



POWERING TRAVEL | SEASON 6 | EPISODE 4

Coaching the next generation of winning vacation rental hosts

What to listen for:

Host Tim Rosolio sits down with two guests to uncover the best vacation rental hosting tips and what separates a good host from a great one. First up is Helen Melliush, VP of Integrated Marketing at Vrbo, who unpacks how the concept of a coach inspired Vrbo's new marketplace campaign to help hosts raise their standards.

Then, Tim welcomes American football coach Kyle Whittingham to connect those same principles directly to marketplace performance. Coach Kyle explains how the habits behind winning programs — attention to detail, consistency, and a commitment to being "all in" — are the same fundamentals that set great hosts apart and translate into stronger reviews, higher acceptance rates, and repeat bookings. Together, Kyle and Helen make the case that great hosting isn't just about a beautiful property.

Listen to the full episode and learn more about how host habits, discipline, and consistency keep guests coming back.

Introduction:

[00:00:01] **Tim Rosolio** Hey folks, I'm Tim Rosolio, your host of Powering Travel. In my day job, I am Vice President of Vacation Rental Partnerships at Expedia Group. Today, we're talking about what exactly is at the heart of great vacation rental hosting. That's trust, excellence, and memorable trips for travelers. So what does it take to build trust, raise the bar, and create the kind of guest experience people remember long after the trip is over? We have two guests joining us today to help answer those questions and discuss the new Vrbo Marketplace campaign. This new campaign was built to help partners understand what can take them from good to great. But instead of rules, reminders, and checklists alone, the campaign introduces the idea of a coach. Someone calm, clear, encouraging, and steady under pressure. Someone who helps people perform their best by anticipating, adapting, and building confidence over time. Think of Vrbo as your sideline coach. We keep an eye on the key signals, flag what needs work, and reward strong performance with search boosts and badging so you can put down the clipboard and focus on your guests. And there's something that tells you the standard is real. 97 percent of Vrbo travelers are rated five stars by hosts. Vrbo delivers great guests. This campaign is about coaching partners to elevate the experience so that those guests don't just leave happy, they wanna come back. The campaign uses language of coaching for a simple reason, because hosting, at its best, is not just about managing a property. It's about setting a standard, building the right habits, making smart decisions under pressure, and creating an experience people want to come back to. On that note, I wanted to start with someone who can really unpack everything that we'd be doing on the traveler side of the business, which is all about trust and quality. Helen Melliush, the Vice President of Marketing at Vrbo. Hey Helen, welcome to Powering Travel.

[00:01:55] **Helen Melliush** Thank you, I'm so excited to be here.

[00:01:57] **Tim Rosolio** Let's talk a little about the campaign itself. We didn't just have a typical email with some best practices or anything that we tried to lean into this idea of a coach. How'd you guys get here?

[00:02:08] **Helen Melliush** Oh, I'm so excited. The team internally have done such a great job on this and this campaign, I think, is so smart, and they've actually taken the profile of a great positive growth mindset coach and said, hey, actually, if we use that framework, the framework of this being someone who's there to guide, to set boundaries, but also to help you be your best self, right? To get the best out of the team. We can use that idea of a coach and bring it to some of the things that we know will actually be practically helpful for hosts. I think that was a really smart idea. And as you said, it's a way to, like, make it fun and engaging. And hopefully, all of our hosts kind of feel that.

Why consistency is important now:

[00:02:51] **Tim Rosolio** When I joined this business 10 years ago, our value proposition was we have those properties. And today it's about we have the most consistent experiences. So, talk a little bit about this campaign and why now.

[00:03:06] **Helen Melliush** I think what was really interesting for me was how mature this category is. We are a long way away from 10 years ago even where it was kind of cute to stay in someone's home, and now this is a really mature category and travelers are looking for hotel-like standards. They know they're not in a hotel, but they're certainly looking to be able to come to a home that feels like it's really good quality and feels like there's consistency and all of the things that we kind of call the brilliant basics internally. And so, yeah, this is not really about volume anymore. It's actually about quality. And I think that's where we have always excelled as a brand. And so this campaign and all the campaigns, frankly, that we're gonna do both on the traveler side or the host side, are really going to be grounded now in quality, consistency of standards, and the brilliant basics because we know that's what actually is going to help people win in this space.

[00:04:05] **Tim Rosolio** You've seen the partners. I've introduced you to some of the partners; you've been a traveler. Let's talk about the full ecosystem. Like, as a marketer, how does our traveler marketing fit with the partner marketing, and how can we make that something that to a certain extent is all reinforcing?

[00:04:21] **Helen Melliush** Great marketplaces realize they're a marketplace. There's supply and demand, and ultimately, the best ones have a virtuous flywheel. If you nail one side, that helps you with the other side, that brings it all the way back to the other side. Again, if we think about quality being the center of our marketplace, what that means for us is when we're doing traveler campaigns, we're gonna talk a lot about the quality of our properties, the quality of our hosts. The consistency of the stay. When we're doing host campaigns, we're going to talk a lot about how do you make sure you can deliver the quality that people need, but also the benefit of that, which is getting those higher-quality, more-trusted travelers who are going to respect your property. And that's the virtuous cycle that we want to create here, and that's what our marketing is going to focus on both sides of the marketplace, and I'm really excited for that.

The anxiety behind booking:

[00:05:14] **Tim Rosolio** A lot of our studies showed that was the thing that made people nervous, whether you're a partner or you're traveler. It's like, is the house going to be quality? Is this traveler going to be quality? It was so glaring that that's what brought anxiety to the category.

[00:05:30] **Helen Melliush** Oh, absolutely. It's such a high consideration purchase to your point. It's not just the price, which is one thing. It's the fact that you've been looking forward to this vacation potentially all year. You really want to make sure you get it right. And unfortunately, everyone knows someone who's had a bad VR experience. And so that's now also weighing in people's minds a little bit. And we talk a lot about the anxiety of this category, the anxiety of the trip planner. And the amount of stress you absorb on not just is this going to be the right home, but is the home going to have everything everyone needs? And I think on the other side of that for hosts, it's the, okay, this is my business. I care about this. Am I getting the right people to my property? Am I making sure that they're going to be respectful of the home, that they are going to follow the rules? And after all of that research, it really comes down to just kind of need the basics, and we would love it if we just have good people in our homes that are respectful and treat the home well. And on the other side, you have travelers who are like, I just wanna make sure that I can get in and it's clean. And it's really interesting that actually, those are the needs, though, the real needs.

Defining what quality means:

[00:06:45] **Tim Rosolio** Quality. Like, this word is being thrown around a lot in our category these days. When we started doing the research, what did quality mean?

[00:06:55] **Helen Melliush** So interesting. I can almost go through the stages of the vacation. Quality means, first of all, that the property is what you said the property was going to be. And people want all types of properties. So it's okay if you have a pool or you don't have a pool. The property is what it is. You arrive, it's easy to get into the property, and no one expects anything fancy. They just want to know, is there a keypad? And they want to know that, in advance as much as

possible, because they're a little bit stressed about getting into the home. And then once you're in the home, quality is just, it's clean. You have all of the linens. You have the towels. You have some shampoo. You have the things, just the basic amenities and things that people will now feel like can take that breath. Those are the core components of delivering quality for people. Again, that doesn't mean you have to do something lavish. It just means those basic things that really connote the people, the host cares enough that they know I'm gonna have a good time and then they can build from there on anything else they need.

Practical tips for hosts:

[00:08:05] **Tim Rosolio** What do we think and hope changes? What's the immediate and practical thing that the hosts are gonna do next, the travelers are gonna notice?

[00:08:13] **Helen Melliush** First thing, ultimately, for all of us internally, I think it's really important that hosts understand that we have their back. Like, we want them to be successful and we wanna be the kind of partner that turns up and actually helps them be successful. This isn't just kind of pie in the sky. This is kind of practical tips, actual helpful advice for you to know how to improve your quality standards, which ultimately means getting more bookings for you. Next thing I would just say is this is gonna get paid off on the traveler side too. And so there's nothing we love more than talking about our hosts, because they are the people behind the product, behind the experience making this what it is for you and for anything I'd love our hosts to know that we're really proud of them and therefore really proud to share all of the work that they do to make these properties the quality properties that our travelers love.

[00:09:16] **Tim Rosolio** From some of our research, what's something that you think very often like the partners miss? What's something, what something that's the obvious things, like obvious gotta be clean? What's that very often the partners miss?

[00:09:29] **Helen Melliush** That's a great question. You know, I think they miss how much work goes in front of the booking. How much people are looking at every detail of the property to assess if it's the right property for them in the first place. And so that is like make sure, again, it sounds really basic that your photos are accurate, that they're relatively recent. A lot of our hosts may have been on the marketplace now for 10 years. Are your photos from 10 years ago, five years ago, or six months ago? That makes a lot of difference, even if things haven't materially changed in the home, important to kind of just keep up with the listing and make sure that you're being really accurate. That helps a lot, because if we can get someone who just like this has everything I need, has the amenities I need. I've seen the pictures, has good reviews, then you're much more likely to have a much more successful stay. And so I would definitely just continue to advise and push our hosts to be thinking about how they show up in that booking experience. Because if you show up great in that book experience and property is what that looks like, you are being reflective of the reality, then everything from downstream on should be really easy.

[00:10:49] **Tim Rosolio** So, Helen, it's been awesome to have your perspective on the show, and I'm really excited about the campaign.

[00:10:55] **Helen Melliush** Thank you. Big shout out to our partner marketing team. This is all of their work, and I couldn't be more proud.

[00:11:03] **Tim Rosolio** Isn't it time for hosts to get rewarded? For a limited time, hosts can earn OneKeyCash™ travel rewards for listing an eligible vacation rental on Vrbo. OneKeyCash is a flexible rewards currency you can use to book your next trip on Vrbo, Expedia, or hotels.com. Visit vrbo.com/podcastoffer to learn more; terms and conditions apply.

[00:11:21] Helen, thank you so much. I love this conversation because it makes the campaign feel bigger than a creative idea. It is really about raising the standard of the category and helping hosts see how quality and trust translate into better performance.

Meet Coach Kyle:

[00:11:35] **Tim Rosolio** And that brings us to the second part of today's episode. If Helen helped us understand the strategy behind the campaign, Coach Kyle Whittingham helps bring the central metaphor to life. Kyle Whittingham is one

of the most respected head coaches in the U.S. Over the course of a long, distinguished coaching career, Kyle has built a reputation for consistency, discipline, and helping people perform at their best not just once, but over time. Those are exactly the kind of qualities that make his perspective so relevant to a conversation about the best practices of hosting. So please join me in welcoming Coach Kyle Whittingham to the show. Thank you for joining us, Kyle.

[00:12:17] **Kyle Whittingham** You bet.

[00:12:18] **Tim Rosolio** We really appreciate you doing this with Vrbo. You know, you're a family man, you have a big family. Do you have a lot of experience staying in vacation rentals?

[00:12:27] **Kyle Whittingham** We do. We love to take vacations as a whole group. We run pretty deep; there's 22 of us. And so, my wife has, through the years, utilized Vrbo a ton. You know, it seems to be a great fit for us and makes things pretty simple and pretty streamlined for our vacation.

[00:12:48] **Tim Rosolio** Awesome. So, for 22 people, is that multi-generational, I'm assuming?

[00:12:52] **Kyle Whittingham** It's our children and our grandchildren. We got 11 grandchildren, and so it's a lot of little ones running around.

Coach Kyle's hosting playbook:

[00:12:59] **Tim Rosolio** We're really excited to have you doing something with our partners. They're the backbone of what we do. We market them, but they're the ones that deliver the goods. They're the ones that put out the perfect welcome gift. What do you think makes for great hosting?

[00:13:13] **Kyle Whittingham** Well, I would say attending to the details. You know, in football, we talk about how everything matters. Every minor detail, down to the last detail, is important. And I think that's really what makes a great host is someone that goes the extra mile, pays attention to detail, those little things that really make the stay a success.

[00:13:33] **Tim Rosolio** What we've really found in this category is all the research says that, you know, the reason a traveler wouldn't book with Vrbo is maybe they're concerned about these things about the vacation rental category. Is the house gonna be like it says? Is it gonna be clean, etcetera? So, it's just so important that as a marketplace, we have standards. Like, how do you think about setting standards with your team and how do you think that could potentially apply to the vacation rental category?

[00:14:02] **Kyle Whittingham** We are in the same mindset where everything matters. Every single thing matters. And we have a saying that how you do anything is how you'll do everything. And so, it becomes a way of life to do things the right way, not take shortcuts, get here early, stay late. Anything it takes to be great, you gotta be willing to pay that price. And that's really what separates the good teams from the great ones. It's hard to be great. People are comfortable being good. But very few can take that next step to being great.

[00:14:34] **Tim Rosolio** A lot of these partners, too, like, they're small and mom-and-pop operations. It's very important that they put the right team around them and have the right processes. Like, how do you think about developing that team mindset and instilling a lot of those standards with the team?

[00:14:50] **Kyle Whittingham** Exactly, and that is so key to success in football, is getting everyone to buy in, being all in. Another term we're saying that we use, you're either all in or you're in the way. We don't want guys that are on the fringe and that just halfway in, halfway out. Those guys, you can't win with those guys. You gotta have guys that're all the way in, buying into everything you're doing. And another thing we talk about is, you gotta understand that you need the team more than the team needs you. If you get everyone on that same page and buying into the team mentality and the team comes first, and the team is bigger than any individual, then you get a chance to be very successful.

[00:15:29] **Tim Rosolio** So, if you were speaking directly to a Vrbo host and trying to elevate their performance, what would you tell them about, like, leadership, discipline, and creating memorable experiences for others?

[00:15:38] **Kyle Whittingham** Well, I would say be very consistent in your approach. You got to be consistent with the, you know, the people you surround yourself with and the people that are helping you present the properties, and, you

know, players need to understand and know what to expect on a daily basis. You can't be, you have peaks and valleys. You got to be very steady, very consistent with what you're doing. And I think that's another key, vital key to success is having that consistency on a day-to-day basis.

Final thoughts and key takeaways:

[00:16:04] **Tim Rosolio** Thanks again to Helen Melliush and Coach Kyle Whittingham for joining this episode of Powering Travel. There's one big idea to take away from this conversation, is that great hosting is not just about a beautiful property, it's about habits and standards behind the experience. It's about getting the details right. It's about being responsive and consistent. It's about creating the kind of stay that feels trustworthy from the first click to checkout. That's what this campaign is designed to celebrate. And that's what will continue to elevate the vacation rental category. If you enjoyed this episode, be sure to follow Powering Travel on Spotify, YouTube, Apple podcasts, or wherever you listen. And thanks again for listening to Powering travel brought to you by Expedia Group. I'm your host, Tim Rosolio, and I can't wait to see where you're going next.