

## Exploring Leadership and Career Advice with Dustin Snyder

Podcast episode was recorded on 4/11/24

Eric Raine:

Welcome back to another episode of the UB School of Management podcast. I'm Eric Raine and I'll be your host for today's episode along with Patrick Lageraen as our co-host. Joining us in the studio today is Dustin Snyder. Dustin is a highly accomplished HR executive whose career trajectory and formidable academic credentials underscore his unique capability to guide C-suite and HR executives through complex organizational transformations. Prior to founding Wayforward Associates, Dustin's tenure includes pivotal roles such as President of the US Manufacturing Division of Aurubis AG, where he led the turnaround of a 600 employee operation. This achievement was preceded by his previous roles in driving more profitable operating results by leveraging robust management culture and fostering trusting engaged workforce relationships at large manufacturing and healthcare organizations.

In addition to the successful sale of prior business ventures in the customer experience field, Dustin's academic credentials include a black belt and Six Sigma, an executive MBA from the University at Buffalo School of Management, an MA in industrial, and in organizational psychology from Cornell University and certification in the MBTI assessment from the Myers-Briggs Institute. All right, Dustin, thank you very much for being here and taking the time. We appreciate it.

Dustin Snyder:

Of course. I'm pumped.

Eric Raine:

So, to just kind of dive right in, we wanted to get an idea of what are some of the current initiatives that you're focused on in your business and your career. Kind of tell us a little bit about Wayforward Associates and how that started and some of the things that you're doing there, and then the HR and leadership components of that.

Dustin Snyder:

Totally. I'd say there's two facets to my business that Wayforward, and there's the internal side of me getting better at my processes and doing what I do. And then there's the things that I'm doing for my clients on the client service side, and I'd say on the client service side, probably the biggest thing that I'm

working on is that there's always the initial engagement. I come and do the employee experience assessments, and then we have an action plan, the steps that we implement to turn things around when a company is experiencing systemic issues with their employees, their workforce. But often through that process, the company is usually going through so many changes that the leadership team tends to change during the six to nine months that I tend to be involved with the company, and often it's a new chief executive or somebody else in the C-suite.

And so navigating that transition and getting that team really cohesive about all the work that's been done, all this groundwork that's been done within the organization, and then integrating new team members into understanding that and helping them have a really seamless process. That's something that I'm working on a lot with my clients. On the internal side within Wayforward scaling, and really I think the marketing side of things is something that I tend to focus my time on when I'm not with clients. A lot of the business over the past three years, 90% of it's been referral based companies that I've worked with before, people who executives talk, they hear about challenges with each other's organizations, and so a lot of my business comes by referral.

But in order to really scale the firm to where I'd like it to see it and where I can really niche down and do only the things that I really want to be doing and really move into more of a leadership role and less of a practitioner role, that top of funnel awareness companies knowing that, hey, Wayforward does this, they're a trusted advisor for so many other businesses, increasing that awareness because once we sit down with a company, we usually jive. If they're the right fit for us we know to continue them through the sales process to start an engagement, but just that first awareness of, hey, we exist, this is what we do. And then letting them look at our case studies, our client testimonials, our results. That first awareness has been a hump that I haven't quite gotten over.

Eric Raine:

That's really interesting, especially given the fact that you're at the same time that you're trying to grow your own business, you're helping other firms handle the challenges that they're facing from a leadership perspective. Meanwhile, you're also facing your own challenges in growing your business.

Dustin Snyder:

Totally.

Eric Raine:

And another thing that you mentioned is this sort of timeline, the six to nine months or depending on the engagement that you're in with them. How do you see that progressing from when you initially start with them and how you go through the implementation process and making the change stick over time and then being able to leave that engagement and have it be successful for them after that?

Dustin Snyder:

Sure. It depends on the size of the organization. Most of Wayforward's clients are mid-sized organizations. So, there's usually, I'd say usually two to 600 employees. We've worked with huge multinationals that have 10,000 employees and smaller ones with less than a hundred. But those mid-sized companies, those engagements, the initial assessment portion of the employee experience assessment, that our really core service line that that takes usually a month or two. It's an interview based process. It's a lot more in-depth than your traditional engagement surveys. And those interviews, the analysis with the data model that we've built with data analytics team here at the University at Buffalo to analyze all those interviews in a quantitative way, and then the reporting back to the organization, that process usually takes one to two months depending on how big the company is. And then after that, there's usually a few weeks where they're absorbing the information. It's a very objective landscape of here's what the current state of the organization is. They're absorbing that we're reviewing the action plan, and they're making decisions about, okay, what is the priority order? I certainly advise them on that, but it's an iterative process where we identify the order in which we're going to do things, who needs to be involved, how much leadership bandwidth we're going to devote to these changes and where the highest priority things are within the organization. And then it depends on the scale of the action plan and how severe the issues are and how pervasive they are. But then the following months are devoted to the actual actions on the ground with the employees and the stakeholders that are impacted by the work that we are doing.

Eric Raine:

And I would imagine too that obviously getting the data and gathering it is one challenge, but then translating that data into something that's actually implementable or applicable to that firm specifically is a lot of where your expertise comes in and that's the value they're trying to extract from working with you in engagement, I would imagine.

Dustin Snyder:

Yeah, exactly. So, my career experience allows me to know what people are talking about, whether I'm sitting down with a group of welders or a group of nurses or a group of software engineers, I have enough of a sense for their day to day, and I am sitting down in really in-depth interviews with them, using the techniques from my industrial organizational psychology background to have a very open-ended interview with them. And then every sentence in my interview notes becomes a data point in a data model.

Eric Raine:

Interesting.

Dustin Snyder:

So, I take something very qualitative, our discussion, and I turn it quantitative, put it through a model.

Eric Raine:

Interesting.

Dustin Snyder:

And then there's insights that are extracted from that. There's the core competencies of the organization, the stuff that we're good at that we want to protect into the future, the stuff that we want to double down on, and there's the impediments, the stuff that's getting an employee's way of being successful on the expectations that are placed on them, the stuff that makes their life harder than it needs to be, and often is impacting really hard-line things within the organization. It's impacting capacity, it's impacting turnaround times, it's impacting all these important metrics. So, having that quantitative analysis of those very qualitative discussions helps leaders who normally only get really piecemeal information. If Eric tells me something and I'm an executive, maybe it's Eric's opinion, maybe I trust Eric, so I give it more weight, maybe I don't trust Eric, so I don't give it any weight, but I also don't know how many people necessarily agree with Eric.

So, These things are very loose for executive teams and to be able to give them a very objective landscape of what is the actual severity of these issues and how are these cause and effect impacting things within the operation is really valuable. But if I just throw a bunch of statistics at them, it's not valuable. It's not going to be absorbed. So, what I then do is turn that data into as objective a narrative

as I can and give them the data back in a narrative format that's supported by not only representative quotations, but the statistics within the analysis.

Eric Raine:

So, that it's consumed better, I would imagine, right?

Dustin Snyder:

Yes.

Eric Raine:

Because you could be identifying it, but unless they really latch onto those identification points and how to do something about it. So, you're kind of selling to them their own issue in a way it sounds like you have to try to find out what that is. Another thing-

Patrick Lageraen:

This is sounding a lot like the Corporate Champions Project-

Eric Raine:

Definitely.

Patrick Lageraen:

Where we come into a company and look at buy-in issues and employee satisfaction issues.

Dustin Snyder:

Totally.

Patrick Lageraen:

Could you maybe give an example of why a company would look at Wayforward and ask you guys to come in?

Dustin Snyder:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraen:

What sort of issues are they facing?

Dustin Snyder:

A lot of times they do an employee engagement survey and the results give them more questions than answers. So, the leadership team, they don't know how reliable it is. It's very surface-level information. So, they might say, okay, we see that we have a communication problem, but what is the communication problem? We're communicating a whole bunch. What's wrong with our communication? It's in an engagement survey that confuses executives and renders them unable to act on the insights that they've got, so they need more information in order to act. That's a time that we tend to come in.

Turnover has also been a huge one. People are leaving the organization. It's hard to recruit for specialized positions, and whenever you lose somebody, there's an impact to your organization, especially with how much lean manufacturing principles have impacted not just manufacturing, but really every industry. Everybody wants to be super lean, have the most efficient staffing model that we can, but then anytime there's a disruption to that model, a lot of our processes and systems within the organization fall apart. So, when we're too lean, I use the example of there's a reason that Josh Allen doesn't look like a bodybuilder, because if you have no body fat and you get hit, you're going to get injured. So, you see football players, people in impact sports, they don't have this tiny body fat percentage like a bodybuilder would because then there's no resilience.

So, I use that analogy and talk about things like N plus one staffing with my clients. So, turnover has been a huge one, not just understanding why turnover is happening, but also understanding how recruitment ties into turnover. If I'm an organization and I'm really good at selling my products and services, I know what's important to my customers. I know how to connect with them. I know what needs need to be met with them. I'm probably not as good at recruiting for employees at selling my organization, representing myself as an employer rather than a product or a service. Because I haven't put as much energy into understanding my people within the organization as I do my customers outside the organization. So, I teach companies how to really understand what their value proposition is as an employer to their best people. If I really want 10 more Patricks, if I could clone Patrick, my life would be great as a leader, but if I don't spend the time to what resonates really strongly with Patrick, then I'm going to have a hard time connecting with other Patricks outside of the organization.

Eric Raine:

You may lose the Patrick you have too, right?

Dustin Snyder:

Yeah.

Eric Raine:

Yeah.

Dustin Snyder:

And it's things like, oh, we have great competitive salary and benefits. We've got a flexible work schedule. Every job description in the world says that. How are you actually differentiating yourself? And if you make assumptions about what's important, like, oh, we've got our five-star rating and we've got our new building, do your employees actually care about that or is that just within the boardroom that we care about that?

Eric Raine:

Yeah, and then identifying what those targets are, because the thing that it sounds like is almost like firms feel like they identify targets, and even if they're successfully able to hit the target they're aiming at, it might be the target over here that they're not looking at and that you're bringing to the forefront to say, look, you may be able to allocate the resources properly, but you have to do it into this direction in order for it to actually have a lasting impact.

Dustin Snyder:

Sure. A lot of times the KPIs end up being something that's part of the action plan. I've had a lot of client engagements where it came out from the employees that just bad data within the organization was causing a lot of problems that they couldn't make good decisions and leadership wasn't making good decisions because the data wasn't correct. Sometimes we're measuring the right thing, but we're measuring it in the wrong way or we're making good decisions and we're hitting our KPIs, but we're doing so at the expense of sustainability and long-term growth. We had a really great quarter, but we are stripping things from our organization that are really essential to next year or to an economic downturn or to again, that resiliency.

Eric Raine:

That seems like such a challenging process, but obviously where you're able to infuse value into those companies. One of the things that we looked at as far as your background in HR, you've shifted for being more on the people side and now focus more on helping HR from the company side like we've just talked about. Can you tell us what made you want to shift that focus to the company side?

Patrick Lageraen:

And maybe what that means?

Dustin Snyder:

Sure.

Eric Raine:

And not that they're always necessarily mutually exclusive, but just as far as the business model goes.

Dustin Snyder:

Sure. I would actually say I did the opposite. I'd say that I was on the company side for a long time and I've shifted to the people side. And that's one of the things that's interesting when I first start working with the client is that the stuff that I talk about sounds really fluffy. It sounds like this happy-go-lucky. Oh, we're going to be nice to our employees and everybody's going to be happy and we're going to sing Kumbaya. And I think that's the problem with a lot of employee engagement softwares and things like that. It talks about, oh, we're going to stop burnout or we're we're going to treat our people well and happy employees make productive employees, but they don't connect it back to the business in specific tangible ways for that organization and that executive team's experience.

They give you national statistics that they read in Harvard Business Review or something, which those are great, but if you can't draw the cause and effect for your actual leadership team, your actual organization, that's when people stop listening to HR. So, to get back to your initial question, for a long time I was on the company side because the HR toolkit and the labor relations toolkit, that's really my background, has been labor relations for a long time is all designed with the idea that your employee is your adversary. And that's kind of an inflammatory statement, but I'll explain what I mean.

If you look at the practices, the policies, the things that HR does, and the way in which they do them, they're designed to limit liability. HR's administration and compliance is designed to limit the liability of

the organization, and that's an important function. There are massive amounts of regulations out there that can really tear an organization down if they're not abreast of them.

But when you're dealing with people and you see them as a potential liability, they can feel that. And it took me a really long time to realize that. And when I finally did and started seeing interactions with my employees, not as me being the goalkeeper and limiting this potential threat, but when I started seeing them as opportunities to engage in the tenets of human relationships that are true everywhere else in the world except for the office, when I started approaching it that way, that's when stuff really took off for me. And I was able to, not only in my own organization, but now for my client organizations, show them that when you treat people the way that you wanted to be treated, like we learned it all in kindergarten, stuff takes off.

Eric Raine:

Absolutely.

Patrick Lageraen:

But I would imagine that adversarial relationship is very true in companies that deal with unions like hospitals in Buffalo. Is that true for other companies as well?

Dustin Snyder:

Yeah, I'm a huge believer that, it's funny because for ages, everybody, they'd see I'm in labor relations and like, oh, you're anti-union. And I've never been anti-union, but I truly believe that companies get the union that they deserve, and people are, we're emotional animals, but we're logical animals. We react logically to the things that happen to the things that we see. So, when employees are disengaged, when morale is low in an organization and I'm able to go through and do this assessment and I can show the cause and effect for the leadership teams that my clients to say, hey, your employees are disengaged and they've got bad attitudes, but what would you do if you saw X, Y, and Z?

If this happened to you, how would you feel? And so teaching organizations not to be an additional source of stress in people's lives, but to be a positive source in people's lives, showing them how to do that in day-to-day, very simple tactical ways, really helps to start turn the tide. And there's a lot of people out there. I'm a big Mad Men fan. I love Don Draper. He's hysterical, he's brilliant. But he's got this scene with Peggy Olson where he's like, "You do the work and I give you the money. That's the relationship."

Eric Raine:

This is the exchange.

Dustin Snyder:

And she says, "Well, you never say thank you." And he goes, "That's what the money is for." And I thought the same way for a long time, and I felt that way personally, you pay me a good salary, I'm going to do excellent work. That's all there is to it. But if you think about any other transactional relationship in the world, you go buy a coffee at Starbucks, if the barista is a jerk, you're going to walk away from that interaction feeling crappy about the interaction. You could get your coffee quickly, the order's correct. Coffee tastes great. You're still going to feel bad about the transaction. But if that barista is fantastic to you, you might even get the wrong coffee. You're like, she might screw up your order, but you're still going to feel good about that relationship because of the human interaction.

Patrick Lageraen:

Absolutely.

Dustin Snyder:

And we forget that there's not some magic door at the front of the office that stops those things from being true.

Eric Raine:

Yeah. This is making me think of really the, I know you mentioned psychology as part of that component of your background, and really at the end of the day, you talk about the human element and sort of how we operate. And you even say to leadership, how would you react to X, Y, & Z? And I'm currently taking actually for one of my MBA electives, a performance management course with Rich Gold who is a former president and COO of M&T Bank.

Dustin Snyder:

Cool.

Eric Raine:

And a lot of the stuff that we talk about there has to do with reinforcement of behaviors. And the examples you were just giving go along those lines of you're either going to increase behavior through positive or negative reinforcement or You're going to end up decreasing behavior through punishment or penalty. And so in the coffee example, even if the coffee wasn't great, but they would reinforce your behavior in a positive through positive or negative reinforcement, the likelihood of you coming back for another coffee is probably pretty high. Whereas If You got a great coffee and it was quick and everything else is good, but you got something you didn't want, which was maybe a negative experience, then that's going to decrease your behavior. And the likelihood you're coming back is probably pretty low.

Dustin Snyder:

Totally. You got it.

Eric Raine:

And really what that comes down to is taking that same idea and applying it to all of the implementation strategies that you're talking about. So, kind of talking about some of those challenges, I know you've identified from your perspective what those look like. How do you really help organizations and employees come together, like the identification process and getting them to understand what needs to be done. And Then in those first few months you talk about that data and then talking to them about what you're finding from the data. What does that look like after that? How do you actually take action on those things?

Dustin Snyder:

Yeah, so I think skepticism is, because I've got really two main buckets of clients. There's companies that are good and just want to get better. They know the value of this stuff and they just invest in it. And then there's the places that we're really digging out and they need help. And in both cases, there's a lot of skepticism from employees. And a lot of times there, there's been a consultant before me, especially people that have been there a long time, somebody else has come in and nothing happened, or we've done a bunch of engagement surveys and nothing happened.

So, they don't feel like their feedback is valuable. So, one of the really common things that I tend to do with my action plans is to involve the stakeholders. One of the things that I've also done with UB is my Six Sigma black belt. And one of the tools in Six Sigma is a stakeholder analysis. And that's essentially what I'm doing. I'm combining psychodynamics with Six Sigma and doing the assessments in the first

place. But through the Six Sigma problem solving process, one of the things that they really drill into you is that if there are humans in the process, you need their buy-in. Because even if you get the process working, even if you get the behavior, it will probably fall away and won't sustain into the future if those people don't embrace it. You talked about one of the initiatives where the students-

Eric Raine:

Lack of buy-in.

Dustin Snyder:

Lack of buy-in can scuttle the best design process in the world. So, there's a lot of skepticism from employees, but the steps that I teach leadership to take are to show through their actions in incremental ways that they're listening and they're going to act on what they hear, and that we don't have to act on everything that we hear, but a lot of times we do because it's valuable information because the employees are so much closer to the processes, the problems, and the systems that executives are just too far away from to really understand how they actually function in the field. So, the first thing that I really encourage my clients to do, and practically all of them do, is share my report with the employees that were involved.

Eric Raine:

The transparency.

Dustin Snyder:

Transparency, and to say, this is what we learned, and we agree with it, we believe in it and we're going to act on it. And even that. So, that's a huge step-

Eric Raine:

Because they feel heard. They are like, wow, okay, you're actually listening to what our concerns are.

Dustin Snyder:

Yeah. And it's hard stuff. When I deliver my report, I give these executive teams a week to digest these before we talk about action planning. Because a difficult emotional and mental exercise, it's taxing to see in black and white in the written word, objectively, here's the state of the organization. And there's some tough stuff in there. Especially these executives, they're not jerks, they're people who care about

the organization. They probably work twelve-hour days, just like the employees do. They put their blood, sweat and tears into this just like the frontline employees do, and they're missing kids' baseball games to try and steer this organization.

And they just need assistance with someone with expertise in human systems. So, them being vulnerable enough to say, here's how we're screwing up essentially, and we're listening to you and we see what you're saying and there's merit from our employee's perspective. That's the first step. And so that's usually such a surprise to employees and organizations because they haven't seen that transparency before. They haven't seen that vulnerability before that even the most skeptical people are like, all right, there's something happening here that's different enough that I will give this a shot.

But then I do something called input workshops where I involve the stakeholders, who are all the people who need to be involved in a problem. If I need a representative from the skilled trade and the IT shop and the stockroom and whoever else, small groups. And then we go through a problem-solving process and say, here's the current state. We know this from the report that we've just done. We all agree that this is an accurate representation of what's going on. And then we go through the problem-solving process and get their input on not only what we need to do and what the solution is, but the control plan too of how do we make sure that this doesn't fall away? We all know the flavor of the months that just fade away in the world of work, that it works for a few weeks and that it's gone. How do we make sure that it doesn't fall apart?

Patrick Lageraen:

And you do these workshops before you assign action items to the company?

Dustin Snyder:

They're part of the action items of the company. And so the leadership team kicks it off in the morning, whoever the VP is that this group rolls up to or owns the process or problem area, and they kick it off. And then they come back at the end of the day and the employees present their own action plan back to leadership. Leadership can ask questions and poke holes and things like that. But then they make some commitments too, as far as backing this plan. And the plans are surprisingly good every single time.

And you wouldn't expect that from people who aren't used to coming up with organizational plans for their day-to-day. If I'm a nurse and I'm taking care of patients, I'm not coming up with this system to solve all these issues on all the nursing units. But they do. And it's because they know the issues so intimately and because the right cross-functional team is in the room to get it from every angle and

come up with a good plan. And so in a single day, we've come up with a better plan than we've ever had, leadership grants their support to it. And then there's a specific timeline of events and stuff is fixed so quickly and it's because people are bought in when they wouldn't before.

Eric Raine:

Yeah, interesting. It seems like the, especially when you say it happens in one day, this kind of light bulb moment or like, hey, you know what? This actually works. It took months and months of analysis and understanding and expertise and the right lens to be looking through to get to the moment where you're able to say in a single day like, hey, this is the new path forward. Especially when you're pairing that with the buy-in, because the shared vision, I would imagine, is probably the first ingredient in that recipe because without it, the workshops and the implementation piece probably would kind of fall on deaf ears, so to speak, right?

Dustin Snyder:

Yes. Yeah. And that's part of the process in that day too, is not only saying, okay, here's the problem. Here's the barriers that we're experiencing, but where do we want to be? What does good look like? What does success look like? And have them paint that picture of when we've completely dug out of this, what is this process or whatever it is that we're working on, what does this look like?

Patrick Lageraen:

So, you've been working in this space for a while obviously, and I'm sure you come up with your own solutions to the problems that you find. Are you ever surprised by what the employees come up with as a potential solution?

Dustin Snyder:

I don't think I'm surprised. I can usually see it like a split second before they do. But I mean, it's only because I'm facilitating and it's a new space for them, and I'm the facilitator. I'm the one pulling all the nuggets together. But what I'm always surprised by is my assessment, the root causes of what's going on. Every time I've come into an organization and had assumptions about what's happening and why I prove myself wrong. And I think that's important. For a long time, I was the executive who thought I had all the answers. I thought that I knew everything and I was the smartest guy in the room, and therefore I needed to be the one determining how we did stuff.

And that's not leadership's role. Leadership's role is to say what we need to accomplish and why we need to accomplish it, and then let your people tell you how. The how needs to be completely up to your employees because you are not an expert in the how. Even if you used to, even if I used to be a doctor or used to be a welder or used to be a software engineer, I'm not in the field anymore and I'm in the corn office. I'm too far away from the actual work.

Eric Raine:

That's really interesting too, because when it comes down to it, I think a lot of firms most likely spend a lot of time not going in the right direction or identifying it because they think they might have the answers. And then before they come to you, they've maybe spun the wheels a couple of times first. And so I'd imagine that probably adds an element to the difficulty of the process you face is that a lot of times firms aren't saying, hey, we're sensing sort of this subtle shift in the air here. Can you come in and help us before it turns into this monsoon season here at the company?

But instead, it's like, okay, we think we know what the answers are. They start trying to do whatever those things might look like for the right reasons. The path to destruction can be paved by good intention. But at the same time, there really needs to be fundamental change that's not happening. So, is that something that you've noticed with firms you've worked with over time is that it kind of gets to that point where they're on the down slope before they get to you?

Dustin Snyder:

Yeah. Yeah. I mean it pretty much always, I'd say 75% of the time. So, that's not pretty much always, is I wish they'd called me six months earlier or even more than that. And they say the same thing. We're like, oh God, we should have called you a year ago. But there's just so much historical inertia a lot of the time we've tried this before, we've been through this, they're just exhausted. The employees and the executives are exhausted by the issue, and there's just this kind of sense of defeatism about it. I will say that pretty much every this time, actually pretty much every client that I work with, they're going through changes. Either their industry is changing, their legacy industry that's needing to modernize what they do or how they do it, or who their customers are, their organization's changing. Maybe it's mergers and acquisitions.

There's a lot I get involved there because that's the most strenuous thing you can put an organization through. Like I said, leadership team changes, changes in the market. And so the change, and sometimes it's a good change, sometimes it's growth, and we've grown and now our organization has changed. And

that there is a subtle shift. And I'm thinking of two in particular clients who reached out to me when they noticed that subtle shift. They just said, something's off and it doesn't feel like it did, and we need to get to the bottom of it before it spoils the secret sauce here. And sometimes it's recruiting from the wrong place. Other times it's getting really big. So, they have to standardize some stuff because they're wildly inefficient, but then that goes at odds with the autonomy that their employees have experienced for many years. And you have to find a way for those things to coexist. So, sometimes it is, sometimes executives are like, there's something wrong. We're going to fix it before it becomes a big problem. And other times it is that inertia.

Eric Raine:

And the other thing too is because of the profound impact that this has, once they do reach out and you do engage and you come up with solutions and you implement them, it would make a lot of sense that those firms would then turn around and from a referral perspective as far as your business growth. So, getting back to a little bit more shifting from talking about the firms you work with to your own firm, have you noticed that being, I guess some of the challenges that you have faced where you say, okay, we have referral business because these people had a good experience with me, and then they're calling and saying, hey, we might have similar problems.

Can you come help us? But at the same time, you're trying to scale and maybe is that a selling point that trying to say to firms like, hey, do you smell something in the air here? Because it's kind of like they might not know what they need and it's really, even if they know what you're doing. So, you could go on a marketing campaign and a sales push and say, this is what we do. We bring value, but they're maybe saying, oh yeah, that sounds great, and if we ever need it, we know who to go to. But it might already be needed at that point too. And I find that just so interesting that it's like the forest for the trees. It's right here in front of you. But don't call when it's too late. To your point, it's like you should have called me six months ago or a year ago.

Dustin Snyder:

Yeah, yeah. It's tough because the kinds of issues that I deal with, it's not stuff that you generally want out in the public. It's dirty laundry and no CEO goes on LinkedIn and says, oh, hey, my company's experiencing all these terrible issues. No, that doesn't happen. I actually had this really odd experience just yesterday, actually last week I was flying back from the West Coast and I sat next to a gentleman on the plane who was a director at the company he worked for in the tech space. And we were talking

about what I do, and he was describing to me the exact kind of pervasive issues, not necessarily within his team, but in other key segments of his organization. And he actually asked me to reach out to his company and he didn't feel comfortable doing it, which is another red flag.

Eric Raine:

He's like, I don't want to be the one showing that I'm saying that I think there's a problem.

Dustin Snyder:

Exactly. He's at the director level and he doesn't feel like he can speak up to the executive team. And so he gives me the contact information for executive team, and I felt a little weird about it, but I told him I'd do it. And so I reach out and I said, hey, I met-

Eric Raine:

Someone.

Dustin Snyder:

I met someone in your organization. I promised him I wouldn't name names, but he described these things to me going on in your organization. And turnover was a big one, a very easy objective measure and that people were leaving for X, Y, and Z reasons. And the executive that I spoke to was just adamant that this is not a problem. This does not exist in our organization. You couldn't have spoken to anyone in our organization because no one would say that. And I was like, okay.

Eric Raine:

Sounds pretty sure.

Dustin Snyder:

I was like, cool. All right, great. I must-

Eric Raine:

But you're like, you know who to call if you do notice-

Dustin Snyder:

I must have the wrong phone number.

Eric Raine:

Wow. That's fascinating though. But I think that also brings back some of the psychological component that we were talking about earlier is maybe that is part of the issue at its core too, is that people that might have the capacity to speak up or identify it don't want to be the first one to raise their hand in the room in the boardroom or something.

Dustin Snyder:

Yeah, because then they get associated, they're a pot stirrer or [inaudible 00:35:15].

Eric Raine:

Yeah. Especially because if they just say, you know what? I think I see this, but I don't want to say anything. I think we need the help this individual you're talking about. But then it's kind of like, you know what? I'm going to wait until things go a little worse and then I'll be like, oh, hey, maybe we should do something about this. And then you can point at that rather than it being pointed at you as the person identifying.

Dustin Snyder:

And it's frankly, it's just easier to leave the organization than it is to be the person to say, no, you know what? I'm going to put in the extra effort to fix this. I'm going to put the target on my back to be the one to plant the flag and say there's an issue.

Eric Raine:

So, have you noticed over the time since you've started and you've been engaging with clients that you have repeat business from the same firms that are basically saying, hey, we have implemented the changes, we've disengaged from what you're doing, but we have a new issue that arose as a byproduct of this change that we can also maybe make an adjustment to? Or I guess how does that work? Or is it more of a single engagement or do you stay connected to them after?

Dustin Snyder:

I tend to stay connected and check in just socially with a lot of the executive teams that I work with. I've had a number of clients who have just done a retainer at the end of our engagement for ongoing coaching of some of their executive teams. Because a lot of times in organizations, their HR team, it's

hard for the HR team to be the executive coach too, even though a strong HR leader tends to be the C-suite therapist, that's just part of the role.

Eric Raine:

That's a good way of putting it.

Dustin Snyder:

But sometimes in a smaller organization, if I only have 200 employees, I might have a couple HR people, but they're very functional. It's very transactional. I'm handling payroll benefits, that kind of stuff. I'm not necessarily ... And they haven't necessarily been through these kinds of changes before. So, it's hard. It is just as difficult for them to navigate. And they're learning along with their peers too sometimes. So, yeah, it's usually coaching or I'll come back in. What we tend to do is create kind of a 90-day world, and we set really strong expectations as a team. I say when I'm with my clients, I'm in it with you guys. It's us. And so we create this 90-day world where we set really strong expectations. We commit to each other what action items we're going to do. And it's very clearly understood by everyone that if I run into any barriers, if I can't get done what I said I was going to get done this quarter, then I'm going to raise a flag and say, Hey guys, I need help.

I can't get done what I said I was going to do, and you're going to do that right away. We're not going to wait until that 90 day point and then say, oh, I couldn't because of ABC. We already knew. We already navigated it together, and we either recalibrate it or removed the barriers for each other. So, we come and check in, and it's this iterative process where we learn to set these expectations, accomplish what we said we were going to do on our top priorities, and then set new expectations and just keep rinsing and repeating.

And then sometimes there's a bigger annual meeting a year from when we first began the action plan to see where we've gotten to as far as our strategic planning. So, there's little check-ins like that. But usually I like to say to my clients, if you still need me, I haven't done my job. I need to teach you guys to be able to handle this self-consciously. And I'm always a phone call away. I'm not going to nickel and dime anyone a phone call if they need advice, but if I'm not teaching them how to swim, if they continuously need me for a long period of time beyond that initial action plan, then I'm not doing a good job as a coach and a consultant.

Eric Raine:

And I think that's a great selling point too, kind of like, look, you shouldn't need me by the time we're done with this in a way. You know what I mean? And this is the value you're getting. It also seems that accountability is a huge piece of this that it seems like they might think that they have or that they completely lack, but because you are existing with them and you're within the organization taking it on as they go, and you talk about raising a flag saying, hey, we haven't reached this milestone on this ninety-day plan or whatever the journey might look like.

Dustin Snyder:

Or not even, I haven't reached it, but I'm not going to.

Eric Raine:

Oh, yeah. Even just knowing because you're there and you're looking at it and saying like, hey, I thought we had a plan. If we're not hitting it, why aren't we? And even that in and of itself is a huge piece. It seems to organizations that who's above the CEO, I mean, you could have a board of directors. But tangibly inside the organization, if you're there with them and you're saying, Hey, I'm keeping an eye on this, and we're all trying to accomplish the same goal here at the end of the day, it really is an accountability.

Dustin Snyder:

My presence is a little bit of that accountability. And the boards are all different, and sometimes they're helpful and sometimes they're not. And when they're not, it's because the only information that they're getting is usually just through the chief executive. And if the chief executive isn't on board with the fixes, if frankly he or she is part of the problem, then we have an issue. That's not usually the case. Usually the chief executive or the head of operations that's pulling me in. I very rarely come in through HR, but so usually I'm working with good supportive boards who are in it for the right reasons. And sometimes it's the board that's hired me.

Eric Raine:

Right. Yeah. They may be the ones that the entry point you talk about. Well, we appreciate you giving us sort of insight into the world that you're in, the business that you're running, and some of the challenges that are being faced out there from a strategic HR perspective and just what firms are facing in general.

Patrick Lageraen:

I wanted to ask one more question about Wayforward, if that's all right?

Eric Raine:

Yeah, absolutely. You guys are driving.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah. So, you mentioned before that when you're not working with clients, one of the things that you do with your own company is do marketing. And you mentioned a couple of times that you're flying all over the country. How do you market your business? How do you make yourself available to countries or sorry, companies not just in Buffalo, nationwide?

Dustin Snyder:

I've spoken at conferences. One of the things that's really taken off, I talked about turnover a few minutes ago. So, recruitment and retention is something that a lot of companies are struggling with or spending a ton of money on with recruiting firms and things like that. And I hear people saying that they're scraping the bottom of the barrel for candidates that they can't hold on to people. So, because that was of such demand, I actually partnered with a marketing agency that's also based here in Buffalo, Riveter Design. And because I can help a company understand how to connect with candidates, I can help them understand why people are leaving and what to do about it internally. What I can't do is go to market with that value proposition. I can't make a website that's not my jam. I can't manage their social, do their design their video and things like that.

So, Riveter and I have partnered to create this offering of employer branding that's like a systematized packaged version of the service that we perform for clients. And we've done it here in Buffalo. We've done it across the country. And so one of their partners, Lauren Malenda and I, we speak at conferences and we've spoken at some of the biggest conferences in the country on this topic. And it's funny because we'll go to something like FABTECH was in Chicago last year and they asked us to come back this year in Orlando, but it's welding and fabricating, so it's like Hitachi and Aesop and Lincoln and companies like that. And they're all there learning about the newest robotic welder and things like that. I should shout out to Dynabrade, because they were, Dynabrade they're not called Dynabrade anymore, sorry, they just got acquired by somebody. But because Dynabrade was in Buffalo, but it's a huge conference all about welding and fabricating, and people are going there and they want to hear about, I can't find welders and my welders are leaving and going to my competitors, so how do I hold onto

people? So, it's things like that, going to conferences and speaking. We've done some big healthcare conferences too where they're having trouble recruiting clinicians and nurses and providers and things like that. So, sometimes it's speaking and then the companies that are national or international are at those conferences and they reach out to us. Sometimes it's just relationships.

Somebody took a job with a company that's based in Chicago or based in LA and with remote work these days, there's global companies out there. So, there's national companies that have presence here in Buffalo or people in my network who have just ended up elsewhere and see that kind of work. But then I do a lot of content too. I put out a lot of stuff on LinkedIn. I'm just starting to get into Instagram and TikTok for video based short form content.

And my clients tend to like that. And I've gotten some clients who've seen my videos and seen my content that I've put out there and said, "Hey, this is the problem that I have, and it sounds like you know what you're talking about. Can we talk?" So, I try to just put that stuff out there just to be educational and help people. And if through a video that something clicks for them, cool. If they hire me, cool. I just care about the outcomes really. With entrepreneurship in general, if you're in it for the money, if you're in it for the business, you're not going to be successful. You have to be in it for just loving the outcome.

Eric Raine:

I think that's a great transition into kind of the next area we wanted to talk to you about with entrepreneurship is you have this journey in your career spanning from healthcare, manufacturing and entrepreneurship, and even multiple companies even before Wayforward. So, what sparked that leap into starting your own businesses and how has having that background in strategic HR helped you launch your organization faster or even more strategically at this point?

Dustin Snyder:

Sure. So, I think that's really where the MBA from UB comes in is, and this is not a plug, of course, I'm sitting here on the UB podcast, but-

Eric Raine:

It's a plug.

Dustin Snyder:

Legitimately the MBA kind of, like I'd always wanted to build something bigger. It's just always been something I've been driven to do. I see stuff that I feel like I can make better and I can't help myself. I just want to, that's why I scrapped your guys list of questions that you sent me and I said, let's talk about something more interesting than my resume. But the MBA I think gave me just this complete toolkit of all these other things that I didn't know how to do early in my career. I knew HR, I knew labor relations, I knew this whole administrative side, and I was starting to get really interested in operations.

And then the MBA gave me the finance and the accounting and supply chain and logistics and all these things that just equipped me to understand, because when you're an entrepreneur, you're doing everything. You start off by yourself or with a small team, and you are doing all of the things, everything from A to Z of your business, whether it's customer service or sourcing vendors or whatever it is, you're doing it. So, you have to understand it. And I think that was where the MBA just kind of unlocked for me. I know enough to be dangerous in all these different things, and I know how to research more and get more dangerous at things as I need to. Did that answer your question? What was the question?

Eric Raine:

Yeah, so it's kind of just like the leap into starting your own business. I know for a lot of people that I talk to and even Patrick and myself, we're very entrepreneurial minded. We share a similar Myers-Briggs. We have the same Myers-Briggs four letter.

Dustin Snyder:

What is it?

Eric Raine:

ESTP. And so the sort of name for that is the entrepreneur. And so a lot of the thought processes, I'm always interested to hear from people-

Dustin Snyder:

I'm an INTJ.

Eric Raine:

Okay, interesting.

Dustin Snyder:

Not an entrepreneur I guess.

Eric Raine:

But it's just a matter of people that want to start their own firm or their own business or they have this idea or this concept of starting something or creating or building something like you talked about can be really scary. I guess you could say. You're going to take the leap of like, I'm working a full-time job. I'm trying to save some money to start this, or I'm seeking maybe some capital, some funding, but you don't want to give it away. You want to really build it yourself. What was that like for you when you made the transition from your background in the MBA and then going in and working full time and then making that switch to saying, you know what, I'm going to do this on my own and I want to create something?

Dustin Snyder:

Sure. So, I had been working for five years before I went back and got my MBA, which helped too. I think I got a lot more out of the MBA than I would've if I had just coming straight from undergrad because I had some experience to apply it to. I have a hard time really pointing to a lot in my undergraduate career that I apply today. There's a couple courses that stand out, but you just don't have anything to hold it up against. It's just all very theoretical when you're an undergrad. So, the entrepreneurial leap, I think there's two ways to do it, right? There's the just complete cliff dive where you quit your full-time job and you go all in. I kind of took a half step, but it was equally as difficult because I had a full-time job the whole time. So, I spent my nights and weekends building my business until it was open, and I built a business that was in the hospitality and entertainment industry. That was my first business, not Wayforward.

It was a sporting venue that started in Buffalo, and I spent literally my nights and weekends building the physical space, hiring the team, building the procedures, doing the marketing, that kind of stuff. And then it was only open nights and weekends. So, I designed it that way on purpose. And so I would literally leave my day job downtown, take my suit and tie off and high tail it over there and throw a pair of jeans on and open the place and run it. So, that's burning the candle at both ends though. If I were to do that again today, I don't know if I could do it. I was still in my 20s. I had more energy. You guys are probably looking at me sideways with this, but we got to wait until you're in your 30s and 40s. Life changes. You don't have the energy you once did. I was always rolling my eyes at people who would say that to me. But yeah, it was a lot. And it was still scary though. I put everything I had financially into it, and there were regulatory delays that I didn't anticipate.

There was a lot of scariness there. We were all ready to open in February. I had a team hired, trained, ready to go, and the business license just sat with the city of Buffalo for another seven months after that. Meanwhile, paying rent, trying to hold onto staff, utilities, inventory, things like that. And were just hemorrhaging cash. And there were weeks where I was selling furniture to try to make payroll on Craigslist, and that's tough. So, you've got to be prepared for stuff like that, and you've got to just be, people talk about being gritty and just being scrappy, and that's entrepreneurship. You look back to people rail against Bezos and Musk and stuff, and yes, maybe they got million-dollar loans from Daddy or whatever the case might have been. But if you look at those stories and there's scrappiness and you've got to figure it out, you got to drive the smart car car across the Mexican border and put the Roadster motor in it. You got to just do weird stuff to get it done.

Eric Raine:

Just make it work.

Dustin Snyder:

Whatever it takes to get it across the finish line. Yeah, make it work.

Eric Raine:

So, then how does that experience, obviously you're working full time, you're trying to start a business, you're running into issues that you didn't necessarily anticipate, but the grit in that, your energy towards it was like, I'm going to do whatever it takes to make this work. And obviously then in the end it ended up being successful and things came out of that in a positive way when you made the transition then. How was that learning experience useful to you to then starting Wayforward?

Dustin Snyder:

I think that I learned to apply that same mindset to my day job. And I was in the healthcare industry when I opened Hatchets & Hops, but then a few years later I went to American Brass and they brought me in as their new head of HR. And my mindset was really just this get it done mindset of there's so rarely nothing you can do about a situation. So, there were plenty of times at Hatchets & Hops in the entrepreneur entrepreneurial space. The first part of becoming an entrepreneur is being able to pronounce it. But there's so many times in the entrepreneurial space where you're just up against this

wall and you're just like, I have no idea what I'm going to do. And you just figure it out and you just keep doing that and you keep doing it and you keep doing it.

And there's wall after wall after wall. But so it's applying that at work and just saying, there's never nothing we can do. There's never nothing to be done. What about this? What about that? And it's figuring it out and it's being that example and showing people that I use that mindset to be that outside party for my clients, to just be the person who's not exhausted, who doesn't have that inertia, who hasn't been through it a million times, but who's been through stuff like this a million times, but knows there's a light at the end of the tunnel. There is a way to figure this out. And it's like sometimes my kids get upset when they can't untie their shoes because they're double knotted and it's a knot.

But if you just take a breath and you look at it and you see how everything is interrelated, you notice that it's a system and it's behaving very logically and if you change variables within that system you will change the outcome. And so it's that, there is an answer mindset in the entrepreneurial space, and sometimes it's just that optimism that clients need. They need someone in the room who's not exhausted, who's not like we've been through this before, who's not thinking about their own personal biases. And I don't mean biases in a bad way, but just biases because part of the ecosystem to just have that optimistic viewpoint and the knowledge that we can do this. And so applying that within my own organization at American Brass and then now applying it to clients. So, I think it's kind of a roundabout answer, but it's just we can get it done.

Eric Raine:

Absolutely. And you mentioned your kid trying to untie a double knot. It makes me think of anecdotally, another kind of example in that space would be like from finding Nemo, like Dory, just keep swimming, just keep swimming.

Dustin Snyder:

Yeah.

Eric Raine:

And it seems so funny. But that's kind of what a lot of that movie is about in a way, is what that positive mindset and also knowing if we just keep swimming, we're going to get to where we need to go or at least find a way to get a potential viable solution. But it's so interesting to see how that translates from

your initial jump into starting something in hospitality and entertainment and then saying, okay, what if I were to apply this to something more in the strategic HR space so really cool.

Dustin Snyder:

I think, yeah, just keep swimming, but also don't just keep firefighting either. Don't just keep your head down, stop and look around and take a moment. And people are always saying, oh, I can't stop and be strategic because I'm so busy being tactical, but you don't realize the amount of things that are taking up your time that if you stopped and took a breath and planned, instead of just plowing onto the next thing on your to-do list, you would eliminate those things that take up a lot of your day. So, that's a little bit of what I'm doing too. I'm building in disruption into their routines and forcing them to step out and take the time to plan. And then also being, like you talked about accountability earlier, creating some tension and saying, here's where you want to be. Here's where you are. What's the path look like in between those two things?

Patrick Lageraen:

I think we should stay on the entrepreneurship subject just for one more minute because I think a lot of our audience, whether they be prospective students or current school of management students, they have a strong interest in entrepreneurship. So, from these two experiences, what are some experiences that you've loved and then how have they affected you in a sense of personal growth or professional growth? What have you taken away from it?

Dustin Snyder:

I think the common thread is experience. So, Hatchets & Hops was about customer experience. And customer experience is actually incidentally how I got into employee experience work. I started at a cancer hospital and I did patient experience work and empathy training for our staff. The littlest things like if you're a cancer patient, you're having the worst day of your life. There's nothing that could have happened to me that morning unless I have also been diagnosed with cancer. That is worse than what you're experiencing.

And so if I need to be thinking about how my actions are affecting you more so than really anything else, even the littlest things like I've got to turn to my computer and enter your information. I could just turn away from you and start typing and you're going to be like, is he listening to me? What's going on? Am I supposed to do something? You're going to get confused and feel ignored. But if I say, hey, Patrick, I just

have to take a second and put your information in my computer. I'll be right back with you. Then you're like, okay, I know what's going on.

Patrick Lageraen:

Big difference.

Dustin Snyder:

They're going to turn back to me. It's a huge difference in experience. And when those little tiny interactions add up throughout, if I'm at a hospital for six hours, I'm walking away, it goes back to that barista experience. Like I'm walking away with two very different outcomes if those things accumulate throughout the day. And so Hatchets & Hops was all about customer experience. It was at a time when food and drink was really exploding in Buffalo New York and there were so many places to eat and drink. There wasn't a lot to do, especially in the winter unless we wanted to go stare at a screen or watch other people do stuff. So, I wanted to bring people together and have them have something outside of their comfort zone that they could do together and use that to bond.

So, that's what that was about. And then the Wayforward is about the same thing. It's about the psychology of your experience day in and day out and the outcomes that creates cumulatively, if I'm going into work and I'm experiencing a whole bunch of little negative things throughout the day, that outcome of my attitude and how much I'm going to buy into that is really very logical. If there's really only two reasons in my experience that people buy into something, you either have a strong emotional connection to the person asking you to do the thing. So, I need a really good relationship with Eric, and because Eric's asking me, I will do that thing because we care about each other and I know we have a strong relationship, but that also burns a little capital. If Eric's always asking and never giving, eventually that runs out. The other way is I have buy-in or I have input into what's happening. It's mine. I own it a little bit. I've been part of that solution.

Patrick Lageraen:

And that naturally gives buy-in.

Dustin Snyder:

Exactly.

Patrick Lageraen:

Because it's yours.

Dustin Snyder:

Yeah. Did that answer your question?

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, it did. I liked your parallel of it all being about customer service, but in Wayforward, the customer is the employee which you don't normally think about.

Dustin Snyder:

Well, I mean, they're the person doing the thing that the company exists to do. And so if we don't listen to them and we don't let them have some ownership over what they're spending their day doing, they're not going to have a good time and they're not going to want to do anything that I want them to do.

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Dustin Snyder:

It's simple.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah.

Eric Raine:

And I think what's also really fascinating too is one of the things we learned about in the MBA program when we take our entrepreneurship course is these nine freedoms of entrepreneurship. And like you mentioned, you're like, look, if money or these couple versions of what entrepreneurship looks like someone else, it doesn't really do it for you. It's not really something that's going to really push you forward or pull you into being interested in doing it. Whereas maybe the creating the experience and being able to build something and see the outcomes and impact. I know impact is one of the big ones that we talked about.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, freedom of impact.

Eric Raine:

And it is interesting to hear your own experience and how that overlays the things that we've learned on what entrepreneurship looks like for different people and what propels them forward in building a business. Especially because there seems to be so much overlap between two businesses you've started and are very different businesses in and of themselves, but at the end of the day, there's still some underlying sense of that entrepreneurial sort of spirit that drives it.

Dustin Snyder:

Yeah, I didn't learn about the nine freedoms in my program, but freedom of impact sounds like everybody's motivated by very different things, and you have to really understand if you're going to be an entrepreneur, you have to understand what is the freedom or impact or what is the value that I'm after here? And sometimes it is impact and sometimes it's just making the world a better place. Sometimes it's problem solving, sometimes it's a combination of a couple, but you really got to know what motivates you if you're going to structure your business in the right way or start the right business in the first place.

Eric Raine:

So, another thing too, sort of going from the entrepreneurship into leadership, because obviously in the roles that you've even mentioned today on the podcast and in your current business that you're running, your leadership has an immense impact on the people that work for you and for the people that you are serving as far as the client base. So, how would you personally define leadership and what qualities do you believe helped you lead a successful career to this point?

Dustin Snyder:

Well, I think the reason that my career is successful is because I finally had an epiphany somewhere along the line that I needed to listen to my people. Like I said earlier, for a long time I thought I had all the answers. I thought I was the smartest. And I feel like that was an arrogant attitude to have. And so while I was able to get by on my smarts and I was able to make an impact for the organizations that I worked for, I don't think that I would've been able to move into a leadership role. I think I would've

always stayed an individual contributor if I hadn't had the realization that I needed to listen to others. And so what really defines a leader for me is somebody who, there's all these terms floating around about servant leadership and things like that.

But what defines a leader for me is somebody who recognizes that their whole job is just to get rid of barriers for the people beneath them, is to decide, okay, we know where we're going and I'm making sure that people understand why we need to go there. That's one of the barriers that people have is why are we doing this? It's one of the first ones that people usually have. But once you define those things, your role as a leader is just to make sure other people can do their jobs and do the contribution that they're supposed to do. There's really nothing else to it. It's just to spend the time with the people doing the work and making sure that you're getting things out of the way for them. Every time that they say, hey, Dustin, this isn't the way. And you help them through it. But also you don't just do it, you talk them through it, ask them questions, see if they can get to it themselves. So, learning how to coach and just ask questions instead of giving direction.

Patrick Lageraen:

But removing barriers kind of ignores the fact that they need a goal or a common vision to work towards. So, where does that fall in?

Dustin Snyder:

Because the common vision, not having a common vision is usually one of those barriers. It's usually the first thing. And involving them in that process of creating that And communicating it really well, usually the C-suite's creating a company level vision of this is our plan for 2035, this is where we're going to be in 10 years, and here's the roadmap as an organization of the high level things that need to be accomplished at each milestone along the way if we're going to stay on track for that long-term goal. Within that, there's multiple functions. You've got operations or medicine or IT, HR, finance, all these things that need to be in place to have strategies to support those milestones along the way. So, then within those own teams, you have to repeat that process and say, okay, here's where we need to be from an HR support standpoint, five years from now. What do we need to do to get there?

So, defining that goal that has been the C-suite defines it, and then the chief human resources officer defines how they're contributing to that higher level goal. And then the chief operations officer defines the same thing for their portion of the organization. And then it's a iterative process cascading that through each layer of the organization, and it's involving them in identifying the umbrella goal and the

level above and why that needs to be accomplished. Because relating it back to that ultimate 2035 goal or whatever it is, whether that's revenue or market share or carbon emissions or whatever your big goals are. And then it's getting each respective team on board with those things, and it's giving them input into helping to draw the roadmap

Patrick Lageraaen:

And also demonstrating how your individual piece of that umbrella is critical to that entire umbrella success.

Dustin Snyder:

Yes, exactly.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Because if you don't understand that-

Dustin Snyder:

You're able to draw that connection. And then it goes back to why would I buy in? Either I love my boss and they're asking me to do it, or hey, I've got input into the plan. So, then I also really understand the plan. There's the old adage of JFK was touring NASA, and he meets a janitor outside the men's room and he says, "Hey, what's your role here?" And the janitor says, "We're putting a man on the moon."

Eric Raine:

That's really cool.

Patrick Lageraaen:

That's really cool.

Eric Raine:

And really that comes down to just allowing the people in the organization to have that barrier removed to understand what that looks like. I know Professor Lemoine that we've had come in and speak in some of our leader core classes and organizational behavior related content. And I am not going to get the quote exactly right, but it's kind of like this idea of allowing and giving people the opportunity to do things that they never thought they'd be able to do and help them accomplish those things.

And that's a lot of what it sounds like you're kind of describing through this sort of identification process and then how they either are doing it because, hey, Dustin's telling me to do it and we have a great relationship, so I'm just going to believe it and I'm going to do it. Or hey, if I have a say in this process that actually builds in inherent accountability in a way, and then therefore the likelihood of them staying on it is a bias that they have that actually pulls them into actually performing the thing they didn't know they'd be able to do as part of the overall goal.

Dustin Snyder:

And it strengthens both of those avenues. If you have a leader who's saying, hey, these are the expectations. I have high expectations of what you as an individual or us as a team can accomplish. And I'm telling you this because I believe that you can get there. And so if the person above you believes in you and knows that you can do it, and you know that anytime you're having a challenge that they've got your back, then your boss is not a source of stress. Your boss is a source of support and a tool belt for you. And it's not that you're leaning on them too heavily, it's not that they're doing your job for you, but it's a process by which you're not only strengthening that relationship, but you're also expanding your control over what you feel you're capable of.

Eric Raine:

And I think it's also interesting too. I know sitting here you have a Wayforward branded, very nice zip up on for those of you-

Dustin Snyder:

Thanks. It's way too hot in here.

Eric Raine:

Maybe you can see it on video, but if you're listening, you can't see it. But it says right underneath the Strategic People leadership. And I think that that kind of puts a bow on everything here as far as how the leadership component impacts the work that you're doing. And I think it's awesome to be able to kind of talk about this today. So, we appreciate you taking the time.

Dustin Snyder:

No, happy to be here.

Eric Raine:

And before we sort of wrap up, we just wanted to kind of touch on a couple of quick questions for you is since our main audience is perspective MBA and MS management students coming into the school of management here at UB, what advice do you have for both domestic and even international students that are looking to enter the job market? Because obviously you have a really good finger on the pulse as far as job market goes. So, maybe some advice for them on what that looks like right now or things to keep in mind.

Dustin Snyder:

Sure. I think my best advice to anybody early in their career is I think the number one thing you can do, and all my recruiter friends are going to hate me for saying this, but the number one thing you can do to make sure that you don't get a job is to apply to the online posting. I think that you're screwing yourself. The best thing that you can do while you're in school, especially when you're in your job hunt when you're outside of school, is to just do something called informational interviewing. I would say that you should reach out to anyone in your network that is in a job that you would like to be in one day and ask them if you can buy them a cup of coffee and just pick their brain about what their day-to-day is like, what current challenges they're dealing with, how they got to be where they are. You're not asking for a job. At no point during this conversation do you ask for a job,

But just sit down with them and get to know what their career's been like, how they got where they are, how they're looking at the current challenges in the industry, whether you're going into management or you have a dual degree program and you're going into a very specialized field. And just sit down and have that conversation. And then at the end of that conversation, if you enjoyed it, tell them, hey, are there two more people that, one or two more people that you think that it would be valuable for me to sit down with and learn from? And they're probably going to connect you.

And even your first one, it could be daunting to reach out to somebody in a leadership role and just say, hey, can I buy you a cup of coffee? But most people like to talk about themselves. They'll sit down and have coffee with you, and if they say no, then you don't want to work for that person. So, you dodge a bullet. Eventually that one person will give you two names and you'll have two more cups of coffee. And then they'll each give you two names. And before you know it, you've sat down with 30 people in the field and you are now very good at discussing the hot button issues in that field.

Patrick Lageraen:

Interesting.

Dustin Snyder:

With people far above you. And you're very comfortable sitting down with executives and you get a sense for pay attention to the way that they talk about it, not just the content, but the manner in which they speak, the manner in which they converse, the energy that they give, and start to model those behaviors. And then first of all, you'll be so well versed in talking about these things by the time you're ever in an interview that it's going to be no sweat. You're just going to walk into it without even needing to prepare.

But one of those people is probably going to offer you a job because you're going to have gotten good at conversing or they're going to know somebody who has an opening, who has a need for someone with an MBA, and they're going to connect you, but you're going to be so comfortable speaking with the executives and communicating. And I think that's probably the biggest barrier that people are facing right out of school, especially if I have the disadvantage of being international and I don't know the culture, it's a second language maybe, I have trouble meeting social cues and things like that. It's great practice to observe these things and learn how to communicate in a relaxed way in the same way as the people who will be leading the organization want to be communicating. And it's going to become second nature to you. So, I think the more exposure you can give yourself in an environment where there's no transaction, there's no winning or losing, there's no job to be gotten, there's no pressure. It's just learning. I think that's the best advice that I've got.

Patrick Lageraen:

These informational interviews. Does the door to that close once you graduate, or can you do that throughout your career?

Dustin Snyder:

I don't think so. I think it's like a bell curve a little bit. It probably gets harder for a little while if I just graduated, then it's like there's some suspicion I think that are you looking for a job? And the answer should be no. I just want to learn from you. This is just educational. I want to be you one day and I'd like to, I've done this myself. I want to be in your job one day. How did you get there? What was your career? What were the important things and what are you dealing with now that you're in that seat?

But then as you get farther along in your career, you sit down and chat with people and you reach out and you say, it's tough when you're a consultant, if you reach out to somebody, they think you're trying to sell them something. But luckily, I don't have a sales bone in my body, so I'm not trying to sell them anything. I'm a big believer in just giving until they ask. I don't ever ask anybody for business, but it gets easier when your peers.

Eric Raine:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah. Makes sense.

Eric Raine:

Yeah. Well, we appreciate that advice. I think it's excellent advice because even just reflecting and thinking through the things you just described, the times where I've had those experiences where I was connected to someone and we got on a quick phone call or we went and got coffee or whatever it was, those were seemingly insignificant events at the time because I didn't necessarily even have a plan for it. It just kind of happened organically, especially coming to the close of my MBA experience. But thinking about what you just said, I think that I can identify a handful of experiences that I've had that were similar to that.

Maybe it was just through luck because it just worked out that way. I didn't go into it necessarily even thinking it in the way you framed it, but to reinforce even the advice you just gave to anyone listening is this is really profound advice. And I think it also is something that can be extremely powerful, especially as a student to what Patrick mentioned is that the door is more easily opened I think when you're like, hey, I'm a student and I'm looking to learn. And they're like, well, this is low stakes. It's a student from UB MBA who's going to come over and have a quick-

Dustin Snyder:

Who thinks my job is cool.

Eric Raine:

And I can just tell them about it, and it's easy. But what that does for you, especially when you, I think take your advice on you, finish that conversation with, hey, you know what? I'd love to talk to someone else you might know in this space too. And if you could do that, and just that small ask can really open many other doors and turn into opportunities you can't even necessarily envision when you start out doing it.

Dustin Snyder:

Yeah, yeah. What's the worst they're going to say? No. You've already learned something. Or maybe they'll say no today, and they'll come back to you a week later and say, Hey, I thought of somebody. But yeah, it doesn't even ... Yeah, it's great. The other thing I would recommend is I get a lot of people asking me if they can intern for me or something like that in the academic space, and I'm super open to that. Actually, one of my first career experiences was an amazing internship, and it was really well-structured, and I owe so much credit to the attorneys that I learned from when I was an intern, and I wouldn't be the professional I'm today if it wasn't for those early experiences. But building an internship curriculum is a lot of work, and it's a whole other job in and of itself.

And so what my answer usually to those students is, yeah, I'd love to, but it needs to be a little bit of a two-way street. I haven't built an internship program, I'm not a big organization. And so if you want an internship and there's not one that you're applying to, if you're just reaching out to someone cold and saying, hey, can I intern for you? I would recommend build as much structure into what you think that internship would look like. And it's not necessarily something that you have to repeat for every ask. If you know what you want to intern in and you're reaching out to people like me in similar roles, then you can say, hey, this is what I think we could do this summer, or something like that. And if you build a structure and then you show how you would create value, then it's a much easier conversation than, yes, I'd love to have an intern, but I'd have to sit down for weeks and build an internship.

Eric Raine:

Right.

Patrick Lageraen:

Exactly. Interesting.

Dustin Snyder:

Or if someone is an entrepreneurial minded person and wants to start a business building internships for small businesses, that's a good business model.

Eric Raine:

It's really interesting.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Good idea.

Eric Raine:

But yeah, it's really that exchange of value, and I've heard this before about networking is it really comes down to powerful networkers are those that are able to bring value to the people they're trying to expand their network with, rather than it being this thing where it's like, hey, I'm going to this networking event tonight.

Patrick Lageraaen:

What can I get out of it?

Eric Raine:

And I wonder how many people I could connect with on LinkedIn that are hiring. And that's probably the wrong mindset if you really want to become a powerful networker. It really should be what value might you be able to bring in a five-minute conversation or down the line by making that connection that then maybe can be reciprocated over time, and then therefore it's more of a powerful tool rather than just more of a take. But like you said, it's kind of a giving thing, and the more you give and you give and give, sometimes those things come back and that's kind of how things grow.

Dustin Snyder:

They usually do. Yeah. If you're the person always asking, people are going to get a sense for that real quick. And then they're also going to anticipate that that's what the employment relationship will look like, that you're not somebody who's looking to go above and beyond and do things just because it's the right thing to do. You're not the kind of person that's going to think about others before yourself.

Eric Raine:

Absolutely. Well, thank you very much for taking the time today to come out and talk with us. Patrick and I really had a good time. We've been looking forward to this conversation now for a while. Another thing too is just quickly as we wrap up, we wanted to kind of throw it out there that you have a podcast that you've been working on. So, if anyone is interested in learning a little bit more about what you do, some of the topics that you're bringing value to the marketplace in through video or podcasting, if you want to maybe just share how they could connect with you there, we'd love to be able to just keep you going.

Dustin Snyder:

Sure. People are welcome to connect with me on LinkedIn. I'm always happy to connect with UV students. Happy to give advice anytime you need it. The podcast is called, This Is The Way, and yeah, the last episode just got released and it's with the chairman of the American Medical Association. So, really, really cool guest with some really amazing perspectives on anybody that's got interest in the healthcare industry right now. So, yeah, it was a really fun conversation.

Eric Raine:

Awesome. Well, thank you very much again.

Patrick Lageraen:

Thanks very much.

Eric Raine:

Appreciate it.

Dustin Snyder:

You're welcome.

Eric Raine:

I hope you enjoyed this episode. Again, we were speaking with Dustin Snyder of Wayforward Associates. My name is Eric Raine. I've been your host along with Patrick Lageraen. Thanks for listening.