with that knowledge that makes the difference. Because you can be completely self-taught and be well ahead of someone that went to one of the best schools in the world.

Chris Nichols   But I think it's really cool because, okay, so there's several things. So your school, I've had a thing about like you've got to learn certain skills that are universal and you've got to learn certain skills that are like of the moment in technical. So what's interesting is that you are basically offering a course there like, okay, here's a small digestible piece of information that you need, ==quote and quote small,== compared to doing four years in college. Like I need to know this skill set because it's something I'm interested in

or I need to know for my job, for my next job or whatever it is, you spend your $1,000 or maybe even your employee can pay you $1,000.

Chris Nichols   I'm sure that happened a lot. Because a lot of jobs offer continuing education. So you spend that money and you're like, great, and then you learn it and then somehow after a while you get return on that investment really quickly as you described. But after a while maybe a new skill set shows up or the ones that you learned doesn't, you don't need them as much anymore. Well, then you can just spend another $1,000 and get to the next level. It's not like if I go to school, if I went to school and I got a master's in learning Alias and Wavefront, packages that are long dead, what use is that?

EJ Hassenfratz   That's a problem too. Like I go to a lot of these trade shows with Maxon and a lot of people have heard of Cinema 4D and they are in college, they're college students and they've been using Maya or 3D Studio Max. Like if you want to go into VFX in Hollywood, like you have to learn those softwares because Cinema 4D really doesn't have those tools to do that kind of work. If you want to go motion graphics, you're kind of putting out a small fire with a giant fire hose, just overkill.

Chris Nichols   And it's going to take you too long to get there too.

EJ Hassenfratz   Right. You're spending too much time learning the technical stuff when you could be learning the fundamentals of lighting or something like that. And I think that's a lot of the problem too, is where some of these schools, they're just teaching 3D Studio Max because some instructors or some professor got a sweet deal with it and they just stuck with it. Even though, like for the motion graphics, like it's mostly Cinema 4D. If you're doing flying logos and stuff, like you don't need to use Maya for that kind of stuff. So a lot of that is just giving the wrong tools to the students that want to do a certain thing.

EJ Hassenfratz   I mean, in any job, there's people that do their job very well and some people who are awful. My mom's a doctor. There's horror stories where you think like your doctor's doing the best thing for you. No, there's some doctors that suck, just like you go to McDonald's and some people are nice, some people suck. And that's the same thing with instructors too. There's some people that teach and they're just checked out. Like I used to work with some folks at ABC and just places throughout my career where you had like the very eager people who love their jobs and wanting to keep learning. And then there's others who are just like, I'm checked out. I'm just showing up.

Chris Nichols   I'm just showing up and getting a paycheck.

EJ Hassenfratz   Exactly. So I mean, if you have one of those instructors, like you just got the bad role of the dice. And I think there's too much of that to like if you're spending $150,000 and you get the bad role of the dice, like you just got screwed. I hear stories on both ends where like, there's very successful people that went to traditional schools, but I mean, again, debt. And then there's people that just they got out and they got nothing from it. It's so heartbreaking because every now and then I'll get an email from, or like an Instagram message or something saying like, thank you for all the training you have for free. Like, you're teaching me more than my instructor and I'm paying how much money for our school. And I'm like, that is awful.

Chris Nichols   Okay. All right. Well, there's a couple things I want to interject here because I think it's important. Well, first of all, I do not want to discourage people from getting an education.

EJ Hassenfratz   Of course.

Chris Nichols   Getting an education degree is important, but you should be very scrupulous about what you're doing and make sure you get the value. It costs a lot of money. And like you said, take advantage of that situation. Look at the school you're going to make sure you have what you need to get there. That does not mean that there is not specific skill sets that you can learn in a really cool and specific way in the way that you guys are doing it at School of Motion. Because I've seen that as well. People want it to learn V-Ray lighting. Back in 2005, I did an exterior lighting, an interior lighting course at Gnomon.

Chris Nichols   It was the only resource they had was those tutorials. No, you don't need to go to college to learn that, but if you need to learn how to light in V-Ray, that was basically your best resource. So that's a good thing. And it costs you $85 for a DVD or whatever it was at the time and that was great. So that was a resource people have. And I think it's really good that those resources exist. I think what you guys are doing is pretty cool because it's also active learning because you are basically like, okay I'm doing it. Eight weeks and if I don't sit there and do the homework then I'm not taking advantage of that money I spent. It's fairly affordable if you think about it considering that.

EJ Hassenfratz   And I think it's enough money where you put your money where your mouth is. Because if you don't follow through with that, like you just lost all that. I mean it's the same thing with over the long span of four years where you're putting a bet on yourself. Some people just go to art school because they're like, yeah I just want to fart around and make 3D stuff and-

Chris Nichols   I don't know what I want to do with my life.

EJ Hassenfratz   They don't know what they want to do. And like, if you don't really know what you want to do, should you really be putting down like as much money to get a law degree? Probably not. Like what I did when I didn't know what I wanted to do. Like I went to a cheap university. I mean people are going to community colleges that have awesome programs too. I was definitely one of these people that I needed to be around other people to push me because I was kind of a slacker back then. And again, you don't know what you want. Like if I would've went to one of these like Ringling or something like that, I might've been one of those students that didn't get a lot out of it.

EJ Hassenfratz   Because I just didn't know what I wanted and I had no direction. So I think some people need to go through some strict, like have an instructor get on their butt telling them like, "You need to get your shit together or you're never going to make it in this industry and you're not going to get your money's worth of what you're paying here." So some people need that. But there's some other people that are self driven and motivated. Like that's how I turned out to be because out of necessity is like I want to be in this field. I screwed up when I was in college. Like I didn't pay attention to the design fundamentals.

EJ Hassenfratz   I didn't get Picasso in our history class. Like I thought all that stuff was stupid. And now that I'm out, I'm just like, "What an idiot I was." I was so walled off from these experiences that I could have had because I was just a stupid college student. And if your mind isn't right at the time, like good thing I was only 30, $40,000 and I didn't have any debt because then I could make up for the fact that I screwed up and take a School of Motion class or ==watching== tutorials to fill in all those gaps in my foundation. And I mean, it's pretty crazy.

EJ Hassenfratz   You see the students at some of these schools and some of them you definitely know, like they have a talent and man, they're like totally taking advantage of everything that's available to them here. And then there's some others, they're just like, "Man, I hope you do well in this industry because I think you're going to get out in the world and it's going to be hard for you to get a job and you're going to be having to play a lot of catch up like I had to. But you're going to be saddled with all that debt." And again, the psychological effect that that takes on you throughout your career. Like, you could have done that same thing with no debt and be in the same situation or better situation that you are now.

Chris Nichols   Yeah. Well that's interesting. It's interesting. So listen, I could go on for a while about this conversation because education is so important in terms of how people are learning these skills and using them and specifically in

terms of art. A lot of people think of art school or whatever. It's like, you're going to be the starving artist. You're going to be the person that wants to paint and can't sell his painting to an art gallery. That's not what art is. Everything you touch, everything you see, everything you do has been touched by an artist, has been designed. This glass, this cable, someone went into CAD and design how this cable connector works to this microphone.

Chris Nichols   So everything has been designed by an artist in some way, shape or form. So there's lots of room and lots of places for art or creativity to take place. And I think it's really important to learn that. And everyone watches TV. Everyone watches a bunch of stuff and all of it requires motion graphics of some kind. So I think it's a great skill set that you guys are doing out there and it's really cool that you're sort of focused or taking your 3D stuff and brought that into to the area. Can you tell people, let's make sure that people know a little bit about your courses and where they can find out about it on School of Motion.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yes. So it's schoolofmotion.com. We have a lot of courses up there. We go in semesters so much like a traditional school. And again, you're with-

Chris Nichols   You have to sign up for that because you're going with a group and it's going through a curriculum. you can't just start at any point.

EJ Hassenfratz   Right, exactly. And for people that are like, "Well, I'm in Asia or I'm in Europe and we're based in North America, right. What are the time zone differences? Is this live?" They're all pre-recorded courses or pre-recorded videos. So the instruction elements there, but again, you have the TA. You have a teaching assistant assigned just to you. So you can always ping them and ask them questions if you have any technical difficulties or you just want feedback. That's a great thing. And I think that's what we're trying to recreate from the benefits of actually being in a physical classroom. Again, we talk about how I connect now via social media and how that wasn't a thing because Facebook didn't exist back when I started. People are working remotely all the time. The whole team at School of Motion's all remote. And I think you're seeing a lot of freelancers doing the same thing.

EJ Hassenfratz   They're all working remotely. They're not working in studio, so it's not a weird thing. So that support group is in that Facebook group. And the camaraderie that you get in there is amazing. Like you get friends. We even have a student outreach person that works for us full time that they will help place you at certain studios and make you aware of job openings and places like that. So very much like a traditional college where when you go through one of our courses and you do a good job and you're making great work, like we're going to help promote that and get you placed at places like Frame.io or Blizzard. We have an alumni that works

at Blizzard now and starting their own studios and stuff like that. So that element is definitely there. And I think that's what sets us above all the passive learning outlets out there.

EJ Hassenfratz   And that's why we want to go after the brick and mortar is because we want to recreate that environment. Because like you need that encouragement. You need that feedback because that's where that real growth happens. So yeah, like I said, most of our courses are, they can be like some of our smaller courses, we have like a design kick-start. Which is like you have no experience with design whatsoever. We also have intro to After Effects. You've never opened up After Effects before. You've never laid a key frame. Like, we got that. We have, just general fundamentals classes like design boot camp, animation bootcamp. We just launched a VFX course and an expressions for After Effects course. There's an illustration for motion class as well, which is highly popular. And then there's an advanced motion methods taught by Sander, who is one of the top animators in the field.

EJ Hassenfratz   That's like, if you're a good animator, man, you want to take this to the next level, that's the class you take. So we have all different kinds of courses. We were starting to build out like a student roadmap, where it's like start here and then start building up this stuff. So like a class like mine, which is called Cinema 40 base camp. We just get you into Cinema 4D, how 3D works, all the lighting fundamentals, although 3D fundamentals. So it's in a software, but it's not like technical. Because anything you learn in our 3D class, you can go to Maya and get that translated. Like you're learning about ambient occlusion. You'll learn all the jingle phrases.

EJ Hassenfratz   So that's definitely something that we always try to, we're not just a tutorial. That you take one little nugget of information and you leave. You're getting these foundational pieces of knowledge that will take you on to that next step in your career. So yeah, we have, how many classes do we have? We try to release at least three courses a year. And again, we go through painstaking lengths to make them like the best quality. So they take like a year to develop. It's pretty exciting. So I'm currently working on the second Cinema 4D class, which should hopefully be coming out in the summer. And that's going to again, like you know Cinema 4D but how do you take this to the next level to make you even more marketable?

Chris Nichols   I think it's amazing it takes you guys a year, that just shows the amount of production value you guys are putting into this.

EJ Hassenfratz   Exactly. Yeah. And I mean from the first courses we did, like I recorded Cinema 4D base camp two years ago. And the quality level from just two years ago to now is insane. Like nice mics and nice cameras and yeah, the production is definitely there. When you go through that long you

really have to hone in on like, our outlining process of just like what's the content we're talking about? That's a few month process right there. So you really like, once you to get everything out, you're like, "Actually let's go back there. Actually, I thought of a better way to do this." So it's really, we're not just throwing this stuff on the wall and seeing what sticks.

Chris Nichols   It's funny you say that because I know a lot of ==is== like I learned how to do V-Ray from your tutorial back in 2005. It's like, my gosh, V-Ray has changed a lot since 2005. So you want to make sure it's it's right.

EJ Hassenfratz   And that's the thing too where, we can always be up on the latest and greatest where maybe in a school curriculum, maybe they don't have the budget to upgrade to the late software or something like that. But yeah, it's an exciting time. I got signed on as the 3D creative director there. So we're really hard at work really amping up the 3D content. And we also release free tutorials and stuff like that as well. So if you do go to schoolofmotion.com there's a lot of free content and free tutorials we do.

Chris Nichols   ==Just== people get a flavor of what you guys are doing.

EJ Hassenfratz   Yeah. Exactly. You get introduced to some of our instructors. You get a little taste of like my teaching style and my horrible jokes. And yeah. We do quick tips and like shortcut key videos and all kinds of stuff. Keep updating the blog. We also have a weekly podcast that Joey hosts and we get all types of people from the motion graphics community. So if you're in the motion graphics or a want to be in the motion graphics, like we get all the biggest and best and brightest in the industry that come on.

Chris Nichols   That's so cool. So cool. Well, listen, EJ, thank you so much for being here and being able to spend your time here and tell us all about this great stuff about your back history and about School of Motion and like figuring out about education. And I think it's a great resource you guys are doing, so thanks so much for doing it.

EJ Hassenfratz   Thank you so much for having me.