

# *All About Qual: Perspectives from Across our Partner Network*

WITH

**Jesse Caesar**

Moderator for Connection & Confidence

Welcome to *All About Qual*, an ongoing interview series in which we highlight some of the unique methodologies, perspectives, and experiences from our partner network that make qualitative research such a flexible and powerful tool for getting to the “why?” behind the “what?”. In this edition, we sit down with **Jesse Caesar**, Owner of Jesse Caesar Consulting, a qualitative research and brand consultancy in Brooklyn, New York.

**Q: One theme that we have noticed again and again when speaking to research professionals is that they often begin their careers in unexpected places. You’ve previously said that a Lower East Side comedy show helped you get your start in research. What is the connection?**

*A: More than anything in my professional background, it was hosting a monthly show that helped me land my first research job. It showed I could “read” a room, charm strangers, generate and maintain energy, and be quick on my feet. Beyond helping interviewees loosen up and stay engaged, I’ve found humor is a great asset for problem-solving, more generally. Comedy is all about challenging assumptions, looking at something from a fresh angle, and truth-telling with positive impact.*

**Q: Some qualitative researchers really lean on formal credentials and training, whereas others evolve into their own unique style. When you think of yourself as a moderator, how much of what you do did you “figure out” on your own and how much have you taken from others?**

*A: There is a science to qualitative research. You need training on the suite of traditional methodologies and the right way to ask questions. I’ve picked up so much from my colleagues and mentors over the years, and I still seek out fresh perspectives, tactics, and tools to keep*

*developing my practice. There's an art to our discipline too, though. Much of the magic of moderating comes from how you bring your authentic self to the process and how you put those fundamentals to work (not just stylistically but experimenting with entirely new approaches). If you aren't being truthful and present with that person you're interviewing, you aren't going to get much back from them in return.*

**Q: One of your stated ambitions as a researcher is to “make clients fall in love with their customers”. What do you mean by that and why is it important?**

*A: I was trained to bring a full insight and address the client's business problem – the “Why?” and the “So What?”. I don't think that's enough, though. Qual should reveal the human behind the data by getting as close as possible to those customers in their context. Apart from story-driven reports mixed with videos and consumer-generated artifacts, I always encourage my clients to be a part of the fieldwork process and experience this themselves. Those intimate encounters breed powerful and lasting understanding, empathy, and appreciation – in short, love. When a client loves their customer, that customer is always on their mind and they'll serve them more effectively. Love can inspire growth and make clients more adept at anticipating how their customers will react to changes and new ideas down the road.*

**Q: Generalization versus specialization (i.e. building deep-domain expertise in a certain category) is a debate that might be old as market research itself. Where would you place yourself on the generalist-specialist spectrum, and why?**

*A: You need to understand your client's business to deliver relevant and responsible guidance. However, I think most of my value as a trusted advisor comes from my outsider – i.e. outside of their bubble – perspective. While I have deep experience across many different sectors, I'm a proud generalist. Unfettered by category assumptions and sacred cows, I can be more present and innovative in my pursuit of insight. Oncologists, energy shot drinkers, HVAC technicians, smartphone shoppers, hemorrhoid sufferers... at the end of the day, they're all just people and I'm a specialist in unearthing people's truths.*

**Q: Our team at Beyond the Table Research tries hard to anticipate the needs of the moderators that we support. What do you most value in a recruiting and facility partner?**

*A: From the start, I want responsive and honest communication. Talk me through the feasibility of the recruit and set expectations around potential challenges. Be proactive and solution oriented. I want to feel like I have a partner, equally committed to the success of the project we're collaborating on. And most importantly, good backroom candy!*

**Q: Both within the market research community and in society more broadly, attitudes towards AI range from extreme pessimism (“humans will be crowded out in a bleak, machine-dominated future”) to extreme optimism (“work and money itself will become irrelevant”). Where do you think we are, and where do you think we are going?**

*A: I'm hopeful we'll all get a bit more thoughtful about how we integrate AI (if there's a real benefit to doing so) and clear-eyed about the tradeoffs. For the first time now, we have what I would consider a true qualitative overlay to a quantitative approach. AI that can probe is a superior tool than traditional surveys, as it can ask open-ended questions, follow up on responses, unearth unexpected learnings, and help you out with the back-end analysis. I'm not concerned about AI displacing qualitative researchers. Even if (not when) AI advances, we'll never improve upon the human-to-human connection. I can see using AI online to moderate your way through small, tactical questions and quick validation needs. Those types of studies have always been better suited to quantitative solutions, though, and I don't want to be doing them anyway – enjoy, robots!*

**Q: We always like to work a curveball into our interviews. Tell us about a time that you took a risk or tried something new as a researcher. How did it go and what did you learn?**

*A: I could tell that attention was waning with a lot of discussion still left to go in a focus group that was not just not going as planned. I stopped and proposed we have a little game break. I had everyone stand up and mimic me as we walked and then skipped around the table for a couple of minutes, making funny gesticulations and blurting out nonsensical sounds. When we sat back down, the participants were focused, energized, and sharing as they hadn't been at any point before. It ended up being one of our best sessions of that project. I learned you must be willing to abandon your agenda – at least temporarily – to fulfill your objectives. Also, people really open up when you give them permission to be playful and reinforce a shared purpose.*

**Thank you, Jesse, for sitting down with us and sharing your perspectives and experiences!**

## **About Us**

***Beyond the Table Research***, a premier market research facility in Pittsburgh, is proud to serve as a crossroads where distinguished researchers, carefully vetted respondents, a modern, thoughtfully designed venue, and a hands-on, experienced project management converge to

*create exceptional insights. To learn more about our capabilities as a resource partner, please visit our website at [bttrfocus.com](http://bttrfocus.com), or take a [virtual tour of our research facility](#).*

***Jesse Caesar** began his career at a boutique New York City branding agency before being hired as Firefly Milward Brown's (now part of Kantar) youngest Research Director in 2008. During his time there, he led research for Fortune 500 clients across several business sectors and was part of the team behind the 2011 book [Marketing to the New Majority](#). Since 2016, he has brought his unique big-firm knowledge and independent moderator flexibility directly to clients as Owner of Jesse Caesar Consulting. To learn more about his services and experience, please visit [jessecaesarconsulting.com](http://jessecaesarconsulting.com).or check him out on [LinkedIn](#).*