

# Paving the Way - Insights from Three Generations of Success

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

work, people, business, company, kid, put, college, years, dad, summer, asphalt, field, jobs, bit, procrastinate, industry, birthday card, office, run, leesburg

## SPEAKERS

Chris West, Monica Pitts

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### C Chris West 00:00

If you write a birthday card to every single person in the company, that means that at a bare minimum, you're thinking of each single person that contributes to the company once a year. Now writing 175 birthday cards, it's a lot to do. But every time I do it, I get to reflect and also shows them that I do appreciate what they do, because some of them are doing dangerous jobs or working in areas that are dangerous, working on major roadways, not the safest thing. And I'm tickled to death to have people willing and wanting to do it, excited to do it. I feel I owe it to show all of them some love and care.

### M Monica Pitts 00:42

You're on mission, and you just need more people to know about it. And whether you're brand new to marketing or a seasoned pro, we are all looking for answers to make marketing decisions with purpose. I'm Monica Pitts, a techie crafty business owner, mom and aerial dancer who solves communication challenges through technology. This podcast is all about digging in and going digital. I'll share my marketing know how and business experience from almost 20 years of misadventures, I'll be your backup dancer. So you can stop doubting, and get moving towards marketing with purpose. So Hello, again. And welcome back to marketing with purpose. I'm Monica Pitts. And today, as promised, I have a special guest with me, Chris West. Now, one of our podcast goals this year is sharing more success stories, highlighting businesses, who are building amazing culture processes and marketing. And we're doing this because like, I don't know about you. But when I hear stories of people finding success, it really motivates me. And it gives me a new perspective. And it gets my wheels turning to find new paths and opportunities to better my own business and myself as a leader. So hopefully that does the same for you. And hopefully, Chris gives you some inspiration. So I have with me, Chris West, who is president of West contracting. And we have been lucky enough to work with you, Chris, for quite a few years now through a few like website, upgrades. And I get to be your print designer a lot of the times I don't know if you know that, but most of your designs actually come off of my desk. So I have read a lot. Oh, and I'm your videographer to.

C Chris West 02:28

Yeah, I didn't know the boss took those

M Monica Pitts 02:30

over. So yeah, I get all these like odd projects that like the rest of the staff. It's not in their core skill set, because they're their web developers, right. And so those things I get to do. So thank you for letting me do fun things for you. And one of the things that I have really enjoyed about doing your design work is that you have so many photos throughout the years because your business has been around for so long. It's been around for like three generations. So I love the scrapbook pages that your mom makes your mom makes those right? One of her friends does one of her friends. Okay, and they're in your office. Yes,

C Chris West 03:11

we've got a receptionist that found a whole nother scrapbook that she's making big billboards. And they're very cool. And it reminded me of a story My grandparents had told me a long time ago, my grandpa rented a house in Leesburg to a an ex felon that actually broke out of prison and was a bank robber. He had no idea Hey, but that guy paid his rent on time every month in cash. Boom. was asking me, she was asking me how the story was relevant. And you know, because there was no mention of my grandpa in there. Oh, man, I didn't even find that newspaper article. So glad we still have it. kept everything. I

M Monica Pitts 03:56

feel like the scrapbooks on the walls of your office, kind of speak to me a little bit about your office culture. And they might actually speak to me a lot about your office culture and the way that you guys work together as a company. And I know that this last year, you've been really, really focused on that you've been in a cycle of change and reevaluating your internal structure, figuring out what works and what doesn't. I feel like a lot of us are kind of doing that right now. As we become adults in our businesses, like we've kind of grown up and um, some of us so tell me about that. Tell me about your company culture. Tell me about West contracting. How'd you end up as president? All those things?

C Chris West 04:37

That's a lot.

M Monica Pitts 04:38

No. Okay. Let's start over. Tell me how you ended up as president. Let's start there. I'll

C

Chris West 04:45

tell you a little bit about myself. And then kind of that journey over the last, I don't know almost 30 years, but I was born and raised in Kirkwood, Missouri. Live there really until I went to college, played a lot of sports growing up anything and everything. Soccer face Ball basketball, I was not very good at basketball because I finished growing and five foot five was on a swim team dive team, if a little neighborhood pool really enjoyed hockey, I played hockey from eight or nine years old until really COVID, hit, everything shut down. And then I realized I needed to stop going to the chiropractor and try and focus on work a little bit more, you know, but even to this day, I mean, I'm not a big sports junkie, but anything active in that sense, you know, we'll take our kids to a swimming pool close to our house, we've got diving boards and big platforms. And I will still go off the diving boards and do a one and a half or go off the platforms and do a can opener all the kids love it. My kids love it, and it gets them. I think it allows them to see me do it. And then they want to do it and not be afraid of it so

M

Monica Pitts 05:50

well and to be able to like see you as an adult still having fun and still being active. I mean that. So I'm a very active person, and I run I do Arial and I my kids just think that all moms are just like this, that they're all like actually circus performers, and they think it's totally normal. And I kind of like that for them. You know,

C

Chris West 06:14

my my wife says she's raising three, three children. So I, I'd much rather be in that category than the dad category has to be the dad category, some but I attempt to live as much of my life and the kid category as I can. So you can you can still be a kid when you're older and actually run a business just you have to also be cognizant of when to get out of kid mode into adult mode.

M

Monica Pitts 06:38

Good advice.

C

Chris West 06:39

No beyond that, though, I played hockey all the way through high school and inline hockey in college after college. But in my years growing up in St. Louis, we spent a lot of time in the country. My grandparents were from Leesburg, and steel Ville, respectively. So, as you know, some of my time was spent in the city, there were a lot of weekends spent out in the country, we still have both places that my grandparents had bought in those towns and cell phones don't work. And it's always a good place to go to reset. I kind of took on a love of fishing. And I'm still able to do that. And it's I think it's what has helped me out too is having both a city and growing up with a city and a country culture. We've got a lot of workers that live in the country and understanding that I still enjoy that aspect of life as well. I think goes a long way it 18 graduated high school if anyone from St. Louis is listening to this and went to slew high that is

not necessarily slow. But that is a big deal on where you went to high school. My wife's from Indiana so she still does not get that. But went to IU Indiana University. They've got a great business school. After a year, Indiana probably screwed around too much. I did not even apply to the business school, I went in and became an economics major with minors in entrepreneurship and real estate. I'm glad that that was my path. I really became a social beam there. And that has helped me network a lot after college and you know, into this day, luckily, too. I did screw around a little bit too much my freshman year because I had to stay for a night semester. And that's when I met my wife. So I met her in October of 2005 pretty much been together ever since. So,

**M** Monica Pitts 08:24

question for you. So you knew that you were going to come into the family business as a kid really, right. So tell me about your decision to go to college instead of just going to work. I find that interesting because my cousins, a lot of them are farmers. They some of them went to college, some of them didn't. Right. And some of them just went straight to the farm. And my dad always advocates that when you go to college, even if you know you're going to go into the family business it like gives you this new outlook on how things can be done. And you can bring that new knowledge back to the company. So how did you feel about going to college? Was it just a rite of passage or were you resistant?

**C** Chris West 09:11

i No, not resistant at all. And it really my grandfather was a huge proponent of education. And he he grew up on a little tiny road and Leesburg didn't graduate eighth grade and went to World War Two came back and was a truck driver for my grandma's family's asphalt business. Eventually, they fell in love got married, broke off and started what is now West contracting rival patient company. I think you know, he had he had to do business, the hard knock way. And I think whether us kids went into the business, his grandkids went into the business or not. He realized the importance of education and really wanted us all you know, to go to good grade school, good high school and a good college and if it were Are you ready to come back and work for the family business, so be it if not, at least you're educated and can do something else. And you don't see a lot of people going to college these days and say, I want to come out of college and go work in asphalt and concrete.

**M** Monica Pitts 10:12

But it actually is a great industry. We serve a lot of asphalt paving companies, we actually work for multiple associations for the asphalt paving community industry. And there are a lot of myths. I feel like that people conceive about the industry that aren't right. So maybe you could tell us one or two things about those, like, they think it's just going to be super low pay, they think there's not going to be any room to grow. But I know that's not true. I mean,

**C** Chris West 10:47

people's perception is probably from Mike Rose dirty jobs that he did. I think it was a paving crew. And I mean, I will tell you in the field, there are no there are some jobs that can be nasty

crew. And I mean, I will tell you in the field, there are no there are some jobs that can be nasty, but it's few and far between. And a lot of the people that you know are in the field get doesn't have to be a dirty, nasty job. And what I can say is everyone in the field actually makes a very good living, working nine to 10 months a year, the we are a union company, but we also do a lot of MODOK or do T prevailing wage work where men and women's compensation is upwards of \$70 an hour, that's more than a lot of office people make if you break it down per hour, then within you know, call it within the within the office, we've got project managers, project engineers, estimators, full operations staff that we need, you know, IT and technology help get schedulers that are managing, you know, 175 different people sending in and out every day, we've got people that oversee our equipment mechanics that oversee our equipment we've got there are a lot of different possibilities, whether you are call it construction oriented or not. Logistics has become a huge thing in our industry. I mean, really, there's there's a class a CDL shortage, per se, and difficulty getting trucks that and you know, people are looking at a labor shortage, any conference, industry event, whatever I go to everyone complains about labor, and trucking. And I tell everyone around here, probably on a weekly basis, we are really lucky because we are not short on either of those, we've treated our customers, right, are the people that work for us, right, you know, all the truckers right? So we're, it's when you treat people, well, you get treated well back. And that's been really a mainstay, even since my grandparents, we were very quick pay, you know that from day one, that was something even if my grandparents had to dig into their pockets. When a bill came in, they paid it right away. And that's pretty much the same today and why we get good pricing, but also good customer service from other companies that we deal with. I think I've strayed away from the question, but it's relatively fascinating how much technology has changed in the industry and what it what it actually does for kind of the end user of erode, but also the sustainability and bring up the hot word. You know, we did. And I think I said that in one of my videos, but we paid a small section of 63 from Vichy to Vienna, and used, we use ground tire rubber in the mix. And like I did the math, and it was like 16,500 tires, like in a seven mile section that was like a thin lift. There are a lot of environmental problems that they've started to look at the asphalt industry to help with. And we are in like, in a matter of years can make a dramatic impact. And it's I mean, what better place to hide shit than inroads?

C

Chris West 14:04

No, no, I It's funny though. There's two guys. That I mean, they that essentially engineer that it's called engineered crumb rubber. It's like a rubber dust but they're the ones that take the tires grind and get the metal out pre coated with some material. But the asphalt industry even call it worldwide could solve like tire problem in like, probably a year. Like if everyone went that way, right. That's how quickly we could get rid of them if everyone was on board. Yeah, shingles or glass for a while, but Platt like plastic, plastics and rubber. Are the two that are becoming a bigger deal. That's coming. So be interesting. Yeah, yeah.

M

Monica Pitts 14:49

So you have a lot of employees, like a lot. Sometimes I feel so we have eight. And sometimes I'm like, Oh my gosh, I'm not even keeping up with What they're all doing. Like Rebecca got a new mouse light from Kara, who's our office momager for her birthday, and she was thanking me for it. And I was like, Oh my gosh, I didn't have anything to do with this cool mouse light that Cara got you this was just what like, way to go Cara. Right? And there's only a company credit card. That's yeah, no. Well, tell me about how you keep your culture like, so family

oriented, and so personal. Over there. I feel like, you know, you mentioned that in college, it helped you learn how to be more social and good at interacting with people, which is part A big part of your job, right now is interacting with people, but what do you do to show them that they're important and and keep your culture like positive and keep people around.

**C** Chris West 15:50

And I'll backtrack a little bit here, you were talking about a bunch of our old pictures, we've got upstairs when we've got pictures from the late 50s. All the way to now. But we I mean, we really have a lot from the 60s 70s and 80s, you see a lot of the same people in those pictures, you know, over a 20 or 30 year spread. And that's the same today, you know, there have kind of been periods where you had a huge group of people here. And inevitably, they retired or left the business. And there was kind of a whole new swath, probably the wrong word to use. But everyone says it too. And looking at them, they're like, this is so cool that, you know, this guy's and three different boards from three different sets of decades. I think that you know, and I started out as a kid working here when I was 13. You know, when I moved back to St. Louis, in 2010, a lot of the same people were here, whether they were in the field or had been in the field and were in the office, I would see people transition to different parts of the company can stay here for a long period of time. And that's been something we have always been proud of. And I think why a lot of people to this day, we hire someone. And right now, I think the current tenure of an employee, or even of a millennial is two or three years, we've got millennials that started with us seven, eight years ago, and are still here, there's, you know, our field has some turnover, but not nearly as much as other companies actually pretty rare. But our office has very little turnover. We're really at that point, you know, right now of developing the people that are going to be here with me, hopefully, for the next 20 or 30 years. Some of them have already been here a 1015 years. You know, that's kind of been the focus the last year and along with maintaining the culture of the past, I'm a firm believer, you treat people like family and expect to be treated by them like family, which can be hard in a business environment, but it is possible. And

**M** Monica Pitts 17:48

sometimes when you run into the employees that like feel like the family members that maybe you don't want to go spend Thanksgiving with, you're like, oh, man, this did not work out the way I thought it was going to like. Huh.

**C** Chris West 18:05

So a couple years ago, we joined a peer group of other contractors similar to us, we don't compete, you know, we're from all over the US, there's six, six different companies. And one of the guys brought up that he writes a Christmas card or a Christmas card birthday card to every employee, and he was hoping the following year to include wives. And I really took that to heart, you know, and thinking about it, I'm like, you write a birthday card to every single person in the company. That means, at a bare minimum, you're thinking of each single person that contributes to the company once a year. Now, typically, you're gonna see them, you know, and speak with them much more than that. But that has gone over really well now, writing 175 birthday cards, and I put a \$25 gift certificate or gift card in there. It's a lot to do. But every

time I do it, I get to reflect, you know, now in the last couple of years, there's, there are a few people, you know, I know most people in the company by name, there's a couple I'll have to figure out at the Christmas party or when I am on a cruise, I'm like, Alright, it was you know, who's this guy, Happy Birthday got the card right here. But I think that helps me stay in touch with them, and also shows them that I do give a shit about them and appreciate what they do, because some of them are doing dangerous jobs or working in areas that are dangerous, just inherently in what we do working on major roadways, not the safest thing and I'm tickled to death to have people willing and wanting to do it and you know, excited to do it. So I feel I owe it to show all of them some love and care.

**M** Monica Pitts 19:42

So you came back from college and there were a lot of the people still working in the business that you worked with while you were a kid. And I've I've heard you say before that you were not raised with a silver spoon. You weren't Given a shovel,

**C** Chris West 20:02

right, shovel, shovel.

**M** Monica Pitts 20:05

And I, I kind of want to hear a little bit more about that like because I think that that the way that your father and potentially even grandfather brought you into the business probably had a lot to do with the respect that you were still afforded when you came back from college because you were viewed as, like a co worker as a person that was going to work hard, somebody who could be trusted, if that makes sense. And I think that might have had something to do with the way that you were put to work and manage. Can you tell me about that?

**C** Chris West 20:36

Yeah, I 100% agree that I don't think I would be where I am. You know, whether it be personally or professionally if I if I didn't work throughout my teenage years and even in my 20s over the summers, of course for the business. I still remember to this day and I have the IRS proof was in 96 You know, my dad, the if you ever want to work for the company, or ever want to run it? Yeah. Okay, well, you're gonna start working this summer. I was like, Oh, shit, like, really? None of my other friends even have jobs like no one's even a lifeguard yet. I didn't even you know, couldn't even drive. You know, okay. And the first probably 1314 He bring me into the office at 630 in the morning. And we paint buildings, clean out gutters. I mean, there are fields that you're like, alright, you know, shut all the weeds down that field. Here's a machete and a weed eater. I don't know I'd finish it like a week and be like, alright, they'll do it again. Like he was the first year I think he was just trying to keep me busy and to see if I could handle you know, hot Missouri summer. And really just be willing to put hard work in. And so after probably two summers, because I know I was on cruise before I could drive. You know, he would drive me in and I started to go out on cruise. I know. Like the first crew I was on was a chip seal crew. We

spent like an entire summer chip sealing all the streets of Brentwood, which is where our office was. So it was easy for my dad to keep an eye on me. But also start to intermingle with guys that are out in the field guys and gals out in the field. And really from college 15 to the time I was 21. Every summer, there were three or four summers where I spent a little bit of time indoors and outdoors camp. But when I was in St. Louis, I was working on the cruise. And by the time I was 20, either 20 or 21 they put me on a night crew for the entire summer it was probably it was probably 20 Like it was so I wasn't gonna go party and have fun, you know, night with my friends and it was probably one of the most grueling summers I had had just, you know, working night work is different. And we're on 44 between St. Clair and Solomon it's which we actually just repaved it a couple of years ago. So that one's already on its second leg for me. But I mean, it's two lanes, narrow, narrow shoulders, and it's, it's scary. You got to have your head on a swivel. You got tractor trailers, you know, flying by you at 55 miles an hour. We're doing a bunch of repair work on it. But I spent three months working nights seeing really the worst of what our guys and gals see when they're out on projects, just what they're dealing with. I think all of those summers that helped me meet learn to work beside a lot of the people that were still there when I came back, but also get a good understanding and knowledge of what was going on. I didn't have to be the best field worker I just had to show up and work my ass off and be a just be another person on the crew

**M** Monica Pitts 24:11

sounds like your parents had a handle on how to keep you out of trouble keep you humble and keep you financially solvent. They did all three in one fell swoop.

**C** Chris West 24:22

I will say that. I think that last summer was the first summer my dad put me put me in the Union so you know he paid me the family that was taking the family discount prior to that but when I actually was on the D O T jobs I had to get the union and that was a good summer I went back to school with more money just about anyone.

**M** Monica Pitts 24:47

We have like my 13 year old so last year I was really frustrated because I couldn't get my stuff scheduled right for are getting like our intern was, she was a college intern, but she was like falling off the face of the earth basically. And I kept telling myself, I think I haven't. So I have an incredibly detailed, like, 13 year old, like, she's very detail oriented. And I'm like, I swear, she can do a better job than this 22 year old, I swear she can. So I made draining videos for and I was like, Here you go. And she just sat down and did it. And I would check her work. And I would be like, Angie did it, right. It's like a miracle. And she's so proud of herself for it. And she's like, I'm doing that this summer mom, because I need to earn some money. So I can buy a car when I turned 16 Because she wants something fancy. And I'm not buying or anything fancy. And she knows it.

**C** Chris West 25:47

Sell their Legs off to get a nice car. Oh

sell their Legos on to get a nice car. Oh,

**M** Monica Pitts 25:53

my goals are so pricey these days, holy

**C** Chris West 25:56

cow. Like my kids, build them in under a day and want another one. Talk to your grandma,

**M** Monica Pitts 26:03

take them apart and put them back together. And another way, that's what I want to know, like I got him a book that has like all these different like Lego creatures and stuff that you can build in it. And you're like, No, no, we want to have like, the actual kit to build this. And I'm like, that's that. You're gonna use Legos that you have in this book to build these things. So like, but the parts aren't exactly right. I'm like, it's called problem solving, problem solving children. They're not super excited about it. So question, next question. Now, I worked as part of my family business for years. And it was a really interesting, dynamic, really interesting. And so I wanted to know, if you had any advice to share for people who are running a business with family, any tips and tricks that really work for you guys, especially I feel like thinking back to when you were coming in out of college, you probably had fresh ideas. And then as you were coming into management, you had, you know, initiatives that you wanted to instill? How was that working with your dad to get through those and getting him on board.

**C** Chris West 27:17

So, so actually, after college, I took a in, I think another positive thing that my dad had done, both my sister and I wanted to come back and work in the company, but he wanted us to get experience working for someone else, you know, outside of the company, outside of the industry, you know, if we cared or whatnot, and I ended up working for a bowtique commercial real estate firm in Chicago, which I had had a lot of friends from Indiana, moving up to Chicago, and I think I was still not ready to quite move back to St. Louis. So I, I moved up there and essentially was commission based for four and a half years, and it really took me a good two years to even get on my feet. And then the next couple years, you know, we're good, but I got to the point, I always told my dad, five years, and I'll be back at four and a half years, I was really thinking about telling them like, I need another five years up here. But he, you know, he was I think, in his 60s At that point, and I knew if I didn't move back, there was going to be a lot of knowledge base that I still wanted, that I wasn't going to be able to get sell. So I moved back in was April 2010, I became a project manager, I've been estimated, you know, anything from parking lots to municipal work, then up to highway work, but I was a project manager for say six or seven years. So you know, really I was not thrown by any means into a management role. And also got experience, you know, had field experience and now I'm getting the chance to actually estimate a job build it try and make money on it in at that point the company had diversified quite a bit so some of that you know, a lot of the same people were in the field that would then help me learn how to bid the job you know, production quantities and whatnot so you know, I think a putting me in that role really helped out and be my experience as a kid

growing up with a lot of these same guys really helped out because they knew down the road you know, most likely I would be president so they wanted to help me help themselves but it was a it was a good it was a good way to mesh that and to help me understand and then from then they got me involved with the asphalt plants which we've got five plants now but it was pricing material which forced me to understand all the rock aggregate oil, sand and whatnot that goes in how to put a price together for specific next and then also get involved on the QC level. I got all my certifications. I think they're probably expired now and it was never so I I was gonna go work in the lab, and, you know, basically do the testing that they do, but have an understanding and knowledge of it and behind it, and who are good people to have in the labs, I really didn't get into a management role until about 2020. And I would say that has probably been the most difficult piece of all of it.

**M** Monica Pitts 30:21

How was it like coming into the management role then? Like, because your dad's manager and your manager? And then is he still with the company? Or has he phased out now? I don't see him like in the leadership team pictures. So that's how I don't know. She,

**C** Chris West 30:37

he's the chief landscaping officer remember?

**M** Monica Pitts 30:40

Oh, so now he's running the weed eater.

**C** Chris West 30:45

We actually, we've got two big prairies at our office, we did a big burn on Friday. No, my mom and dad are big green thumbs as well. And so he formally retired in 2017, I believe, and put gentleman named Jim Fitzgerald into the President's role at that point in time. Jim is still here, he transitioned to CEO, January one, which is when I became president, but Jim has been here for 31 years, you know, kind of notch under the belt by, you know, on how people stick around here for a long time. But with that as a huge knowledge base of what has happened the last 2530 years, when they essentially made me a VP, and put me into a management role with really out much guidance here your VP and like, Okay, what do I do? I still don't really think I was much at that point. But with you know, at that point, Jim, and I set a five year transition plan, right then in there, it was when I was like, Oh, shit, what my dad disguised as a kid is like, the clock's ticking now, you know, and I'm thrown into a management role. And I really don't know what I'm supposed to manage, or do.

**M** Monica Pitts 32:06

I get it, it's like sink or swim. When you get to management. It's like, all those problem solving skills that you learned in all your other roles are going to be the most essential thing that you own, because you don't know how to do anything that you're doing every single day. Welcome

own, because you don't know how to do anything that you're doing every single day. Welcome to discomfort friends.

**C** Chris West 32:22

100%. And I think, you know, in my dad had been retired for two or three years at that point, now, he's to my dad's in the office today. He's always there for, you know, guidance or problem solving. But even, you know, I think the best time that I had with my dad was from 2010, to 2017 18, when he retired, and to get his knowledge base. In the company today, I think it was at a place that he nor my mom ever expected. And I think, a little bit out of their comfort zone where with as much knowledge as I've gotten, it's kind of in my comfort zone. And 2020, or 21 is really when I said, All right, Jim, let me run with some ideas. But I'm gonna need some help when you know, you're not around. When we joined, we joined a peer group that I brought up earlier, we started working with a business coach in either 2020 or 21, you know, things that this company had never done, but I knew I was going to help myself and the company out in the long run, both of those and other things have, have really helped us make the leap from where we were then, even to today. So I've had plenty of help of not not scared to say it because people have to realize when they get to a point of discomfort, go out and find help to keep the business successful. And to keep it going. Keep the doors open. We're

**M** Monica Pitts 33:54

there. So if someone was thinking about going and joining their family business, is there any piece of advice that you would give them before they just jumped in with both feet?

**C** Chris West 34:04

I would say don't depending on the business, but don't, you know, don't start in the office and don't start at a management role. You've got to understand the business before you can actually manage it. You don't have to go and put your kid on a highway for six or seven years. But, you know, a I think the kid has to want it for the right reasons, not not just for money, you know, and they've gotta want it and they need to get experience in different aspects of the business and be able to understand that I looked at it. Yeah, I don't have to be the best field laborer, the I don't have to run QC or plants. I don't have to run the asphalt plant, but I need to be able to understand it and to be able to hire the right people to do those things and somehow mesh it all all together?

**M** Monica Pitts 35:01

Well, and it sounds like one of the ways that you guys kept from stepping on each other's toes was having clearly defined roles. As you were coming up and learning the trades. And your dad wasn't necessarily the person who sat next to you every day and trained you how to do it, he had a skilled person that was training you how to do it. And so that made it easier.

**C** Chris West 35:22

Yeah, a team of people that had been here for a long time that wanted to help groom me, I think I was probably the most fortunate in that. And they all had different skill sets, you know, and whether they're still here today or not, I still talk to some of those people. And all those people are interested, you know, how we're doing, you know, one of them call me a couple of weeks ago, I saw this newspaper article, I mean, we picked up a huge design build project was mowed out that I don't think and, you know, we ever anticipated being able to complete or pickup and it's just, the company has gone to a different level. And it's been exciting to be part of that process and be right in the middle of it.

M

Monica Pitts 36:04

I bet some of that outcome is based on the work that you guys did last year, you said you spent a lot of time defining like your values and your goals and your five year plan. So what made you guys take that step back and do that I feel like a lot of us just kind of work, keep our heads down, you know, get the job done. But you guys took a moment to breathe and like, look forward. So what was the catalyst behind that?

C

Chris West 36:28

I think it's really getting to the point of where I want to take this company. And again, it was one of those things. It's like, I know, we need help. This statistics of third generation companies are not great. And some of that is, you know, I'm lucky because my dad was an only child. And my sister's not involved in the business. My brother never had any desire to be involved in the business. But like, for me, you know, growing up, it's like, you don't want to be the one with you know, oh, yeah, he took it over. And he ran in the ground. You know, and so I think that's driven me a lot more to do things right, and to try and be trying to get the right people here. So I don't do that. And, I mean, we truthfully, we suck at processes, like we'd like to read processes. But we had people retiring, and, you know, we hire someone say for, you know, accounting or payroll like, Alright, what do I do? Like, I don't know, you just do what they did. Like, they did it for 30 years. So you got this. Like, we didn't have a budget for the first 66 years as a company, like, we brought in a new controller a couple of years ago. And she's like, how do you operate, like, we bid work, and we build work, and we build for it, and we get paid for it? Like, this is insanity. But it's things like that, I look, I look back, and I'm like things work for a period of time. But there's also going to be a period of time where they don't work. And our controllers first year, we had a great year, second year was our COVID year, and we had a really down year and realized that, you know, her helping us get on a budget was absolutely necessary. So that didn't happen again. And we could actually predict when things would be down and make no necessary cuts or just also be able to, you know, when you buy new equipment, when we buy new equipment, when the old one breaks, well, how do you know you got enough money? Well, we usually have enough money. We're good, trust us. But I think we've been able to mash, you know, kind of our old way of not necessarily flying by the seat of our pants. But people around here have always had a pulse on operations and how things are going occasionally there's something that was far off. But you know, now we're at the point where we've we've gotten a budget, but we also have a good operational pulse. And it allows us to make kind of future decisions better and easier, not on a whim. I think for a long time, the way this place operated was show up, put your head down, do the work. Go on. I think that's fine and dandy until you get to a certain size where you really have to be more methodical about things. Getting back to the question, I knew we were at that point, but needed help to do it. But even in starting that

out, you really kind of have to define who you are, what you are, what you want to be and get the right people on your team. A lot of what we've been doing is really getting the right person in the right seat. And, you know, as a smaller family business, you have people that wear multiple hats, you know, and all of a sudden you have people that wear multiple hats, but some people are doing the same thing wearing like, you know, you have two people doing the process this way. It's like well, why don't we just have one and like, I don't we clearly defined roles. I mean, in your organization, I'm sure You have a number of people wearing multiple hats. But if you had 10 times people, you're probably going to define their roles a little bit better. That's where

**M** Monica Pitts 40:09

it does get tricky. And what was interesting though, is on the flip side of it, when we were really small, and we had, like, you know, just three or four employees, everyone had their hats in their lane, and no one overlapped. And then when Stacy and I started having babies, it was a problem. Because we had no one that could do our jobs. And so after our first babies and watching revenue dip for like, over six months, because we would take a short maternity leave, like six weeks, and then come back, but it was like a six month hit to revenue. And so then we were like, Oh, my gosh, we have to hire a few more people and cross train folks. So that way, we're not completely exploding and setting ourselves back six months, every time we have children at because it's it's real man Israel, because

**C** Chris West 41:04

well, I'm it's and it's not, it's not fair to you, too. So and I think that's, I mean, kind of our big realization, it's not it's not fair that, you know, people have to bosses or don't over their bosses or aren't held accountable. use that word, you know, in a real way, it's not fair when you got someone pulling, you know, 80% of the weight and someone else pulling 10 have a specific task. So it was stepping, you know, stepping back and admitting like, we've got problems. Let's do what we can to fix them. And I, I think we, you know, it's not a one year journey, though, we've done a good job, we still have a long way to go. We're not 100% there. And I don't know if we'll ever be 100%. But you at least have to be working on it.

**M** Monica Pitts 41:57

100% Yes, working on it. Now. I think one of the things is gonna get you there is that you have the don't give up attitude, right. It's like a superpower. I am also like, I don't take no for an answer. And I'm not I'm not giving up. Its superpower, Chris. But you had mentioned that you're a bit of a procrastinator when we were planning this interview. So tell me how you keep moving forward despite being a procrastinator because I bet there's a lot of people in your shoes.

**C** Chris West 42:37

I would say the kind of not not giving up as somewhat. I think it's different than procrastinating. It's probably more innate. I think the knock giving up thing comes, again, somewhat innate, but I was thrown into a lot of situations. As a kid where you got to get to the other side. I mentioned

that. I'd went to a outdoors camp for a couple of weeks for about four summers. But it was a relatively hardcore camp built to train kids to go out to World War One be able to live out in the woods. And we had, I think when I was 17, we did a 550 mile canoe trip from we like jumped for like 10 days and then ended up on a river called the seal river that dumped into Hudson Bay, Mike. You know, one of the days we had a 10 mile Portage that's hauling your canoe all your equipment through muck and mud. And, you know, I mean, you get in those situations and you kind of hate yourself, you're like, What the hell's mine. But it's like, okay, the only way I'm gonna get through this is to put one foot forward and keep walking by with this canoe on top of me through the woods, hidden bit by mosquitoes like it's funny, you come back, you know, I've done four different trips like that, and all gradually a little bit longer. But you know, the first time you really, you're not having fun, you don't like it and then all of a sudden you go back you're in school, you're telling people stories, like actually it was kind of fun bonded with 12 Different people over a two week period and we're in the middle of nowhere with nothing to do other than get through the trip. That was almost kind of a enjoy punishing yourself moment, and I want to go back you know, the next summer for a couple of weeks. I look back at that I'm like, you know for like don't give up attitude. I think that was probably the biggest thing is going to that camp and being put in a situation where you can't and we only have like the last trip we were so far out we had a GPS phone but other trips like you got no choice if you're gonna make it through, you know, I just you know, there's some things in business or life that you know, you expect to be done in an hour and it takes a day, or you expect to be done in two weeks and it takes two months. The minute you give up on it is the minute you've quit on your team. shall hear even if things don't get done as quickly as we would want. See it through finish it.

M

Monica Pitts 45:05

So how do you mean and you're you're wanting to procrastinate, the putting it off? Are you and eat the frog guy? Have you heard that saying where you're like, I'm gonna do the thing I don't want to do first? How do you overcome it? You

C

Chris West 45:17

know, I've spent a lot of time trying to try and fix my procrastination problem. Some things have worked, some things haven't. But my, my mom sent me a TED Talk to Adam Grant, it was a TED talk on Actually, why certain times, procrastinating is not bad. And it talks a lot about, you know, people that get up and have a task to do and don't procrastinate, they get it done, or they write their paper and turn it in. And the people that procrastinate, they end up thinking about it more and really have more time to come up with, you know, a good idea or a better solution. And I've noticed that, I mean, it's probably been a month since I've watched it, I realized that sometimes when I get to that room, like Alright, I gotta get it done. Well, I had had three or four different thoughts. And then at the last minute, you know, the really good idea hit me and I'm like, I'm glad I waited. So there's things you can procrastinate on, there's things that you can't, but I think the ones that deserve more time to be thought about, and you have time, let it hang out there. I

M

Monica Pitts 46:25

agree. Like with our designers, we always encourage them to look over the details of their work

a few days ahead of time. Because especially for really intensely large, like artistic and creative projects. I need my brain to like subconsciously process everything. And then when I sit down to do it, I've got like 17 ideas, like it's gonna come to me while I'm running. Or when I'm in the shower, or when I'm doing the dishes like it's not, when I'm sitting at my desk expecting my brain to output creative crap, it's never coming that and so if I, I guess I'm using a form of procrastination to do just what you're talking about there to like, let my brain process it. So the good stuff will come out later. Yeah.

C

Chris West 47:05

I was like, that's a good thing. I procrastinate like, this isn't a bad thing.

M

Monica Pitts 47:09

Well, Chris, we're gonna wrap up now. So is there any last words that you would like to leave everybody with after this awesome interview? And how can they get a hold of you also, email,

C

Chris West 47:22

LinkedIn, Facebook's usually the easiest ways. I try not to be on those all the time. But I do like LinkedIn communication. So email is good as well. I think something that I think about a fair amount. And growing up is I'm really glad my dad put me through it the way he did. And I have a very humble attitude, about most everything, talk to everyone in your business, the same talk to field labor operator or mechanic. The same as you know, another VP of the company. I think the minute anyone feels like you're talking down to them is the minute you become a boss, not a leader, you know, give people the time of day Answer your phone, I would say most everyone in the company has my phone number. Now, there's maybe a few that call me too much. But I think they appreciate the ability to call me if they really feel like they need to express something or they saw something, you know, on that set boundaries, because you will have people abuse it. It took me I think a lot of time to actually not take on problems that should be other people's problems. I always wanted to solve any problem that was thrown in my lap and I and I, I took pride in it until it became too much. I remember days where I'd have 150 phone calls, I could upon some of those off or maybe I shouldn't have called someone to start something. So now I really try and keep a pulse on everything, but I let the problems arise and try.

M

Monica Pitts 49:30

I think that is excellent advice. The minute that people feel like you're talking down to them, you become a boss, not a leader. So that is great parting advice. That's awesome. And I try to use the same thing with my kids. It's not always easy, man. It's not easy, but I feel like treating them like people is a lot easier than treating them like people I'm trying to dominate I

C

Chris West 50:02

like these kids sometimes. Yes, exactly

**M** Monica Pitts 50:04

full circle and act like a kid sometimes. Well, thank you so much for coming and hanging out with us, Chris. And thank you everybody for hanging out with us and listening. And be sure to subscribe so that way you don't miss next week's episode. It's one that I've been promising everyone for a really long time. Travis and Stacy are joining me again, and we are going to completely geek out about the difference between domains, hosting, and website. They are really intangible, but they're so important for your business. And we talk about these things every day. But for normal humans, they kind of create a question factory. So we'll answer what a domain is how you get one, how you connect everything together, what hosting is, if you need it, and which one to pick. Alright, so subscribe, or meet me back over on the marketing with purpose podcast, and we'll talk all about domains hosting and website next week. All right, friends, thank you again so much for listening and until next time, go forth and mark it with purpose.