



**Complete Transcript: HALO Talks with Sumner Hanna
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Pete Moore

I want to thank all of our listeners for several years of dedicated and loyal listening throughout the Halo talks. 400 podcasts completed to date. We're going to 10 by 2024. If you're so inclined, would love to have you go to iTunes for us. Keep this podcast rolling globally. We are now on Chartable's top lists and moving up to charts. Also, if you want to educate yourself in the new year, please go to thehaloacademy.com take a look at what we've done with 150 executives in the Halo sector to get them smarter, get them bad for capital raises and also more winning.

This is Pete Moore on HALO Talks NYC. I have the pleasure of introducing my SoulCycle trucker. My fitness witness and good friend by way of Greenville, South Carolina, somehow got transported to El Segundo and now is serving as the Hanna entering your living room over the podcast. Get ready for summer. Lehatta thank you for coming on the show.

Sumner Hanna

Holy moly, what an intro!

Pete Moore

That's a good intro, right? That's a lot. Okay, you and I have known each other now for like seven years. I used to go to Bike Ten, and every time you did a class, I was in the class. So I came up to you and I said, look, if I had a playlist, it's same as what you would make if you want to do this type of BPMs, that's what I want to do. So I basically changed my fitness regimen and my routine and my time to when you were teaching and thankfully you came back and we've reconnected. It's an important part of my life and I think a lot of people that do boutique fitness and have an affinity with a brand, it's usually with a person and an instructor, they follow and then they like the rest of the brand and what that brings. So why don't you just give your quick background and then I wanted to talk with you about the psychology of the new normal and how you think things are going to kind of play.

Sumner Hanna

Yeah, I love it. Well, first of all, thank you. I'm blushing. That makes me so happy. I love having you in class. My background, you want me to kind of take you through my journey of yeah, for sure. It's kind of brought me to where I am, so I think it's important to know my journey as you did. I grew up playing soccer at a very young age. I also danced professionally at a really young age. I was in a few different dance companies that traveled all over the US. So I was dancing with very well-known choreographers and teachers and came out to La. During the summers and trained for national titles. So I was very active

dancing my whole life. At 18, I moved to La. Went to Fitham, the Fashion Institute design and Merchandising worked in that industry for a handful of years and then fell back into professional dancing. I knew at that age that if I wanted to dance, that was probably the right time to get back into it and was also teaching fitness as a side gig at the same time to get extra money in what modalities? I was teaching Cardio bar, which is basically a ballet workout on track.

[Pete Moore]

We invested in extended bar. Yeah, I'm familiar with cardiac.

[Sumner Hanna]

And then I taught JJ dancer, which is like a dance cardio workout.

[Pete Moore]

Oh my God. I know Jjing cycle. Oh my gosh, we never talked about that. Also, I didn't know you played soccer until now.

[Sumner Hanna]

Learn something new.

Pete Moore

That's good stuff. So let's talk about did SoulCycle find you or did you find that?

Sumner Hanna

Actually, my best friend took me into a class. I don't even know what year it was, but I took Sony's class in Santa Monica and then kind of fell in love with it, obviously, and kind of moving out of to the dance world. SoulCycle still gave me that, like, performing aspect of teaching class. So I fell in love with it, started taking class, and one of the instructors said, hey, I think you should audition. You're a perfect fit. The rest is history. Here I am, seven and a half years later, still teaching SoulCycle.

[Pete Moore]

Awesome. Obviously, when you started, there used to be a small number of studios, whether it's SoulCycle, just any other cult following. The classes were probably waitlisted, you're probably coming in saying like, hey, I'm doing like the equivalent of Broadway performance, basically, and I'm preparing for it as if it's live entertainment. Right? And now, obviously, you've had all this time off. You've got other interests, you got other ways to generate relationships and money. How are the boutique centers? How the locations kind of change what they represent for you? Or to me, it's kind of SoulCycle's like Madison Square Garden and you're like the artist. And it used to be SoulCycle kind of comes with the artist. So do you think there's a way to rebundle this or do you think we're in this new normal of almost like Uber drivers? We're all professional Uber drivers are going to do whatever we want in fitness and let it kind of lead our path.

[Sumner Hanna]

Yeah, that's interesting. You mentioned having a small number of studios in the very beginning, and I think it grew at a very fast pace when our leadership changed. So the original founders handed it over and someone else came in. Her name was Melanie and she opened way too many studios. We became a Starbucks. We were on every corner. And we were at the high of the height, though, so all the studios were doing well. Like you said, classes were sold out. It was awesome. And then the pandemic hit, and it's like we haven't really bounced back. I feel like people found their other workouts. They either can

motivate themselves to do the at home workouts or they have found other group workouts that they now like better.

[Pete Moore]

Right. You think that people would cycle to other workouts and other people would cycle too. Not somewhat of like a pun, but they would cycle back through as well. But there's obviously been a lot of choices that people have made, whether they bought a SoulCycle or Peloton bike or they've got some other connected fitness unit. Maybe there's like I mean, I invested this much. Like, I might as well try and get a little more out of it. But when you talk to clients that you have on the personal training side or you talk to people that haven't come back, what's the main excuse besides saying, hey, I found someone else's? Do you think people are lazy or do you think they need an incentive? They think they're getting the same type of workout that they're getting at home, which I don't think they ever can.

[Sumner Hanna]

I agree with that. I think that the spin bike became really big when everything shut down. So COVID hit there was peloton. There's a SoulCycle at home bike. I feel like people have been spinning and cycling. That's the only workout that they've been doing, really, if they bought a piece of equipment. So I think that they are trying to do anything besides that they're ready for something else. Interesting.

[Pete Moore]

Do you think we over saturated? The spinning is like an exercise and it's got that time?

[Sumner Hanna]

I think so. And think about before that. SoulCycle was really hot and trendy for like 15 years. So I feel like they cycled for 1015 years and then only cycled for two years in their house. They're now like, okay, kind of sick of being on a bike, what else can I do?

[Pete Moore]

Yeah, that's interesting. As you look at other boutiques that you've either worked for, you've done some work with climber, do you think that there's a clear future of hybridization, if you will? Like, we're going to have all of our instructors and you can do a workout at home, you can do a workout in the club. And do the owners and managers of these studios at large not SoulCycle? Do you think that they're like conditioned to be saying, wherever you are, I am? When you run a bricks and mortar location for a long time, it's hard to say. Like, now I'm like a digital guru and I don't have the staff to create. I don't have like a data scientist. I don't have like a web person, I don't have a CIO, I don't have a coders. Do you think that it's almost like patchwork? Or do you think that they'll figure it out and they'll win? Or they'll just be like digital apps and it'll be bricks and mortar? Do you have a Christmas?

[Sumner Hanna]

Yeah. I thought like once Covet Hit, I was like, oh, I feel like brick and mortars are kind of done. I felt like digital was the future of fitness, to be honest. I then came on with climber, which is a vertical climber, and they were just doing digital work. They now have since opened a live studio in Denver and in West Hollywood. But now that we're two years after the Pandemic hit, I kind of feel like people are craving the energy to be back in a room, working out with people instead of digital instead of a digital platform. So I think that for some people, it's still stuck, you know, with a digital platform, that they've done it since they've been at home. But I think the majority are craving that energy and environment and community again.

[Pete Moore]

Got you. All right, let's role play for a second here. So I'm opening up this badass health club. It's going to be in Hermosa Beach. There's all fiction, and I'm trying to recruit you and five other top instructors from the La. Area. Give us a sense of what matters to you. What do you think of as the top five or whatever? Why would you come?

[Sumner Hanna]

You could go through first of all, I think the instructors are the real MVP, right? So I think you should treat them as such. And if you want them to only be working for you, then you need to pay them as they're only working for you. This isn't a side gig. This is a career. So it needs to be treated as such. So paying me benefits, paid vacation, a 401K, maternity leave, there's going to be career growth or else, like, the instructor feels stagnant and then bounces.

[Pete Moore]

Yeah. Do you think a health club I don't belong to an Equinox, but obviously I have a very strong group exercise program? At the same time, they've also got soul cycles. As a separate company. Do you feel like people are going to your class? Whereas if they're going to Orange Theory, they're going based on the time. If I was to recruit you and five instructors to my Hermosa Beach Moore's health club, how much do I have to be concerned about? Is it your club? Is it my club? Do you work for me? Are you like a celebrity that happens to be using me as an arena? Is there any kind of psychological new normal that people need to think about maybe treating them the way you're talking about? That there's a career not just like I paid \$50 or \$100, \$200 to my spin instructor for this sold out class that people I don't know. I'm rambling, but I just want to understand. Obviously, it's an employer employee relationship, but at the same time, it's different because you're a celebrity and you're part of the poll.

[Sumner Hanna]

Yeah. Sorry, what was the question?

[Pete Moore]

I don't really know what the question was. Even though I'm hiring you and this team of instructors, is it maybe not an employer? Employee relationship? Are we almost like, in a joint venture or a partnership or how do you think about who you'd be working with?

[Sumner Hanna]

I mean, I still think of it as an employee employer kind of relationship. Like, I come in and I'm still an employee, so I still respect the people in that way, shape, or form. Personally, I don't think that I'm better than any other instructors, so I don't have that kind of mentality of like, I deserve these time slots. You don't you know, I feel like that's, you know, you got to stay humble, got to stay grounded.

[Pete Moore]

Yes, I hear you. So what's happened a lot over the years is that in these middle market health clubs called, like a Gold's Gym or 24 hours or Neighborhood Club, where an instructor will basically be to have their 100 or 200 members. And then they kind of say, hey, look, if you don't pay me more, if you don't allow me to do what I want to do or give me these times like I'm leaving and I'm basically taking my 200 members with me, I feel like given Instagram and connectivity and zoom. Even though you agree that it's an employer employee relationship, do I own the member? Do you own the member? Do we all own the member? If the member gets results, who gives a shit? Because they're going to tell everyone that was either you or us that got that. So how do you think about everyone says, like, every software

company I talk, they say, I own the data. Five companies can't own the data in the relationship. So how do you think about it?

[Sumner Hanna]

I feel like the instructor brings in, as, you know, the clientele, so everyone is attracted to the instructor or the coach or whatever. Sure, the company is an umbrella and a branch of that, but I feel like its very instructor driven, so I feel like, yeah, if the instructor is like, hey, I feel like I'm worth more and you can't pay me that, then I'm going to go elsewhere. Those clients are going to follow the instructor.

[Pete Moore]

Do fitness instructors at the highest level, do they have business managers that have agents? Are they looking to how do they make decisions or how do you make decisions?

[Sumner Hanna]

So we do have a manager, a talent manager within SoulCycle. So they kind of discuss the classes, class times, everything that we do, even if we want another role within SoulCycle, I was part of the training, like the new training groups, so I would evaluate. So I don't know. Yeah, they have someone that managed us and tells us if we could be doing more, if we can be making more. But, you know, it's a competitive if you're in the industry, you have friends that work at different companies, everyone's talking, we know what you're making. I know what you're making, like, and you just kind of know. So I feel like, you know what you're worth, you know what you should be paid. And that's kind of how we manage that.

[Pete Moore]

Yeah. So do you see going forward over the next couple of years that these studios will kind of, like, ride out the storm and then there'll be a new, fresh group of people that get exposed to a SoulCycle, a cardio bar, club Pilates? Or do you think that naturally happens, or you think there's got to be some marketing campaigns, which I feel like studios are so boutique and exclusive where they thought they were. That's like the field of dreams. If you build it, they'll come, and it's just going to be a matter of time before everyone resumes that way.

[Sumner Hanna]

And you know that we didn't have to market specifically Soul Cycle. Speaking from experience, we didn't have to market Soul Cycle. There was buzz around it. People wanted to come. There were wait lists. It was a thing. But yeah, now that the world is different, we need marketing. Companies need marketing, especially if you're not seeing the results that you want. That's huge.

[Pete Moore]

So when you take a look at the digital space right now, if I'm a health club operator and I've got 20 locations and I've got 200 instructors, is there a reason not for me to put every instructor on my digital connected platform?

[Sumner Hanna]

I mean, 200 instructors I feel like is a lot for digital platform. Personally, I would start smaller, create buzz, have people have their favorite instructors. As you add in different workouts, add in different instructors that are that's their main. Like, say you have someone that's a boxer, they come in, they're saying, I'm going to start a boxing program for this digital platform. You have someone that's doing strength or hit or bar or whatever, like come in and start adding them in. But I think to flood to flood it

with 200 instructors right off the bat, I feel like the users are going to get a little overwhelmed.

[Pete Moore]

In your scenario, there's probably people that enter this club digitally that don't necessarily have a relationship with somebody that's teaching a group exercise class inside the club. I was thinking it from like, hey, if you got 50 people to take a class with Pete at this workout, hopefully they'll also do it at home and almost like, democratize instead of like, hey, are you on the SoulCycle digital platform? You say yes or no. Why would the answer be no in your case? If you have a history of, like, waitlisting classes, preolve it. I just always want people to want you to tell people to get as many people on the platform as possible.

[Sumner Hanna]

But we've had the platform out for a long time, and they're just rotating the same instructors. I mean, if we're strictly talking SoulCycle and you have instructors that do really well in different markets and that bike is in all different markets, you should definitely be bringing in other instructors, new energy, new classes, like, different vibes, for sure, if we're just talking one specific workout.

[Pete Moore]

Yeah. So before we close out here, I want to ask you a couple of questions. You've got influencer status? I don't even know what that means, but I don't know my Instagram password. But if I did know my password, I'd probably having said that, how do you manage opportunities that come in? Is there certain metrics that are being used? I have X number of followers; I have X number of posts. And people are asking you to promote their brand, or you get a lot of just free stuff sent to you, and then how do you make decisions about, like, hey, this is who I am and this is a natural extension, and you're not going to show up with a new Reese's Peanut Butter cup. It sounds great. Every time I buy them, I have no one to share with facts, terrible facts.

[Sumner Hanna]

I have the amount of followers where I am just getting free product. So people send me free product in the mail for an exchange, for a story or a post. But yeah, only if it feels authentic to me will I be posting about it. Like you said, it's something off the wall. And people know. People know. If it doesn't feel authentic, if it's not an extension of who you are, it shows. Right? So it's not good for me, it's not good for them. So I just decide, hey, this is not a good fit. Thanks for the product.

[Pete Moore]

Yeah. And the last question is, obviously, in a normalized world, you're doing, like, two classes a day at SoulCycle. How do you yeah, I know. Trust me, I know. Uber back and forth. The class is with my third coffee of the day at Pizza, looking at me like, dude, what is this guy doing bouncing off the walls? What do you do during the rest of the time that you maybe obviously you don't have a nine to five or you don't have to be at a desk. Like, you've got a lot of autonomy, you've got a lot of freedom. Do you try and create a regimented schedule for yourself? Or preparing for a class now probably doesn't take. I mean, I'm sure there's a lot of work to be done, but it doesn't take as long as it used to. So how do you think about your work life balance and also affect you with three classes a day? You got to be burning at least more calories.

[Sumner Hanna]

Yeah, for sure. Yeah. I mean, routine is definitely key. When I first started teaching, it would take me, like, an hour and a half to prep for class, for a playlist, to figure out the BPMs, the tempos, to figure out

the vibe, to figure out the flow, like, all the things. Now, I can do it in, like, ten minutes, 15 minutes. But yeah, I mean, it's three classes a day. You're toast, man. So you got to be yourself. Rest is so important to me. I'm someone who needs to rest and recover so that I can come back. I'm someone who gets in the car, turns off my radio, and needs complete silence to recharge my battery so that I can't do stuff that's good for me, like beach walks and feeding myself with good nutrition, getting enough water, being with friends, you know, doing all those things. Those are all work life balance, which is super important to me.

[Pete Moore]

Yeah, and last question on that, there are some instructors that all they do is coach. And you've never been that type of instructor. Is that a choice that you actually could make, or do you know that it would not be beneficial to the class if you were just talking?

[Sumner Hanna]

Oh, you mean I ride the bike and coach at the same time instead of being off the bike and coaching?

[Pete Moore]

Yeah, sorry. I should have described that the way you did. I apologize. I'm a novice at describing the coaching versus riding.

[Sumner Hanna]

No worries. Yeah. The SoulCycle way is to ride and motivate at the same time. There's only a handful of people that could I've only actually known one or two people that can be off the bike and still fill a room for every single class and motivate. But for me, I personally have I feel like I have more energy off the bike. I can motivate and talk more and feel more and read the room more. I'm a little bit more present instead of, like, being in my own body, which is also great. But yeah, we're not really taught to be off the bike.

[Pete Moore]

All right, well, as I told Dave, I wrote two songs yesterday. I almost hurt myself. So I was checking my work release way, and we're rebuilding the trot. The cult will return. Our leader has to stay on.

[Sumner Hanna]

Exactly.

[Pete Moore]

Awesome. So last thing, you got any words of wisdoms or quotes? Obviously, you got quotes in class and takeaways, but anything that kind of motivates you or something that somebody said or that keeps you in your perseverance, something.

[Sumner Hanna]

That I feel like a message that I always come back to in class, out of class, is just like, staying true to yourself, and you'll always be successful.

[Pete Moore]

Awesome. All right, well, you are our hero ambassador. We'll send you some free stuff. Promise.