

Richard T.: [00:00](#) Welcome to the Solo Business Show for conscious creators, authors and entrepreneurs where we talk mindset, meaning, money and mastery. I'm your host, Richard Taubinger. Find out more at consciousmarketer.com.

Richard T.: [00:17](#) Hi everybody, thanks for tuning in. I'm Richard Taubinger, the CEO of Conscious Marketer. I really appreciate you being on the podcast here today. I'm really excited to have on today's guest, Pablo Fernandez. Pablo is going to be talking about creating extraordinary customer experiences and also why real life events, not just digital stuff is so important. So many people also get caught up in making the first sale, and they don't think enough about the experience and how they deliver as well, so this is going to be really exciting. Hi Pablo, are you there?

Pablo Fernandez: [00:48](#) Hey Richard, thanks for having me.

Richard T.: [00:49](#) Can you hear us?

Pablo Fernandez: [00:50](#) I can hear you. Yeah.

Richard T.: [00:51](#) Great. Let me tell you a little bit about Pablo before we get started. He worked in the finance industry as a corporate executive for 10 years, so did I by the way, so we can chat about that. Then he decided to pursue his true passion, connecting people around food. A four month sabbatical in Spain marked the beginning of a reconnection to his culinary roots, and this journey led him to follow the footsteps of three generations of bakers, cooks, culinary instructors that preceded him. That's so incredible. What started out as cooking at home and parties led to what is now called Secret Table, wasn't that the best name in the world for a company? A renowned live experience design company that connects community leaders, innovators, artists and entrepreneurs at the dinner table?

Richard T.: [01:41](#) That's what we're going to talk about today. He is a voting member of the San Diego Food System Alliance, the creator of food farming and nutrition program at Autism Tree Project Foundation.

Pablo Fernandez: [01:55](#) That's a mouthful.

Richard T.: [01:56](#) Yeah, that is a mouthful, and a board member there since 2004. We're going to talk about customer experiences, developing real life relationships and I think we met Pablo at a mastermind event I think in Vegas a couple of years ago, and we live close to each other, so we've connected here, there. That's his big intro.

He's an amazing person that just lights up the room. Can you tell us, Pablo, a little bit about yourself and how you came to be in this world that you're in now? It sounds like an exciting adventure.

Pablo Fernandez: [02:27](#) Thanks Richard. Yes, it's true, we met in Vegas. We had a wonderful weekend experience and connected. I knew we were going to stay connected, not just because we live in San Diego, but I knew that there was a magic in your eyes. I remember connecting with you and thinking, this is a good human being, and I'm going to stay connected to for the last [crosstalk 00:02:46] so we're here now.

Richard T.: [02:47](#) That's so kind of you. You obviously don't know me well enough.

Pablo Fernandez: [02:52](#) Well, everyone's going to find out the truth on this podcast. Yeah, I really appreciate you having me and to share a little bit about my background, it's been such a full circle experience. I did spend 10 years in finance, and I was both a broker owner of a small firm, and I spent five years in different corporate positions. After 2008 and losing my business, my homes and everything, I was a young guy, totally invested in real estate. I lost everything, took a corporate job, about a year and a half later realize it was sucking the life out of me, and somehow was offered the opportunity to spend a few months in this small town outside of Valencia in Spain.

Pablo Fernandez: [03:41](#) It took me about two days to make the decision, it was rather quick. I quit my job and I moved to this small town. I think population in 2000, so it was ... Talk about old world living. It was a complete contrast to living in La Jolla and running a region for a bank. It's just such a world of difference. I remember one of the first things that I noticed when I got there was not just the pace of life, but the culture of connection that everyone had. It did take me a little bit of time to develop some relationships that I ended up developing within the town. It's almost like at first some folks were a little hesitant to let the outsider in.

Pablo Fernandez: [04:28](#) It's a non touristy town, so I was the only American there and probably the only American that had been there for many years.

Richard T.: [04:33](#) Did you have family there or?

Pablo Fernandez: [04:35](#) No, it was a connection through a friend that said, hey, you can come stay here. There's a local program that you can ... It was

this Spanish-English [entertainment 00:04:44] program. I just needed a break. And so I took it. Yeah, it was such a wonderful experience. I was playing soccer, reading books, drinking wine, connecting with the locals every single day and I remember-

Richard T.: [04:57](#) That's so un-American. You need to get to work.

Pablo Fernandez: [04:59](#) Correct. That's coming from the guy who ever since I was a kid ... The story goes way back, but ever since I was a kid, I've been involved in some sort of business or work. It was an amazing change of pace for me and what most stood up for me was this culture of connection, where almost every single person that I would run into in town every day would take time off to eat with family, eat with friends, sit down, take a break, enjoy nature, have conversations, not think about work.

Pablo Fernandez: [05:34](#) I remember thinking I've always been involved in bringing people together. When I was in finance, I was very involved in hosting workshops, seminars, being part of conferences. I've been attending conferences, seminars and workshops since I was a teenager. I knew I wanted to combine my gifts and talents and background and just interest in being a part of that type of ecosystem, and take the best of this culture that I was experiencing in my culinary and family background and put that all together and create something unique and special that was impactful here in San Diego on a local level.

Richard T.: [06:16](#) You started the Secret Table, and you found some clients. How did you find those clients? Did they find you? Normally when you make a decision that's aligned with, whatever you want to call it, your higher self or some kind of greater purpose, the universe has a lot of synchronicity, where there're some things that just happen that created that first, or was it tough? Did you have to go out and knock on doors? How did it go down?

Pablo Fernandez: [06:41](#) That's a great question. I completely believe in what you just described. The truth is it was both. It was a mixed bag of incredible synchronicities and a lot of work that I put into making sure that it was going to take off and take off on the right foot. I love this part of the story because I truly believe in what you just described. The moment that I decided that I was going to move to San Diego, move back to San Diego, and do something that was in my mind going to serve a higher purpose and help our local community have deeper connection and beautiful experience and develop this culture of sharing.

Pablo Fernandez: [07:27](#) All kinds of doors started to open up. One of the first doors that opened up for me is I was introduced to my housemate at that time who was also a chef, incredibly passionate about people, and food, and connection. I mean, to talk about synchronicity my very first housemate, we went and rented this beautiful large up property in Carmel Valley. It was ideal for entertaining, and right off the bat, we said, hey, let's start hosting these dinner parties to just make new friends and connect people to other people. We started hosting these cooking class, dinner parties in our home. At first, it was 10, 15 guests and 20. Then 30. All of a sudden, we'd have 45 guests in this grand room by the kitchen with all these multiple stations set up, walking them through a six course meal and then enjoying it with live music and some wine or whatever the case, juice, whatever anyone was drinking. After about eight or nine months, I realized specifically, I thought to myself, there's something here we keep [selling 00:08:30] these out. We're selling them at cost.

Pablo Fernandez: [08:32](#) It wasn't a money making thing for us and we're also beating up this house quite a bit, that felt really bad. I thought, there's something here maybe I can really turn this into a business and just take it to the next level. And so I spent the next few months conceptualizing Secret Table with my brother, who's my business partner. When we decided to host our big event, our first event, we hosted Miss Beautiful Rooftop Terrace in downtown San Diego in a tall condo building complex. The capacity was a maximum of 100 guests per fire code. I remember thinking like, I've only been here for about a year and a half. I don't know that many people outside of this core group of regulars that keep coming to our cooking class parties, and I really want to take this to the next level. Like, how am I going to make that happen?

Pablo Fernandez: [09:21](#) I spent about a month straight. This is something that sometimes when you're launching something new, some folks underestimate the work that goes into launching a new business. I spent a month calling, I don't know, I must have called 600, 700 people, sent out a thousand texts, hundreds of emails in preparation for just this one event because I wanted to make sure that it sold out the very first time, and we just hit the ground running.

Pablo Fernandez: [09:55](#) Sure enough, we packed the house that time. It was a total hit. Behind the scenes, no one knew that there are all kinds of things going wrong. We were on our toes fixing things behind the scenes.

Richard T.: [10:07](#) They always talk about front of stage and back of stage.

Pablo Fernandez: [10:09](#) Totally.

Richard T.: [10:12](#) I think restaurants are the epitome. I mean, restaurants' employees are like that. Front of stage, you have this beautiful experience, and the backstage can be organized chaos.

Pablo Fernandez: [10:23](#) Well, that's exactly what it was. Really, I received only positive feedback from all of the guests that attended. They were thrilled that something like this was launching in San Diego. Back of the house, we were putting out fires left and right, but it was such a fun, exhilarating experience that we knew we had something, and from there, we just grew it and grew it. We did grow it in size for a while. Then in the last couple of years, we've realized that in order for us to help people with very busy schedules and with big missions to connect on a deeper level, we needed to create a more intimate format.

Pablo Fernandez: [11:00](#) We've been mostly focused in hosting these experiential multisensory dinner experiences that are on average 25 to 30 guests or less. That's just been the most fun and most deeply rewarding work we've been doing ever since we launched.

Richard T.: [11:17](#) We operate or we've talked a lot about masterminds and things like this where the client value could be, I mean, 20,000, 100,000, corporate dinners where you're bringing in clients or people you're trying to take care of. I mean, the value of creating an extraordinary experience is pretty high. Can you walk us through how you think about an event and how you go about creating a unique kind of experience for your clients?

Pablo Fernandez: [11:47](#) That's a great question. In order for us to feel really good about elevating our experience, our offering, and also positioning ourselves to be really at the top of the marketplace and in a unique position, where as far as I know, I don't know anyone else at least in San Diego that's doing ... I had to dream big, and a couple of the things that are always top of mind are ... I think about it like this. For us, the design or the philosophy behind the experience is in my mind like a mix of Chef's Table. If you've ever watched the Netflix series, Chef's Table, it's like merging Chef's Table with Ted and then having the comfort and care of your grandmother or great-grandmother there to serve you with so much love and intention that you're going to walk away feeling like, holy crap, I've never experienced something like this before.

Pablo Fernandez: [13:43](#) I've always conceptualized it in that way. When we talk about it with our team, we say, okay, what are the different ... We are very clear on this now, but at first it was like, what are the different points that we want to hit throughout the night? How can we create a curated experience from start to finish, where everyone feels incredibly taken care of? They're also in awe and in wonder, feeling just inspired by beauty and creativity. And also, how can we guide and set the intention for specific conversations that are going to help people open up and go much deeper with each other? And so there is a specific sequencing that we take every guest's experience through, but in a sense, that's the concept. That's how we in a sense wrap it all up into one experience.

Richard T.: [13:35](#) I realized really recently that I care a lot about space. I care about the space I work in, I care about my car being clean. Some people don't but this really affects me. How do you think about creating a space that actually opens people up to opportunity or to business deals or to friendships or to think ... Do you think about space in that way or how do you think about it?

Pablo Fernandez: [14:03](#) Well, we never stop thinking about it. I think that's a huge component, and I think that in many cases when you attend an event or when someone is thinking aesthetically or about the design portion of a space, they underestimate the value of it. I love the fact that you mentioned that you like your spaces clean and well designed and well thought out. And I'm the exact same way, and my wife is even more so. We'd love to have you over for dinner at our place soon, and when you visit, you'll notice our home is incredibly immaculate.

Pablo Fernandez: [14:39](#) I mean, it's way cleaner than I would keep it for sure if it was only up to me, but our whole team operates this way. One, it's always very clean. Our space, when we design, it's very clean. We never underestimate the value of beauty and detailed aesthetic design. When guests attend one of our experiences, they'll find all kinds of different unique, small touch points that have been very intentionally placed. From the very beginning, from the moment someone walks in, from the moment someone enters the main gate to a property, there's something there that is welcoming, that is beautiful, that is inspiring through the very end.

Pablo Fernandez: [15:24](#) We never underestimate that and we never stopped thinking about it. I think that part of how we think about spaces for our experiences are when we consult with clients to that for themselves is we encourage people to find outside of the

ordinary and unique spaces to begin with. One of our core signature components of our brand has always been to host our experiences in spaces that are noncommercial, where not just anyone is going to walk in and host another event. That opens up all kinds of other opportunities to then transform that space. That's a big [inaudible 00:16:04].

Richard T.: [16:03](#) Challenges and problems, I could imagine too.

Pablo Fernandez: [16:06](#) Yes, it's totally both, but we were very interested in accepting that challenge and it keeps us on our toes.

Richard T.: [16:15](#) It's interesting because basically I run an agency, and we run our own products, but we do a lot of launches, membership sites, things like that. There's so much detail involved. Do you just hire people that can track all the details, or are you wired that way? Do you have checklists? I'm wondering how you make sure that the ship is so tight because you want to be so meticulous. I'm curious what your strategy for that is.

Pablo Fernandez: [16:46](#) That's a great question. I think one of the reasons why ... Like I said, as far as I know, I think we're the only company in town that does this as a full service turnkey package, and our team owns the entire production. I think one of the main reasons is because into our almost seventh year now, we've been developing our core team and we own the entire production. It's very different than when you source different components of an experience with third party vendors, and it's not something that you're working through with them on a regular basis. Our team owns the start to finish of the entire production. Once in a while, we'll source something like lighting if we don't own it already or if it's not something that we're comfortable doing ourselves, but for the most part, each event requires our team to come together. We spent 40, 80 hours planning different components of an event, sometimes even longer. Our internal processes, I mean, we leverage technological tools, project management software, and different people within our team handle different components of the planning and execution of each experience.

Pablo Fernandez: [18:06](#) When you look at our event breakdown sheet, it's a document that we prepare and then print out for every event. Usually, each event takes us almost three days to complete. The day before the event when we're doing the bulk of the set up, the day of the event where we're doing some setup and the execution, and then the day after where we're doing breakdown and wrap up. At a minimum, I would say, it's a 10-

page document, but sometimes it's been as long as a 15-page document and there're all kinds of checklists that we go through. It's an in depth process for sure. We managed to developed an art and science around it by now.

Richard T.: [18:40](#) I can imagine. You're not going to share that secret with anybody cause that's your proprietary [juice 00:18:46], but I think that-

Pablo Fernandez: [18:49](#) We will be soon.

Richard T.: [18:50](#) You will be soon, okay.

Pablo Fernandez: [18:52](#) We will be soon. There's a very small niche number of clients that we can and want to work with on a yearly basis. For our hosted events, there's only so many that we can host with a very small niche group of people. The next evolution that I'm very passionate about is we're going to be teaching that methodology and help empower other experienced designers, producers, community leaders to be able to do their own version of what we've done.

Richard T.: [19:20](#) That's amazing. That sounds fun. Now, I heard you say that you control all the parts of the process. I know you just recently bought a farm, so can you walk me through? Are you thinking even including the growing of the food now you want to have your hand in that as well, or how do you see that as part of what you do?

Pablo Fernandez: [19:39](#) Thanks for asking. We didn't purchase it. It's a multi-generational family farm and it's right in the heart of Encinitas. We have formally leased it, and it's a long time lease so we're there for a while. Yeah, and it's exciting because on one hand, we get to help a local urban family farm thrive, and survive, and create a platform that will be replicable and also to be able to be utilized by the community. It's been a nonprofit farm for many years and what most folks don't know or don't realize is that most urban or suburban farms have a real tough time making it. The economics behind that being successful is a tough code to crack for sure.

Pablo Fernandez: [20:26](#) Our company Secret Table with a farming partner have come on board and we've built an alliance, and we've leased the space and we're going to just take it to the next level as a joint collaborative effort. For us, it's exciting because we're building a permanent farm kitchen on the farm. We'll have beautiful regenerative organic crops growing. It's a beautiful event space

to begin with and that'll give us a chance to invite guests to tour the farm, other third parties to come in and host classes and workshops, nonprofit community based events and private experiences.

Pablo Fernandez: [21:02](#) The reason why that's inspiring for us is because it helps us to connect our local community to the land, to where food comes from, how it can be prepared, and how it can be a catalyst for connection, which is one of our biggest values.

Richard T.: [21:17](#) Catalyst for connection, it's almost like you're supporting humans to be humans. Let's talk about that maybe we can end on there. Can you share a little bit about your philosophy behind relationships? So much stuff is done online now and there's a huge benefit, but we seem to have gotten away from getting together and having cups of tea or dinners. Dinner parties seemed like they've gone out and everybody's so busy that they fail to make the time. Can you share why you think it's important and also mention maybe some of your parties? I'm assuming that all kinds of things happen at your parties, like business relationships and some results that ... Besides just the friendships, I'm sure that there's real business case for it as well.

Pablo Fernandez: [22:06](#) Right. Yeah, that's a really good point. Let me talk about what I'm personally passionate about around that topic. It's interesting because we're more technologically connected than ever, yet experiencing some of the highest levels of individual loneliness that we've ever have. With so much polarization and division happening in our culture, for me and for us as a team, there couldn't be a better time now than ever and a more critical time to bring back some of our older traditions of just having family dinners at home together again.

Pablo Fernandez: [22:45](#) I think that most of us truly and to our own detriment seriously undervalue the importance of that, and so when we host events, one of our big takeaway challenges for our guest group every single time is, we encourage you, we invite you to just host one every week would be ideal, but at least every other week, host one simple family style dinner in your home or encourage a friend to host one in their home and join that. We also encourage and invite people to cook their own meals. There's something about that connection to your own food.

Pablo Fernandez: [23:23](#) Not only is it likelier to be healthier for you and better for the planet, but it's also a meditative and connection process with yourself, with the food and with others. We're incredibly passionate about spreading that message. I forgot to mention

one of the other foundations that I serve on the board for, it's called the Berry Good Food Foundation and that's also another local food systems foundation that is very passionate about spreading that message. One of the main reasons why I'm involved with these local foundations is because that's another way for us to spread that in our community and provide resources to be able to do that. That's a huge component. I'm always encouraging and challenging my friends to do that. We try to do it as much as possible. We just moved into our new place, so my wife and I are going to be hosting small intimate of non business related dinners to connect folks that we know in our community just in a casual and deep way.

Pablo Fernandez: [24:19](#) And then yes, through our business platform Secret Table, it is very intentional as far as how and who we connect, and so it absolutely has a business case. In fact, that's our core model. Our core model is that we bring leaders from multidisciplinary backgrounds together so that through our process, through our methodology, through our live experience model, they can create unlikely, uncommon and sometimes incredibly valuable connections that span business, personal and in many cases create conversations and connections that help solve major problems, major challenges in our community and abroad. There is a very specific methodology. The best feedback that I ever received from past events attendees, aside from I met my husband or my wife or my significant other who I was married because of your event.

Pablo Fernandez: [25:14](#) I mean, we've received several of those throughout the years and those are incredible friendships and whatever the case may be. Some of my favorite ones are, oh, I now have a new business partner thanks to you guys. The way that you guys were able to curate a very intentional, specific community for us to be exposed to and to be opened up to in such a deep and meaningful way fast tracked my ability to make that type of relationship, whereas someone may not have the time or even the knowhow of who, how, or when to go and develop those relationships. So that's something that I'm incredibly proud and passionate about.

Richard T.: [25:50](#) Yeah. That's amazing that I can also imagine that one of the big things you think a lot about is where people sit when they go to these dinners. I'm sure that's a huge ... That we could probably do a whole episode on how to sit people at your dinner table.

Pablo Fernandez: [26:03](#) That's true. That's a big part of it. Yeah.

- Richard T.: [26:09](#) This episode really just warms my heart that you're out there helping people kind of rediscover the importance of sharing food together and connecting from the heart. And the fact that doing that in business, you know, there's a blending where it just all becomes one thing that this intention to come together and to be friends and get things done and enjoy life. It's kind of a breath of fresh air to kind of our modern world where we're so fast paced and especially in America, we forget that I think traveling through Europe ... I mean it's no a mistake probably that you had to go to Spain and get out of America to find a different culture lived.
- Pablo Fernandez: [26:56](#) Totally. In many cases it's a question of what people don't know, they don't know or what they've forgotten about, they don't realize in the moment that's important. And if I can serve or my team or our members, our guests can serve as a catalyst to be a gentle reminder, or an inspiration point for folks to say like, oh, that is important, where our food comes from, how it's produced, how it's shared, how it's prepared. Those are all important things we forget and we think that they're not because of our current culture. But I think that in the long run, this is something that sometimes keeps me up at night. I think if we forget too much, we're going to regret that. Things disappear, ecological systems, food systems, they disappear if we don't value them. And so, yeah, Richard, I'm looking forward to dinner at your house soon.
- Richard T.: [27:54](#) Okay. You set the bar pretty high. So [crosstalk 00:28:00]
- Pablo Fernandez: [28:01](#) You should see when we cook at home it's very simple. It's very just basic good whole foods and so it doesn't have to be complicated at all. It's about the intention and the heart behind it.
- Richard T.: [28:13](#) It's kind of funny because my wife and I have been married for over 10 years and for the first couple of years like I never cooked because I met her in a restaurant in Hong Kong actually. And the restaurant was called Life Cafe. This was 2002 ish. So that's about what 15, 16 years ago. And she sat me at a table and we started talking and I found myself asking her out. I didn't know at the time that she owned the restaurant, which was kind of funny. And then for years after I never really cooked for her. And then she got pregnant and we had a baby and then I started to cook almost every day. I started to go into the kitchen and cook every day and she was like, why didn't you tell them you could cook? And I was like, well you owned a restaurant and like you have very [inaudible 00:29:06] tastes.

Richard T.: [29:07](#) And I was like, you know, but there was like a connection. Obviously after the first birth you have a strong connection. I think the food was even, you know, there's a nurturing that you need at that time in your life and it was like a rediscovering of that. That you're reminding me of right now. So I thought I would just mention it.

Pablo Fernandez: [29:25](#) That's wonderful. What an opportunity? So what you're saying is you can't wait to attend some cooking classes at the farm with us?

Richard T.: [29:33](#) Of course. Yeah. I have like this secret fantasy of like going to Italy or going to like even India, I've always loved Indian food too, taking a couple of weeks and learning a cuisine, you know?

Pablo Fernandez: [29:44](#) That's amazing.

Richard T.: [29:46](#) Well thanks for joining us on the show today, Pablo. You know if you're interested in ... If you're listening to this on iTunes, you can go to consciousmarketer.com and click the podcast button you get it download. If you're watching it or listening on audio, you can get the video. If you want to learn more about Pablo and his Secret Table, you can go to secrettable.co, secrettable.co and find out about what he does. You're in the San Diego area, just a quick question. Do you ever do anything in like other cities or do people fly to New York or Houston or other places to do events as well or mainly just the Southern California area?

Pablo Fernandez: [30:24](#) Our core focus is Southern California, and in particular San Diego, but we have this funny motto, it's like, we will travel for food.

Richard T.: [30:34](#) Okay.

Pablo Fernandez: [30:35](#) If there is a right fit opportunity anywhere in the world, we're interested. We've taken groups to Guatemala and other countries for culinary experiences in the past. Like I said, it's not a core model of ours, but we're into food, we're into people, we're into travel as well.

Richard T.: [30:48](#) Okay, that's amazing. And you can go to Pablo A. Fernandez on Facebook and they also have an Instagram [@secrettable](#) at Instagram. So you can just Google Secret Table on Instagram. I'm assuming you're posting lots of, I haven't been there yet, pictures of the events and things that you're doing and see Pablo's work. Yeah, so thank you so much for joining us today,

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Pablo. Thanks for all the listeners tuning in today. Again, go to secrettable.co to learn more about Pablo. Pablo, I want to thank you so much for your time today and sharing your wisdom. And I want to also thank all the listeners for tuning in today.

Pablo Fernandez: [31:23](#) Thanks, Richard. It's been an honor.

Richard T.: [31:25](#) You're welcome.

Pablo Fernandez: [31:25](#) Have a wonderful day.

Richard T.: [31:26](#) Hope to see you soon.

Pablo Fernandez: [31:27](#) Yeah, absolutely. Thanks, Richard.

Richard T.: [31:30](#) Thanks for listening to the soul of business show. Find out more and subscribe at www.consciousmarketer.com