

Interview mit John, Airbnb-Host und Aktivist für faire Regulationen von Kurzzeitvermietungen in einer Stadt in Kalifornien, persönlich, 26.04.2017
Interview: TF, Transkription: GS, Korrektur der Transkription: LS

Interview wurde in zwei Teilen durchgeführt, da es in einem Restaurant stattfand und nach den ersten vier Minuten der Aufnahme bereits das Essen serviert worden ist.

Thomas: Okay, I put it here and it should work. ... To begin I just need your short approval that I can record it, so that I can use it (...) #00:00:14-3#

John: It is fine. #00:00:16-3#

Thomas: Okay, thanks. Yeah, maybe you could just introduce yourself in a few words and also regarding your activities in Airbnb. #00:00:25-5#

John: Okay, so my name is (*John*), I've been hosting on Airbnb for about five and a half years. I live in (*name of neighbourhood*), (*city in California*), and I rent out a spare room to mainly tourists that come to visit (*city in California*). I started two organizations ... for the community of hosts in (*city in California*). One is called (*name of one organization*) and the other organization which is just a political organization, which is called (*name of the second organization*) which is ((charted)) by the (*city in California*) Democratic Party. So, you know, we are actually formed under the rules of the Democratic Party. So, I'm the co-chair of that ... and yeah. So our aims are to advocate for fair and reasonable regulations of home sharing and also to help our community of, to give them a voice whenever there are any legal reform measures being proposed that will affect home sharing, home sharing rights. #00:01:47-3#

Thomas: Mhm. Okay. So, what might be a fair regulation in your point of view? #00:01:54-1#

John: Well, I think that right now what we have is quite fair in (*city in California*). It allows, it, first of all, it mandates that everybody who does short-term rental must get a permit from the city and get a business license and then that allows us to pay hotel taxes to the city and for the city to keep track of where, you know, who the hosts are and as well as that, right now the regulations in (*city in California*) allows a maximum of 90 days for what's called unhosted stays, so. #00:02:34-2#

Thomas: When you're not there? #00:02:35-1#

John: When I'm not there. You can only rent it for 90 days a year. #00:02:37-4#

Thomas: Okay. #00:02:38-7#

John: But if you are there all the time and you're just renting out a spare bedroom there, you can do that for 365 days, so I think that's fair. But, you know, there has been, ever since that law has passed an attempt to reduce the number of days. So for example, the last attempt was to impose what was called "universal cap", to put a limit on both hosted and unhosted for 60 days a year. So we don't think that's fair. #00:03:19-7#

Thomas: ... Shall we continue or you want to? #00:03:21-4#

John: Let's eat first (laughter). #00:03:22-9#

Thomas: Let's eat. It was quick.

[Zweiter Teil]

Thomas: Maybe just some very basic questions: Why did you initially register for Airbnb for being a host? #00:00:14-3#

John: Well, I usually have a long-term roommate and he migrated to Germany, actually Berlin, around the time that my mother, who lives in Australia, and my sister, who lives in Hong Kong, were starting to come regularly, visit me. So when my roommate left, I left that room vacant, so they can stay, when they in town. But that was only one, maybe two weeks a year. For, to keep the whole room downstairs vacant for the whole year, just for that two weeks when they're here, made no sense. So someone told me about Airbnb, "You can rent out your room downstairs, when your family is not here, and when they get here, you just block up those days and then they can stay with you – this is a win-win situation". So, okay, I'll give it a try. And it worked out really, really well. At first, well, I had all the novel concerns, you know, ((should I have)) strangers stay with you, you know? Or even security, that's the whole thing, but then I found, yeah, so really, the experience was much more positive than I imagined, so I just kept on doing it. #00:01:38-5#

Thomas: Mhm. And what is, what do you like particularly about being a host? #00:01:45-7#

John: Well// #00:01:46-1#

Thomas: What's nice about it? #00:01:46-5#

John: Let's face it, we all do this for the money. #00:01:49-3#

Thomas: (laughter) #00:01:50-2#

John: So definitely a compensation is rewarding. But there are also other intangible rewards as well. And I find, I actually do enjoy meeting people from all around the world. And for some reason I've, I get a lot of young Australians, group of Australians, really fun to have Australians coming through and staying with me. And then I've also, because I, you know, when I started hosting, ... it was around the time I retired as well, so. And then I started this group for, the home sharers group, so it kind of really exposed me to something that is a very exciting and intellectually interesting development that is located in (*city in California*), right? Not just growth of Airbnb itself, but this whole new thing called the sharing economy. You know, what is a sharing economy, why did it reside in (*city in California*), how come that it got so big so fast, or popular so fast? How is it really changing the way people stay when they travel around the world and how is that changing not just travelers but hosts and the whole idea of accommodation and hospitality? So that opened a door for me, intellectually, right at the same time as I was starting my retirement. And so I call, Airbnb contacted me, wanted to talk to me about the club I started and in a way we grew together and so that's been, that's been really a very rich intangible reward. #00:03:46-0#

Thomas: Ok. ... How would you say this growing together, how would you define this or describe this relationship with your (*name of one organization*)// #00:04:00-8#

John: Well, as I mentioned before, you know, we were very, very concerned to make sure we're independent of Airbnb, right from the start. We don't take any money from them.

None of their employees would, are membership, are members. So, we are proud of our independence which gives us the ability to do two things. One is to speak authentically. We're not the puppet of Airbnb. We are not in their pocket. So when, when we talk to the press, to the public about our views of what's going on about regulating the new laws and, you know, home sharing, people can know that we are not just a mouthpiece for Airbnb. That's very important. #00:04:46-5#

Thomas: How can you distinguish it? Or how can people distinguish it? #00:04:50-7#

John: Well, we always try. Whenever the press, the reporter talks to me and asks me questions, which I can see is, they wanted to compromise our voice by implicating us as being in the pocket of Airbnb, alright? But, so they ask me questions like, like at events, "Who paid for this" ... and, you know, "Are you" – they wanted to know how much money we get from Airbnb. So I'm always happy to tell them, "Nothing! We do not accept any money to the extent that during election campaigns, we send out publicity, like mailing, and we get donors, from all sorts of interest groups and candidates. Airbnb does provide us with some funding for that, but that's fully disclosed in the ethics' laws in (*city in California*) which anybody can find out, it's publicly disclosed how much money you can get from ((another)). So, our real independence is very important. That gives us an authenticity when we speak. It's not a compromise, our voice, our view, it's not compromised by accepting money from Airbnb. The other thing also, is the independence gives us the ability to disagree with Airbnb, right? (laughter) So. #00:06:15-8#

Thomas: Could, could you, I mean, you said this before, but it's not on record, but what are the basic disagreements or agreements with Airbnb? #00:06:24-6#

John: Well, so, yeah, I'll just mention one thing that just recently variously came up. Airbnb is considering changing the cancellation policy for hosts in (*city in California*). They have their business reasons for doing so, they're understandable, but, you know, at the same time a lot of hosts are against it. Because it imposes more fees on hosts, so that's one area, we are having an emerging disagreement. We will be making our view clear to Airbnb, so they know what the hosting community feels about these changes. But we also go to give them some alternative suggestions for reforming the cancellation policy. And these suggestions which are much more neutral in the effect on hosts, but it still addresses Airbnb's commercial concerns. #00:07:17-9#

Thomas: So it's more like a constructive relationship? #00:07:23-6#

John: Yeah, yeah, yeah, so we, you know, as a host, as a community of hosts, we tell them, "We don't like your, we don't like this idea. ... and here is why" you know, "This is what, how it's gonna affect us. And we don't like this idea, but we also understand why you are doing this and here is some other idea for you to consider". #00:07:46-1#

Thomas: Okay. Going back to being a host. Has there been any situation or moment that you remember as being particularly nice, as being an outstanding thing? #00:07:57-7#

John: Oh yeah, lots of them. I had a young couple from Brazil, they came to (*city in California*) on their honeymoon, we had a lot of fun together, you know, we had dinner together, I think I made them the dinner and then, it was just a very lovely couple. And when they left, I, he, they gave me, we exchanged e-mail addresses and as usual I've thought that I never hear from them again. (laughter) #00:08:25-5#

Thomas: Most of the time it's like that? #00:08:30-7#

John: Yeah, most of the time, yeah, we do it ((with everybody)), yeah. But before they left, they said, you know, "Whenever you're in Brazil, please come visit us." So that's very kind. And then, a year later, you know, I got an e-mail to say hello, again inviting me to stay with them and I said, "Oh, I don't feel like going to Brazil, but thank you very much". So we kept contact and recently they've been thinking of coming to (*city in California*) again. I think [it's] the anniversary, this time bringing, I think, his mother (laughter). So, it's nice to have that continuation. And, oh, yeah, there is another couple, who has two children living and working in (*city in California*). And they live in Florida and they wanted to visit their son who lives close by, so they stayed with me, they stay with me. But I found out that where they live in Florida is very close to where I have a holiday vacation apartment. So when I went to Florida on my vacation, I looked them up and now we've become very good friends. Anytime I go there, we get together, I go to their place to have dinner, they come to my place and that's good. #00:09:42-7#

Thomas: Okay. So it's these// #00:09:45-2#

John: Friendships. #00:09:46-6#

Thomas: Relations, friendships// #00:09:47-0#

John: Right. #00:09:47-2#

Thomas: Developing along this. #00:09:51-0#

John: Yeah. #00:09:50-9#

Thomas: Is there anything you don't like being a host or which you find annoying?
#00:09:56-0#

John: Oh, very rarely, you know, I get a ... guest that leaves a review which is, I find, sometimes very silly comments, silly and negative. Like, you know, recently, one guest said that, "After a few days it smelled very damp", so I said, "Well, you know, we've had the wettest winter on record and you didn't open any of the windows". (laughter) #00:10:40-4#

Thomas: He wrote that in the review and you commented the review? #00:10:43-0#

John: Yah, I mean, you know, of course I wrote it in a very nice way, but, you know, it's hard to read so negative comments when (a) they could have said something during the stay rather than just leave the review, the public review after they leave. If I have seen there is an issue, I could have taken care of it while they were here – why, you know, do it post-hoc? And (b) it just seemed crazy. I mean, you know, if you smell damp, open the window! (laughter) So those kinds of things get me annoyed. But that's very rare.
#00:11:28-4#

Thomas: Mhm. Did you have any other negative experiences? #00:11:36-7#

John: Well, yes, it's not worthwhile talking about. They mainly, they're very rare, they mainly happen when the guest is to an Airbnb stay for the very first time. Their expectations are like a hotel, a four, five star hotel and home sharing is simply not that. So when you come with difference of expectations, you know, there're some tensions. But I always tell my guests to read my descriptions very carefully – most of them don't, most of them look at the pictures and then they make a booking. (laughter) #00:12:23-7#

Thomas: I think some people do. #00:12:25-0#

John: Right, right, right, most of those who, where that difference of expectation occurred, are those who only look at the photos and book. But I know am very reluctant to book someone who has never stayed at an Airbnb before. #00:12:47-8#

Thomas: Is there anything else that you consider before you accept like a host, guest request? Do you look at their profiles or on their reviews? #00:12:55-5#

John: Well I have what is called instant book, right? There are filters, so if you don't actually, if you don't have a previous review from another host, they can't instant book. So they have to send me a request. #00:13:08-3#

Thomas: What are these filters? It's automatically? #00:13:11-8#

John: It's automatically. #00:13:11-6#

Thomas: Or do you set it by yourself? #00:13:13-4#

John: Well, you could say, well, there are ways that you can screen out those people who are allowed instant book with you. So, one of the criteria is, that it must have at least one other or two other reviews from previous hosts. Now that's, another filter is, they must have completed verification ID and things like that. #00:13:35-2#

Thomas: So there is a standard setting and you can change it. #00:13:36-2#

John: Yah. It's a menu, so. What was the question? #00:13:43-0#

Thomas: What do you consider before you accept a guest? #00:13:46-8#

John: Oh I see. Okay, yeah. #00:13:48-3#

Thomas: But still you have to// #00:13:49-1#

John: So a half instant book. I can actually address those main filters, but I also only allow two people. Occasionally, people request those "me, my wife and our child", that's okay. But recently I got a request, "we are five people together" (laughter), that's way too many people maybe. Because my bathroom is very small and five people make it very unpleasant. And so it's, it wouldn't be a good experience for them. So and also, you know if they are, if they have mobility problems. My house has a lot of steps. So things like that. #00:14:34-1#

Thomas: Okay, so you, you look at what they write and// #00:14:39-9#

John: Well, I look at their profile, right. They usually, you know, if they, if they are blocked from instant booking, there usually is a reason. So when they send a personal request, they usually tell us, tell me, describe to me their party, which issues they have, and what expectations are// #00:15:05-8#

Thomas: And from instant booking, it's just, you receive them and you have a quick look? #00:15:11-1#

John: Or do I have a look? There's a, their reservations is instantly confirmed once they click. #00:15:17-4#

Thomas: Okay. #00:15:19-1#

John: By the way, a lot of hosts and our members do not like instant book. We were very reluctant when it first came out and Airbnb has made many changes and refinements to the whole instant booking process. They put a lot of resources there, they've done a lot of user testing and, because they really like it, Airbnb really likes it. They want to make sure that booking is done as in a little time as possible, 'cause they know through their own statistics that the longer someone is looking at a listing [and] doesn't book it, the less likely they will book it. So they want people to book immediately. And also, from the guest point of view, they like to ((immediately secure)) accommodation. They don't want to send a request and wait five days to know whether they have somewhere to stay// #00:16:13-2#

Thomas: And send another five. #00:16:14-0#

John: Alright, exactly. So Airbnb really, really is pushing instant book. On the other hand, there is a core group of hosts who stubbornly refuses instant book. #00:16:30-8#

Thomas: How does Airbnb like encourage you to provide instant booking? Because you don't have to. #00:16:36-0#

John: Well, I think right now, if you create a new listing, I think that's a default. Unless you have to opt out of it. #00:16:44-5#

Thomas: Okay. #00:16:45-9#

John: And I think, they keep on sending you, if you don't have instant book, they keep on sending you these little e-mails and say, "Here, all the benefits", yeah. #00:17:04-7#

Thomas: ... I mean, you regularly meet other hosts// #00:17:08-4#

John: All the time. #00:17:09-1#

Thomas: And your organization, so you connect, do you also, do you like online activities? #00:17:15-5#

John: Yeah, we have a Twitter account and we have a Facebook account. #00:17:19-6#

Thomas: And also in Airbnb host forums? #00:17:22-9#

John: Yes, yes. If you look on the community, community groups in Airbnb in (*city in California*)// #00:17:33-1#

Thomas: In this official community? #00:17:35-5#

John: Yeah. We have, we are the home sharers of (*city in California*), sort of thing. #00:17:38-7#

Thomas: Okay, and how would you describe like a good host? What sort of characteristics should he have? #00:17:46-3#

John: No, there is no stereotype. I guess, it's one, it depends on – again, it's all a matter of expectation. For lots of business travelers, a good host is someone who is not there. (laughter) Who is invisible, who provides a really good... accommodation for a low price. So they just want a really nice place to shower and to sleep at night and go for work in the

morning, centrally located. But for travelers who want to experience a new culture, to experience a city, a good host, you know, is an ambassador to that city, right? Who knows a lot of the history and culture, who is friendly and open to cultural exchange and conversations and so you have a whole// #00:18:41-4#

Thomas: Variety? Mhm. And what's a good guest? For you? #00:18:45-9#

John: For me? You know: Friendliness, cleanliness (laughter), responsibility, and good communication skills. You know, if there's a problem, let me know about it right away, let me take care of it. And if you like something, tell me about it. If you don't like something, tell me about it. If you, if you really want to know how to find the best dim sum in Chinatown, ask me! (laughter) #00:19:18-2#

Thomas: Okay, so, communication. #00:19:19-4#

John: Right, communication is key. #00:19:21-5#

Thomas: And what's special about your listing? What do you emphasize? #00:19:25-0#

John: Well, it's a very historic house, you know, was build by Italians at the turn of the century. I think everybody loves this location. I'm within ten minutes walk of many of the iconic (*city in California*) destinations – the (*list of five different attractions*), you know? You can (*name of another attraction*), it comes right next street. You know, you can walk to all these very special areas. #00:20:04-0#

Thomas: Do you take much care of your profile, do you update it (...) regularly? #00:20:09-2#

John: My listing, not so much my profile. My listing. #00:20:13-5#

Thomas: I mean your listing-profile. #00:20:14-9#

John: Yeah, the listing I do, because, in fact, actually, I think, the Airbnb algorithm is the more you update the listing the higher you are in the search results. So if you just, like for example change your rates from time to time, that will increase your rank in search result. But I will often add things in there as, “Oh, I didn't know that”, you know, guest didn't know about something. So I'll, so for example, the (*special sightseeing tours*) are usually booked up way in advance. So a lot of guests come, then the next day they want to go and do (*special sightseeing tour*). You can't do that. You know, you need to buy a ticket online weeks before you come to (*city in California*). So now , I've put that into my description, “If you are (*doing the special sightseeing tour*), here's a website, buy a ticket there first”. #00:21:16-3#

Thomas: So that experiences you have with the guests that you reflect and include in your listing. Do you also ((feel)) like any review affected your listing, so that you, somebody's writing// #00:21:35-9#

John: We don't have a choice. When a guest reviews us that may be posted. They won't take bad reviews down. So we don't have a choice about what to add and what not to add. I think, I maybe not select the best ones and put them at the top for you. But, we don't get to determine that. #00:21:55-4#

Thomas: Okay, when somebody wrote, I don't know, there has been an issue, some sort of, he tried to react to this and// #00:22:03-7#

John: Well, after we leave a review, we can respond and that response is posted also. #00:22:15-0#

Thomas: How do you prepare your – maybe, yeah, this is from (...). Is it a lot of work being a host? #00:22:20-5#

John: It can be. #00:22:21-7#

Thomas: Mhm. How do you manage to// #00:22:24-3#

John: Well, ((I told you)), I'm retired. So I have time. But if you don't have the time, there are now different new businesses that will look after and manage the listing of you. For a fee, of course. So for example when I go to Florida in my holiday, I use a company called HostWell and they look after my listing. They greet my guests, give them the key, show them around, they clean the place after the guest leaves and put new sheets and vacuum, so they do all that. But you know, I'm always here, so I do the cleaning myself. #00:23:06-1#

Thomas: Do you also use that, there are some apps that, I think, there's a (...) pricing. #00:23:13-6#

John: Oh smart, yah, the dynamic pricing apps? #00:23:17-5#

Thomas: Did you have any of these? #00:23:17-8#

John: Yeah, I used EverBooked. Yeah, but you still have to monitor it. Sometimes I find they sell it too high (laughter), but it, they are very good because, you know, I don't know when there's gonna be a big convention in town. So they know that, so they can adjust my rates for it. #00:23:38-8#

Thomas: Okay, but you double check? #00:23:43-0#

John: Yeah, and I usually know, because, you know, if I don't get a booking, you know, it, like – if I look at a booking regularly or it's has been a long time since I got a booking, it must be caused, if the booking app sets, the price is too high. So I go in there and I changed the prices, put it down a little bit ((and that's it)). (...) [talking to a waitress] #00:24:09-2#

Thomas: How does it work? How do you prepare yourself or the flat when somebody is coming? #00:24:15-0#

John: Oh, housecleaning, vacuum, clean the bathroom, just change all the sheets, towels, you know, provide all of the, all the provisions in the kitchen. #00:24:27-0#

Thomas: Do you change the apartment also? #00:24:29-5#

John: Not too much, no. #00:24:31-5#

Thomas: Not too much, mhm. And generally, how do you integrate the presence of guests in your everyday life? You said, you, if there is, if they want some interaction you are available, if not, not. #00:24:47-7#

John: I let them tell me. So, before they arrive, I'll send them an e-mail, a message, and I tell how that, you know, they can either have no interaction with me, or if they like, I'm happy to share a glass of wine or coffee with them, at the beginning sit down, have a conversation, share my knowledge with them of (*city in California*). So they know it's, I'm available and because of my setup, I'm upstairs, other than the front door area, we don't have to see each other very much. #00:25:21-3#

Thomas: Okay. ... And does it happen, when your guests check out and they leave a message or something or is it just like they go away and it's already fixed? #00:25:34-8#

John: Oh yeah. Well, actually, for a few years now, I leave a guestbook and on front of the guestbook, I ask my guests to leave travel tips for future guests. #00:25:50-2#

Thomas: Okay. #00:25:51-4#

John: So they write down what they really enjoyed doing. And so future guests can read and learn from their experience. And ask them to leave, you know, – so actually a lot of the time I have find out things I didn't know myself, that I've learned from that. But very of// #00:26:10-0#

Thomas: Are these for yourself (...) you tried out? #00:26:12-6#

John: Yah. Like, you know, sitting in bars and, you know, restaurants are always opening and closing, bar is always opening, closing, it happens all the time. So such, you know? But they often leave little notes and tell me how much they enjoyed staying here. #00:26:26-8#

Thomas: Mhm. Yah. We haven't talked too much about the review system// #00:26:31- 5#

John: (laughter) #00:26:32-1#

Thomas: Which is actually interesting for me. I mean the other questions are also interesting, but what do, in general, think about the review system? #00:26:41-2#

John: Well, you know, this is the, it's actually a very interesting part of Airbnb and the sharing economy. Airbnb has, I think, created what is called trust economy. And the trust economy settles around the review system. The basic core idea of it, the core idea is that both sides of the transaction ... has an interest in good behavior, right? So guests want to be good guests so that the host won't review them badly which allows a guest to keep on using Airbnb listings in the future. So if I'm a lousy guest, a host gives me a bad review, future hosts aren't going to let me stay there. And vice versa, right? If the host gets bad reviews from guests, they won't gonna get more future bookings. So there is a commercial incentive based on the review system for both sites to act well, to be good actors. That has genuinely been successful, I accept, I believe that there is a tendency to overrate. There's a bias in favor of good reviews, so, – and I'm guilty of that. Unless a guest is really awful, awful, awful, would I leave them anything less than 5 stars, you know? They, most of the time, they're always, they behave perfectly fine. Some are more messy than others, but, yeah, that's the cost of doing business, right? So if I have to do a little bit more cleaning, that's fine. As long as they are not rude or, you know, violent or something or they steal things – I've never had any experience with that – I give them very good reviews. So, I think the reviews spur to be over, overly high-level, but I also believe that it's now becoming very one-sided. So. #00:29:06-6#

Thomas: Which way? #00:29:07-6#

John: So, here's what's happening: Airbnb is giving guests more and more ways to rate hosts, right? Occasion, communication, cleanliness, attentiveness, all of the criteria, I think it's more than ten. #00:29:32-9#

Thomas: I think it's seven. But maybe they changed it. #00:29:36-1#

John: They invited more, recently. #00:29:38-2#

Thomas: It's a different design now than like a year ago. #00:29:42-5#

John: Right, right. But of the reverse, hosts rate guests, have three or four criteria and it has never changed. So I think that this is going to be increasingly urgent issue that hosts are feeling that more and more the review system is biased against hosts, or put it this way: is biased in favor of guests. #00:30:20-8#

Thomas: Okay. Maybe the consequences of this focus on the ((guests)). #00:30:27-6#

John: Well, it means that it increases the level of dissatisfaction among hosts. ... Now, I think, Airbnb has sort of made a very careful calculation that, you know, hosts aren't going to shoot themselves in the foot financially, they are not going to delist over these set of increases, criteria increases. But it does create a, you know, a bad flavor in a mouth of some hosts – not all of them. And if this trend continues, I think that they'll see the problem getting more and more serious. #00:31:17-5#

Thomas: Okay, yah, I mean, I know that there are different processes that, and also maybe the guest take more time reviews, because I, the hosts I've, with whom I've talked, they are, most of them leave just a really short, one sentence standard review for the guests. #00:31:37-5#

John: But it's not just, it's not just a written part. We don't have a lot of boxes to check against, right? So it's not, and Airbnb is not providing those criteria for us to address our minds to the guests. So they do so for the guests reviewing the hosts, right? So there's an imbalance. The other thing is that, – and I actually said this to Brian Chesky, recently there was a meeting at Airbnb where Brian came and said, you know, “You, the host” – and it's not the first time he said that – “You the host community, we regard you not just as customers, you are our cool partners”, right? And he said this, “Without you guys providing, you opening up your homes, we would have nothing on our platform”, and so ... 5 stars to Brian for saying that. And at this meeting, he announced that he's gonna add a new title. He's not just CEO of Airbnb, he is CEO and Head of Community. And we hosts are the heart of this community. We talked about the importance of community and he is going to fly around the world, talking to hosts all around the world, promoting his idea of community. ... And so, at that meeting, you know, there were a lot of hosts invited and we were asked for questions. And I was one of the people that asked questions and my questions was, “You know, Brian, it's great, that you are now Head of Community, but, you know, we, as hosts, many of us feel that, you know, Airbnb is paying more attention to guests than hosts”. One of the example I gave was, you know, there are, there is a very high standard of bar for this special appellation, “superhost”, alright? You have to have achieved over 80% on several criteria to be superhost and it is a very special thing. And it's good, but there's nothing for superguests, right? And we as hosts would love to be able to know, that the person coming to stay with me is a superguest. Just as like a guest would

like to know that the host that they are going to has outstanding ratings, has this superhost rating. So why don't you give it both, to both sides? #00:34:17-7#

Thomas: What did he reply? #00:34:20-1#

John: Well, I was quite surprised, because I wasn't the only person who felt this obviously. A lot of the members of the audience cheered and applauded. And so I think Brian was, said, "That's a fair point, we will look into it", but I've never heard anything ever since. (laughter). #00:34:39-8#

Thomas: I guess you need to see how this// #00:34:40-9#

John: We'll see what happens. And he also announced his creation of, I think, of a host committee, or, you know, he's putting together a special group of people to address concerns about community and hosts. #00:35:00-5#

Thomas: (...) more effort in// #00:35:01-5#

John: Yah, but the funny thing is, you know, since then, there was one person that was there, flown in from Australia who's on this special select committee. #00:35:13-2#

Thomas: Mhm. #00:35:14-8#

John: But since then I've, we've heard nothing about who the other members of this committee is, we haven't heard what issues they are working on, we haven't heard how we can contact them to communicate with them, you know, it's like (laughter) a phantom committee. #00:35:32-0#

Thomas: Yeah, interesting. #00:35:33-3#

John: Right. #00:35:39-1#

Thomas: Hmm... So. You mentioned that the, this tendency to overrate. So how do you make sure that, I mean, if everybody overrates, how do you make sure that the guest is actually not problematic before you, is there any// #00:35:56-9#

John: Well, it dilutes, I mean, I think it dilutes the importance of the rating system, right? It dilutes, it waters down (laughter), it weakens the importance of the review system. But quite frankly I think, unless the guest has like 1 or 2 stars after many, many reviews and even if there is a really bad review from another host, I'm more inclined to accept the reservation. I mean there's, there always can be the element of risk, there always can be an element of risk. And there is no, ever eliminating the risk to the extent that, the review system lessens the risk, I think, that is a good thing. #00:37:02-1#

Thomas: You still with time? ... So you, how many of your guests write a review? #00:37:16-0#

John: Most, most, most of my guests do. I would say 70 to 80%. #00:37:24- 1#

Thomas: Okay. #00:37:25-8#

John: I have had 300 reviews right now. #00:37:28-7#

Thomas: And do you read all of them? #00:37:30-1#

John: No. (laughter). #00:37:33-8#

Thomas: Because you get a like a notification that you got a new review, but you//
#00:37:40-5#

John: Yeah, you know, there is also, I think, there's a rule that ... so whenever a guest checks out and they leave a review, I can't read the review unless I leave a review first and vice versa, right? That's fair enough. #00:38:00-0#

Thomas: Yeah they changed it, I think, in 2014, before it was you could see right when//
#00:38:08-7#

John: But I think right now also ... I can't respond to a review unless I leave a review. So that also means that ... I've heard cases from other hosts where they weren't all that happy about this guest, they didn't really want to leave a review, because they don't wanted to say anything nasty. And then my response to them is, "Say something, anything. Anything, say something very neutral, right, because that preserves your ability to respond". If they, the guest review is unknown to you at that time, turns out to be bad, right? So that creates this dynamic, probably intentional from, of Airbnb to force participants to leave a review any sort of review rather to remain silent. Silence, silence never works in your favor within the Airbnb system of the person who decides to be silent. #00:39:25-7#

Thomas: So, if it happens with you that you have like sort of not so nice experience, you would also always leave a review? #00:39:33-3#

John: Oh, I think, now people are smarter, they say, you know. Let's say, I have a guest whose experience wasn't so good. So I don't want to leave a bad review but I don't want to leave, I don't want to remain silent either because that constrains my ability to respond to that review. But then I won't leave a review, either host won't leave a review, until I get a notification from Airbnb, "Oh, the guest must have left you a review, to see what the review is, leave a review to the guest". #00:40:07-7#

Thomas: Okay, so if the guest doesn't leave a review, you'll keep it like that. #00:40:09- 2#

John: Right. So there is a way of remaining silent, if – so the tactic, the strategy is ... remain silent until you get a notification that you've got your review. Then you can send in a neutral review ... to preserve your right to respond to that. #00:40:34-7#

Thomas: And then see what the review is and then clarify if you// #00:40:37-9#

John: Right, right. So the whole thing is a little bit of a chess game (laughter).
#00:40:43-7#

Thomas: Think a step ahead. #00:40:44-3#

John: Right, right, right, right. So, I mean, to the outside world this whole review system, the whole trust economy seems to be fantastic, but once you get into the weeds of it, it is a bit of a chess game. #00:41:01-2#

Thomas: Yeah, I think so. That's why I'm interested in it, so. #00:41:07-5#

John: But you know what? To really get to know what it's like, you should start hosting, you should become a host. That's the best way to fully experience, and to know all the problems, and// #00:41:24-9#

Thomas: It's true. But It's kind of complicated, if I not sure if I am allowed to do it.
#00:41:29-9#

John: Oh it is? #00:41:30-3#

Thomas: It's not my flat. I don't own the flat. #00:41:34-0#

John: Usually you are a tenant. #00:41:36-6#

Thomas: Yes. I am a tenant and we also have the kid, so it's sort of small and it might be just one room that we rent out, so. #00:41:46-7#

John: Or couch. #00:41:47-4#

Thomas: Yeah, so. #00:41:48-3#

John: But look at your lease, see if there's any closure that says you can't sublet. If it doesn't say anything, well, then you can do it. #00:42:00-3#

Thomas: Mhm. Yeah, I might try it. #00:42:05-6#

John: Doing it for research purposes. #00:42:05-2#

Thomas: Yeah. #00:42:07-5#

John: Or rent another apartment. #00:42:11-0#

Thomas: ...Yeah. #00:42:10-5#

John: And then rent out that. #00:42:10-8#

Thomas: I'll think about it. #00:42:11-6#

John: (laughter) Or do it for your parents. Do your parents have a spare bedroom?
#00:42:19-2#

Thomas: Yeah, but they live at the countryside and nobody ever wants to go there.
#00:42:23-3#

John: You'd be surprised. #00:42:23-6#

Thomas: Yeah? #00:42:25-0#

John: Yeah! Try it! Your parents might welcome both the company and the extra money. It might be ((something)) they enjoy. #00:42:33-9#

Thomas: I will suggest it. #00:42:35-7#

John: Yeah. And look. The worst comes the worst. If they don't like it, just turn off.
#00:42:40-8#

Thomas: Yeah, that's true. ... You said you don't like standardized reviews, so you take the time to write a personal review for each guest. #00:42:53-8#

John: Yeah, but you know, again, it's not very long. You just say, talk about their demeanor, are they nice and they friendly, you know, that sort of thing. And I usually say, I usually say that I would recommend them to other hosts. If I don't think I can recommend them to other hosts, I'll say nothing. #00:43:19-7#

Thomas: Yeah, so you leave out these, there is like sort of a subtle advice for other hosts to know if that's not, ((there're, if they)) might not be so nice people. #00:43:37-6#

John: Right, but very subtle I could do that. And quite frankly, my inclination is, I'd rather not, I'd rather not leave a bad written review, I would rather say nothing. #00:43:55-5#

Thomas: Mhm. Okay. And you said about the trust economy a little thing, so, do you think reviews are also like sort of influencing the way you and your guests are acting? Is

it a disciplining thing to be a good guest? #00:44:13-7#

John: I don't think so. Well, you know, I've been doing this long enough to set my whole standards, right? And I love hosting. I want, I personally want, I'm driven to provide my guest with a good experience. So, by now, personally, you know, I'm not going to ... let the reviews be a main motivator. At the beginning, yes. Because you'd need to develop a good reputation, so you can get more, more guests. But I've done this for four and a half years, I've had over 300 reviews, you know? One or two excellent ones, or one or two bad ones. It's not gonna make a difference, but initially it did. And actually, initially, it was very, very useful, because the guests would make some suggestions which I would, I wouldn't think about, but did, I would implement to improve it. #00:45:23-0#

Thomas: ... Okay. I think you said something about how you react to critique in reviews (...), respond to it and how to one negative experience ((you mentioned)). So, (...) okay. Is there anything more// #00:45:42-2#

John: No. #00:45:43-4#

Thomas: That might be interesting for me? #00:45:46-5#

John: I think ((we talked of many)), email me for any follow-up questions. #00:45:52-4#

Thomas: Yeah. I have your email and I can write you. I mean, if you are interested in what will get out of all this, you, I can send it to you, but it will take some time. #00:46:01-6#

John: Yeah, yeah. It's all right. I can wait. (laughter). #00:46:04-7#

Thomas: Yeah? Yeah. So, thanks, really much. #00:46:08-5#

John: Yeah. #00:46:09-4#

Thomas: Nice to meet you. #00:46:09-9#