

# 5 Minutes with...

## Vinnie Brand



### Owner of the Stress Factory Comedy Club

#### How did you get into the business side of comedy?

I opened my own club in 1991. I was a young guy with three kids so I couldn't do what comedy guys usually do—travel all over the place, sleep on friends' couches, and stay out 'til 3 or 4 every night. I didn't want to not raise my children. I wanted to pay my bills with comedy and this is the path I took.

#### Who were your comedy heroes?

I loved George Carlin. I never met him or saw him live—he played New Jersey constantly, so I always thought *I'll go next time*. But he died and didn't give me any notice, so I never got the chance. I also loved Johnny Carson, the Smothers Brothers, Rodney Dangerfield, Sam Kinison, Richard Pryor, and Bob Newhart. There are so many.

#### You see a lot of up-and-coming comics. Who did you know had that something special way back when?

Ray Romano. He was a feature act at Catch a Rising Star in Princeton. He opened for George Wallace, another great comic, but Ray Romano was burying him. I tried calling his manager so many times I can still remember the number now, 21 years later. But I could never get him. *Finally*, five years later, Ray was in my club in New Brunswick. In between shows he used my office phone to finish up an episode of *Everybody Loves Raymond*.

#### How do you keep finding talented comics for your club?

We rely on agents, but we also bring a team mentality to it. A lot of times my manager will see someone or my wife or I will see someone and get them in. We're out

and about a lot. We're either in the city doing shows or out of town, scouting around.

#### What is the most frustrating thing about running a comedy club?

Lately, in the last several years, it seems like people want to know ahead of time who they're going to see. The shame of that is, you should be willing to trust our instincts and come in knowing we're a discerning buyer.

#### What is the greatest challenge?

We're in the most competitive market in the world, so the greatest challenge is to give people an experience that makes them want to come back. If you love wine and comedy and food, I have to give you the best of all three to make sure you come back.

#### What is the key to surviving a tough audience?

If you don't have confidence in what you're saying, you're done. It's hard to be funny when they are in control. You have to know your jokes are good. You have to be a leader. If you're nervous on stage, they will sense it and it's all over. The most self-deprecating, most insecure comic was probably Dangerfield, yet he was one of the most successful guys ever because he was confident in his delivery and knew he was great. **EDGE**

**Editor's Note:** Yolanda Navarra Fleming conducted this Q&A with Vinnie Brand, who is an accomplished stand-up in his own right. He boasts a long list of TV and movie credits, as well as the weekly podcast *A Comic's Tale*. For more info on Vinnie and the Stress Factory Comedy Club in New Brunswick, visit [stressfactory.com](http://stressfactory.com). For **5 More Minutes** with Vinnie Brand, log onto [edgemonline.com](http://edgemonline.com).