

# Agency For Change Podcast : Craig Moody, Managing Principal at Verdis Group

## **Announcer**

Welcome to Agency For Change, the podcast that brings you the stories of people creating positive change in the world. We explore what inspires these changemakers, the work they're doing and how they share their message. Each of us can play a part in change. And these are the people who show us how.

## **Lyn Wineman:**

Hello, this is Lyn Wineman from KidGlov and welcome to the Agency For Change Podcast. Our guest today, Craig Moody, was bit by the sustainability bug long ago and is now on a mission to help create a thriving and resilient world, one organization at a time. Today, we're going to talk about his work at Verdis Group, a company that helps organizations identify and implement their own sustainability solutions. How are you today, Craig?

## **Craig Moody:**

I'm doing fantastic. Thanks for having me, Lyn.

## **Lyn Wineman:**

Absolutely. It's great to have you here. I love talking about what you do because it's such a hot subject right now. Tell me a little bit more about the work you're doing with Verdis Group.

## **Craig Moody:**

We are an 11 year old sustainability company. We're based in Omaha, Nebraska with an office in Lincoln and now staff in Los Angeles and Denver as a result of the pandemic. We've had people kind of spread out a little bit, perhaps a story for another time, but we are sustainability consultants. So what does that mean? We typically help large organizations identify and implement ways to be more sustainable to address the climate crisis. We work with a lot of higher ed institutions. We do a lot of healthcare work with governments and municipalities, really helping them understand how sustainability fits within their higher level organizational structure and strategy. We often tell them that sustainability is nothing other than sort of the fad of the moment and you're going to do it because an employee or two asked about it and you're going to create a green team and just kind of talk all around the edges That's not what we're talking about here.

## **Craig Moody:**

We view sustainability as a true strategy by which most organizations can really achieve their higher level objectives. It can certainly save them money on the front end. Energy efficiency means lost dollars going to the utility, and there are any number of opportunities to save money as a result of being sustainable. But there's no question that it's a differentiator for a lot of organizations. It's a way to attract talent. It's a way to attract customers. And it's a way to really, kind of more succinctly think about their organizational mission, vision, and values, and put it through a slightly different lens other than the traditional make money lens. Our work's evolving, the definition of sustainability 10 years ago when we started is dramatically different than it is today. And so a big part of what we are always challenged to do is to keep up with where that evolution is going and where we can continue to evolve our services as well.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Craig, it's such a great topic and a great thing that you do. And I think about you being a trailblazer at Verdis Group and being on the front edge of this wave and 10 years ago, it had to really feel like you were on the front end of it when you started. I'm just curious what even inspired you to care about sustainability in the first place.

**Craig Moody:**

I think I've always had sort of an embedded ethos around conservation. My grandmother was the woman who saved all of her bread bags and cleaned them out, reusing them for any number of things. Like on the back of her door handle to the closet, there were, I don't know, 300 rubber bands that she was going to eventually use someday. So that's always been in me. But professionally speaking, it was never...when I went to college, this was not a degree alternative. It just wasn't. There might've been a couple of universities here or there back in the early 90s that were doing it and now it's just prevalent. So I was a business finance major. I got an MBA right away after graduating undergrad and then worked at the Federal Reserve Bank for eight years. And it's during that tenure where I spent some time as the facility manager.

**Craig Moody:**

I was responsible for the lights being on, the grass getting cut, the tenants happy paying utility bills, getting the waste out the door, all of those sorts of things. And it's there where I really got a good line of sight to how many opportunities there are to make a building sustainable. And thereby an organization more efficient and what the environmental impact of that is. Meanwhile, honestly, Al Gore's film came out, *An Inconvenient Truth*. And so those two things kind of happened at just the right time. And then I met my business partner, Daniel Lawse, who was, in fact, going through some education where he's being trained in this. I am not. Any learning that I've ever done has been on the job or just me soaking up as many books as I can, but Daniel brought that expertise to the table based on several years of both learning and doing. So it was those three things, they kind of combined to line the stars up so that we eventually gravitated towards, "Okay, this might actually be an opportunity to create a business where we can do some good."

**Craig Moody:**

And that's really where it started. I remember vividly the conversation that we had at his kitchen table when we talked about, "What are we really trying to do here?" And we kept coming back to, we want to have a big impact. We want to have a big impact on everything, a positive impact. We want to do big things. We never talked about, "Oh, and we might be able to make a lot of money doing it too." And so I think that ethos is still part of our company in many ways. We're here, we're a company, we need to make money in order to continue to do we want to do, but we still very much feel that our purpose for being is to have that big impact.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I think that's fantastic. I think people who are having a positive impact should make big money. They are the ones that should, so I'm all for that. I also love... I was smiling when you were talking about your grandmother, because I'm finding as I talk to changemakers, I'm finding two things that have a lot in common with people's stories. And that is something that happened or someone that inspired them in their childhood and kind of living out something that started then. And then also kitchen tables, a lot of great ideas, I think happen at kitchen tables.

**Craig Moody:**

Yeah, for sure.

**Lyn Wineman:**

So, that's fantastic.

**Craig Moody:**

Right.

**Lyn Wineman:**

So let's take a deeper dive and talk about how this work is making a positive impact in the world. And that might seem obvious, but then again, I know it goes deeper than just the surface level.

**Craig Moody:**

Yeah. Well, I mean, to me the biggest environmental issue of our time in my view, without question, is the climate crisis. And unfortunately for many years that was very politicized, again, probably a conversation for another day. But I think what we're seeing is that, especially when you look at younger generations, more and more people are acknowledging that it exists and that we as humans are creating the problem. And foreseeing that the consequences are pretty severe, like comparing it to the pandemic that we're in today. The flatten the curve language is very apropos for the climate crisis and CO2 parts per million is the main metric that we look at from a greenhouse gas standpoint. Flattening that curve is the exact same thing that we need to do. I think the big difference quite honestly, between when you compare those two things, with the pandemic, I'm under the assumption that at some point we're going to have some treatments so that we can suppress this thing and we'll get back to something closer to normal.

**Craig Moody:**

The climate crisis doesn't afford us that opportunity, the damage is long lasting. So, I really think that the things that we're doing for organizations, that's the main motivator from our standpoint. The thing that we're really trying to address now, there are all sorts of tentacles that connect to that. No question about it. The United Nations sustainable development goals, and there are 17 of them, they cut across all sorts of different things that aren't environmental in some cases. It's any number of things, whether it's economic prosperity, access to clean water, equal rights for women. So the definition of sustainability is not just about climate change at all, it's not just about pollution and it's definitely not just about recycling things. That's a big part of what I think we're examining and exploring, "Where is this evolution going?"

**Craig Moody:**

And we can't be all things to all people. We can't be experts in all of those things. So our opportunity is really to figure out where we need to go. But the reality is all of those systems are interconnected and the connections between environmentalism and social justice are very strong. Communities of color are always more negatively affected than me as a white person, plenty of data around that. It's not as though we can just pull this off a shelf and carve it out and say it just stands there alone, because it affects so many other systems. And that creates a lot of complexity in some of the work that we do, especially when we're working, as an example, with the City of Lincoln in Nebraska, who's wrapping up their climate action plan right now. And it's not just about carbon emissions, that's an important part, but it's affordable housing, it's access to transit, it's equal rights. It's just, it cuts across so many things. They're all interrelated. And I think that's part of the fun and the complexity of the work that we do.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Since I live in the City of Lincoln, Nebraska and we have an office there as well, I'm going to say, thank you for the work that you're doing with our mayor in our city. We appreciate that. And since you mentioned so much change, what's next for you and Verdis Group? What do you see on the horizon?

**Craig Moody:**

Well, we're growing. Like you mentioned, 10 years ago when we first started... I think the words used were, you were sort of ahead of the wave, so to speak. That's exactly where we felt we've been for the longest time. 2019, the wave started to crash, right? Things have really picked up for us. Our work is increasingly nationally, we're doing work in Minneapolis, Oregon, Seattle, Dallas. We're expecting that continued growth and quite honestly, in some ways the pandemic has created an opportunity for us to more easily connect in other places where before we would have had to hop on a plane and go see people. So I think that geographic expansion will continue to occur. Like anything, there's going to be I think, a little bit of a lull here, but honestly we felt that for about two months and we're back at it busier than ever, which is great.

**Craig Moody:**

I think we're going to see some growth from a geographic standpoint. I think the corporate sector is the other place where, up until last year, we had really just kind of been doing a little bit of that work. But we've seen some really meaningful upticks in the corporate sector from a sustainability standpoint. And I'm really excited about that evolution as well. So we expect more growth. And again, I think we're constantly challenged by, "How do we continue to expand our services as the definition of sustainability evolves?" And that will be an opportunity that is just not going to go away. That's always something that we've got to be mindful of. The minute we lose sight of that, is the minute we're stale and we're going to fail if that ever happens.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's fantastic. I do have to agree with that. In the pandemic, we really have learned how to take meetings, build relationships, do networking via Zoom. And I can't tell you how little I've been driving my car and I've been on absolutely zero airplane flights. So, that may have a positive impact on all of us, but it also gives those of us that are based in the center of the country, the opportunity to reach out more efficiently across the country. So, Craig, what are the biggest challenges then, that you face in your work, but also as someone who leads change?

**Craig Moody:**

Well, I think the challenge for us and I kind of hinted at this earlier, is being able to look around the corner and know what's coming next. And it's sort of an interesting dynamic of being aware of where the industry and the trends are going and also defining those for people because we are so much on the vanguard that I think in many ways, it's sort of our job to think about what's coming next and to help people foresee some of those things. I think that's always going to, like I said, that's always a challenge for us to foresee what's next. I think people, like the organizations that we work with, we almost require that all of them set some sort of goal around some of these issues.

**Craig Moody:**

I think perhaps some of them are going to be a bit more financially challenged to really allocate the resources that they might need to in order to achieve some of those goals. Although I think that's very

much a short-term issue. I think it's also narrow thinking because we don't see these as just short-term expenditures, these are investments, and inevitably they have payoffs that manifest themselves in a variety of different ways, whether it be financial or easier recruitment of employees and retention, so on and so forth. I think there's a little bit of a short-term challenge there, but I don't think it's a meaningful one. And as a manager of change, so to speak, I think we're trying to manage our own change internally, right?

**Craig Moody:**

We haven't been really in the office together for a very long time and that's been both good and bad. You highlighted some of the good things with respect to limited travel and more efficient meetings as an example. But there are going to be other consequences that I think none of us really know about yet. And that's a big part of what we're really trying to think about internally and helping not only our customers, but also anyone who will listen, to explore this idea of, "Can we create a new normal that is sustainable, thriving and resilient?" Because I think it would be a tremendous shame if we go through all of this and we don't learn anything and really pivot our society in a more sustainable and just way. I think that would be a tragedy if we just kind of default back to, "Well, let's just get back to the way it was before." And the way it was before, it was not working for everyone.

**Craig Moody:**

And the pandemic is shining extraordinarily bright lights on many of those issues. That's a big part of what we're really focused on right now and trying to foster a conversation around. Let's be deliberate about creating a new normal, and let's talk about what it could be and let's take some action to get there. That gets me super excited because I think we can play a role in that. Like when we talk about big impact, that's what we set this firm up to do. And I think we have a tremendous opportunity to foster that.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Craig, I'm going to say amen to that. If we don't learn through 2020 and come out differently, we're doing something wrong. I'm even going to take it to the point where I have in my mind, 2020 is not a bad year, 2020 is the year we all needed to hit the reset button. And I've heard your partner, Daniel, do some speaking on that as well. But it also could be a topic for another podcast.

**Craig Moody:**

Yes, of course.

**Lyn Wineman:**

So Craig, as you think back, I can't imagine what it must've been like, you're in a high level position at the Federal Reserve, you're telling your family, I'm going to become an entrepreneur, I'm going to change and do something nobody's ever done before. Do you think about yourself as a changemaker? What advice would you give to someone else out there who also aspires to lead positive change?

**Craig Moody:**

Well, I think I had a healthy dose of ignorance then... Yeah, honestly...

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's not a bad thing when you're doing an entrepreneurial adventure.

**Craig Moody:**

Yeah. I mean, part of it was, I left the Fed and the Fed was contracting a little bit in Omaha. So I knew I was leaving, took some time off and honestly I took a job that I didn't enjoy soon thereafter, which I mean, there's nothing that will light your fire to start your own business than a job that you dislike. So I wouldn't tell people to go find a job you dislike necessarily, but the thing for me was, it was just about, "What do I really want to be spending my time doing?" And the reality was both Daniel and I kind of acknowledged that, in some ways, we needed to have a sense for what we're doing and what the plan is here, but let's just dive in and learn as we go in some ways and trust ourselves to figure that out.

**Craig Moody:**

But if I knew then what I know now, I'm not sure I would have started the business quite honestly, because I think it's a lot scarier proposition than probably I realized. I put that on myself. I'm an MBA, I should at least have some stinking knowledge about what it means to start a business. But I think the advice that I would give them perhaps, is to not put too much pressure on yourselves to have all the answers on day one, because there's no way to know. I don't have all the answers today. We've been doing it for 11 years. That's part of the evolution and allowing yourself to learn on the go and let the market place tell you what they want from you. In some ways you can't predict all of that. And so we've had a healthy amount of, "Well, we don't know, let's figure it out, hire the right people. They can help us figure it out too. And we'll just kind of learn on the fly." Fortunately, we haven't made too many mistakes doing that.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I think that's a common thing I hear from other entrepreneurs too. One thing I say to my team is, "We're smart. We'll figure it out, right?" So bringing this all full circle, me being a marketing person, I always like to ask one question about how do you get the word out and amplify the great work that you're doing? How do you let people know?

**Craig Moody:**

Yeah. We're not mass marketers by any stretch of the imagination. We've always described our marketing model as hand to hand combat and that's not possible today. So we're very much shifting to a more content oriented platform. The main thing that we're really interested in right now is through a program that we've always affectionately called Green, Eggs and Bam. So that's Green comma Eggs and Bam. And it started as an invite only forum where we would invite some people in and have a very structured conversation around, as an example, how do we get to zero waste as a community? So just exploring these really big ideas around sustainability, to try and be seen as a catalyst for moving our community forward more than anything. We're altruistic in that way. Well, we're spinning that so that it's virtual now.

**Craig Moody:**

We just did our first virtual Green, Eggs and Bam about a month ago and invited in someone from Project Drawdown, which is an organization that's examined, and has identified, all these different ways, solutions that exist today to mitigate climate change. And she did a phenomenal job speaking. We had 90 people there, we broke into small groups and did some ideations. It was really well attended, interesting. We got a lot of great feedback on it. And now the question that we're really kind of framing all of this with, is the one that I mentioned earlier, "We're in a pandemic, what can we learn from it to create a more sustainable, just, resilient, thriving, new normal?" That's the frame for a lot of these conversations. A lot of the content that we're driving going forward is really framed around that question.

**Craig Moody:**

We just announced, I think it was earlier this week, we pushed it out yesterday as a matter of fact, on July 23rd, that we're doing little 10 minute snippet interviews where Daniel or I will just have one guest. We're going to talk for 10 minutes, keep it peppy and record on Zoom and then push it out. And again, it's all around the same theme. And so we're going to start creating some content and hopefully we put together a tight enough strategy to ensure that it is the way in which we can start to gain some traction with people and share it. And it's both attracting new people to the environment, so to speak, but also it's content creation that we can share with our current, past and future clients that is thought provoking, interesting, and kind of challenges their thinking a little bit as well.

**Craig Moody:**

I'm super excited about it. Doing my first interview today with Dr. Ali Khan, who is the director of the Dean of the College of Public Health at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and wrote a book called The Next Pandemic. I mean, he is so unbelievably busy right now. This is all of his thinking, writing, studying, and research, it directed him to this point where we are today, right? Like he is one of the world's foremost experts on pandemics full stop. And I wanted to talk with him today for 10 minutes. So I'm super excited.

**Lyn Wineman:**

That's really cool. I saw that promotion come out on your social media yesterday and made a note to make sure that I stay on top of that when those come out, I think that'll be fantastic.

**Craig Moody:**

Yeah.

**Lyn Wineman:**

Craig, one other thing I love personally is motivational quotes. Do you have any words of wisdom that we could share with people as a motivational or inspirational quote?

**Craig Moody:**

Well, the thing that I lean on every day, and this is something that I say to my daughters before they would leave the house when they were going to school, is "Work hard, have fun and be kind."

**Lyn Wineman:**

Love it.

**Craig Moody:**

That's the rule at our house. That's the mantra that we come back to. We will oftentimes sit at the dinner table and we will review our day and talk about it, tell me about a time when you worked hard or when you had fun and give me a person that you were kind to. And I think if we can check all of those boxes every day, I think we'll call it a successful day.

**Lyn Wineman:**

The world will definitely be a better place. So, Craig, I really appreciate your time today. For people who want to learn more about Verdis Group, how could they find out more about you?

**Craig Moody:**

The website is verdisgroup.com. That's V-E-R-D-I-S group.com. And if you're interested in Green, Eggs and Bam, the forum that we're hosting, virtual forums, I should say, that's verdisgroup.com\geb. That's where we'll be posting all of those.

**Lyn Wineman:**

G-E-B for Green, Eggs and Bam, right?

**Craig Moody:**

Yeah.

**Lyn Wineman:**

I'm going to look up and get on top of it.

**Craig Moody:**

Bookmark Lyn.

**Lyn Wineman:**

You got it. You got it. Craig, I so appreciate you spending time with me today, but even more, I appreciate what you and Daniel in Verdis Group are doing to change the world. So thank you so much.

**Craig Moody:**

Indeed, it was a pleasure. Thanks Lyn.

**Announcer:**

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