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Amazing Mentor! Spotlight Interview with Jeff Sutphen

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By Olivia Pineda, Assistant Editor

Jeff Sutphen is a producer, writer and game show host for nationally broadcast family-focused TV programs. Whether behind the camera or in front of an audience, Jeff has created innovative and exciting projects for kids and families. As host of BrainSurge, on Nickelodeon, Jeff makes learning fun with a game show that tests contestants' and viewers' memory and concentration skills. To encourage kids to learn how to use online technology like social networking, the TV star recently announced a partnership with the acclaimed kids-only social media destination Yoursphere.com. Because Jeff has built a reputation in the broadcast industry for creating energetic, highly rated family-oriented programming, he selected Yoursphere.com as the ideal place to establish his first online social presence because of the site's pioneering focus on age-appropriate content, online safety, and rich interactive features. Through his new "Jeff's Madness" sphere, Sutphen brings his customary zaniness in interacting personally with his young fans. From this personal platform he offers exclusive clips, photos, trivia, games, contests and more.

Not only has Jeff worked with Nickelodeon, but he has also worked for several other networks, including VH1, MTV and E! Entertainment. As producer on Nickelodeon's U-Pick Live he produced over 400 episodes. The show aired 2002 through 2005. In addition to serving as a producer for Nickelodeon's 2008 game show *My Family's Got GUTS*, he has served as a producer on TEENick spots and several other Nick shows. He not only works on kids' shows but has also created a music show for a college network, entitled *Bootlegged*, which showcased alternative bands with live concert footage and interviews. He has hosted the pre-award show *The Countdown to Kids' Choice!* at the 2010 Kids' Choice Awards and also started as the host of *101 Ways to Leave a Gameshow* for ABC. As a creator, and producer, Jeff is one of the few people to manage it all to such a high level. Let's look into the reasons for his tremendous success.

Amazing Kids!: As a producer for a television show, what do you do?

Jeff Sutphen: This is a great question. To be honest it changes from project to project but my overall job duties generally include a lot of running around and sitting in meetings. That's the boring answer. For the most part I am responsible for the overview of the entire production. You want to make sure that the ideas that people are coming up with are the best they can be and then you have to figure out how to make it happen. I like to think of it as putting together a puzzle. All the pieces are there you just have to figure it out. And once you do that you put your own style on it.

AK: Is it difficult to separate your roles of producer and host when you're playing two roles on the same show?

JS: At first I had a lot of trouble doing this. As time moved on I was able to draw the line between them, but the fact of the matter is being a producer has made me a better host and being a host has made me a better producer. There are some projects where I wear both hats so I don't need to separate them. Like on BrainSurge, I'm one of the producers so I have my hands in everything. However on 101 Ways... I just focus on the hosting. But because of my production background the producers will sometimes take my suggestions

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because of my production background the producers will sometimes take my suggestions, but I don't want to step on any toes.

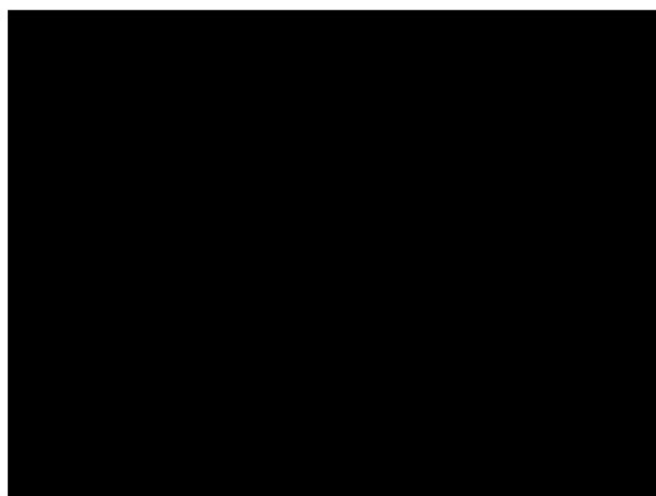
AK: We like how you teach kids as well as having a really fun show. How do you mix education into an entertaining show without it seeming forced on kids?

JS: I'm going to be straight up honest with you guys... I am pretty much just focusing on having a good time. I set out to make a fun show every time. If someone learns something from it great, but usually I'm just acting like a fool. That said I don't think you will become stupider from anything that I host, at least I hope not.

AK: How did you start out in producing and acting? If kids have the same passion as you had as a kid, how should they pursue their career into producing and acting on television?

JS: I went to college for TV production. I knew from a pretty early age that I wanted to do that. The hosting thing just kinda happened by mistake. I guess you can call it a happy accident.

AK: How is hosting a game show different than a regular acting job?



AK: How do you think programming for kids' television shows will change in the next 10 years?

JS: This is a great question! I have answered thousands of interview questions and I have never been asked this. Simply put, robots and aliens will do it all. Kidding. I think that we will see a big shift to online shows. There is so much there already and today's kids know how to work computers better than most adults. It's only a matter of time before TV's and computers are one in the same. We are on that doorstep already. There are websites out there already that allow you to watch all your favorite shows online and they offer social interactivity as well. For example, Yoursphere.com is a great place for fans to connect and share their thoughts together. I also think there is going to be a big interactive element. Look what Wii did for gaming. We have to be making that jump in television soon too.

AK: What were some of your favorite TV shows as a kid, and did this inspire you to want to work in the television business as an adult?

JS: I was, and still am a huge fan of Pee Wee's Playhouse. I would love to make a show like that now.

AK: When you're trying to pull the entire family into a game show, instead of just the kids, what factors must be added to make it work?

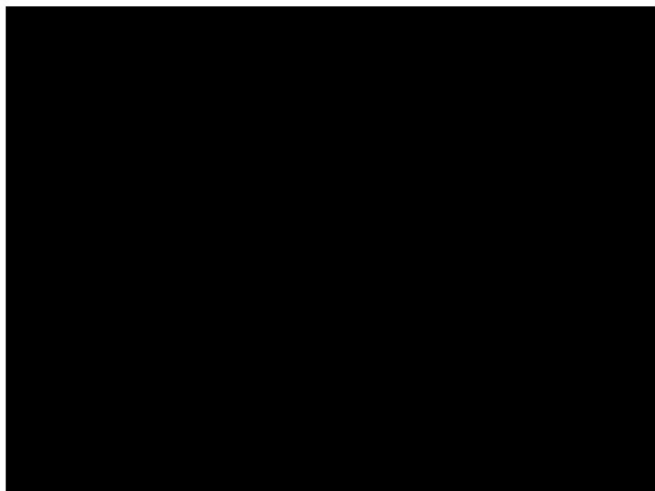
JS: I personally don't change up too much. From where I'm standing I think kids get it just as much, if not more, than the adults. I talk to adults the same way I talk to kids... in French. Just kidding.

AK: Creativity is a key factor in developing innovative and exciting programs. How do you keep your creative juices flowing?

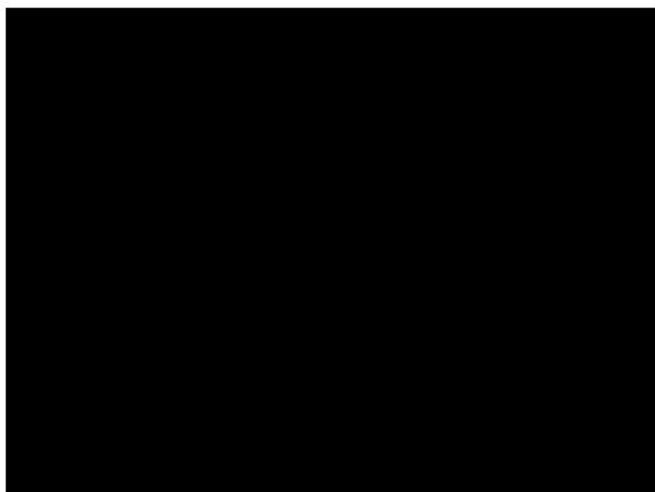
JS: The key to this is to surround yourself with a great team. The people that I work with on BrainSurge and 101 Ways are straight up TV geniuses. They are so good at what they do. Because of that I trust them. Some of my favorite moments are when we all get in a room

and brainstorm ideas for shows. I usually walk out of those meeting with a stomachache from laughing so hard. Find those people and keep that team together. I also believe that good ideas become better when you are in a group setting and have other people to bounce things off of. [Yoursphere.com](#) is a great place to get inspired. There is so much energy floating around from all its users that you would be hard pressed not to find something that will spark you.

AK: What has been one of the funniest things that has happened to you when taping a show?



AK: Did you have a mentor that helped you succeed in your career? If so, what key piece of advice did they give you?



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