

Agency for Change Podcast: Graham Pansing Brooks and Kyle Cartwright, Founders, SEACHange

Graham Pansing Brooks:

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Announcer:

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of changemakers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman:

Hey everyone. This is Lyn Wineman, president and chief strategist at KidGlov. And did you recognize that voice of the guest you heard from the top of the show? If you did that's because he and his co-founder were kind enough to talk with us back in 2020 to discuss the company they created, SEACHange, which partners with businesses to help them turn their passion into compassion that can do real good in the world. We'll put a link to that episode in the show notes for today's episode, so you can learn more. But there's something else that makes these guests so special and it's that they literally changed KidGlov trajectory by helping us start on the path to becoming a certified B Corporation. And that's why I'm happy to welcome Kyle Cartwright and Graham Pansing Brooks back to the agency for change podcast. Kyle and Graham, I'm eager to talk with the two of you today and learn more about the great impact you are still making on the world.

(Listen to SEACHange's first Agency for Change podcast here - <https://kidglov.com/podcast/seachange/>)

Kyle Cartwright:

Thanks, Lyn. We are glad to be back with you. Thanks for having us on the show again.

Lyn Wineman:

100%. It's always good to talk to you guys. And I feel like we are old friends at this point, but before we start catching up Kyle, could you tell our listeners what SEACHange does?

Kyle Cartwright:

Yeah, absolutely. I guess in brief, we work with purpose-driven companies. We work with the companies who they place defined value in their people, in the community, in their clients and customers, in the environment in some cases. And we help them further that, we help them allocate the multiple resources that are available to businesses, but also scarce resources. Even the billionaires of the world have scarce resources in conflict with the problems that face our society.

Lyn Wineman:

The billionaires are just really good at allocating those scarce resources every day.

Kyle Cartwright:

They've done it very strategically, yes.

Graham Pansing Brooks:

There's few rockets in there.

Kyle Cartwright:

Yeah. We help businesses really think thoughtfully about how they allocate those resources they have at their disposal to create impact, to drive loyalty and engagement with their people and their community. And it helps business grow in addition to making a good impact on the world.

Lyn Wineman:

Kyle, I love the way you explained that. And it's interesting because I think back to a couple years ago, when I first started working with the two of you at SEChange, I felt like, oh, KidGlov is a good company. We're good enough as we are, but I am going to say, you really helped us. You really helped make us better. And as I think about a lot of publicly owned companies we hear about what they're doing for shareholders, but Graham, why is it so important for businesses to tell the story of the good work they're doing in the world as well?

Graham Pansing Brooks:

Yeah. Again, thank you, Lyn, for having us on. And as we're thinking about the importance of sharing these stories of the good work that our businesses are doing there's so many reasons that it's important. First and foremost, as you look at the competitive nature across business currently, whether it's low unemployment rates, the fierce competition for talent, whether it's continued expectation for community engagement, environmental stewardship, there's so many reasons and so many pressures that are being placed on businesses today. That really it becomes sort of a baseline expectation that we're going to communicate those values in order to be able to attract the highest quality talent, in order to direct consumer attention. It's the baseline expectation, or at least is becoming more so, but beyond that, what I think is really critically important is that it's really transitioning the way that we're thinking about doing business, because it's not purpose because of profits, but it's purpose that helps fuel profits.

And so really this new way of thinking is helping create this flywheel that starts spinning. Our purpose can actually help fuel the profits that we're making as a business and thereby our profits can in turn allow us to do more work, whether through environmental stewardship, community outreach, team engagement, benefits, there's so many ways that this flywheel can start spinning to be able to really put business into this new stratosphere. And it's about, I think, the competitive advantage. And we think that the new competitive advantage here is purpose. And so how do we find ways to get in that competitive race for more good work in the world?

Lyn Wineman:

I'm smiling here because I think you're exactly right. As an owner of a company, I didn't set out into entrepreneurship to be a good company for the competitive advantage, but I see it particularly in two ways for KidGlov, we are just in a hyper competitive field. We're always competing with other agencies in RFPs, putting out proposals and the B Corp certification and the policies we've created and the actions we have taken have made us more competitive. I, 100% believe that and man, as we're all fighting for employees right now too, employees are becoming very savvy at asking questions. I think the latest thing I heard is people who are not just asking, does your company have a sustainability or a DE&I plan, but what are your written policies and what kind of budget are you putting behind it? And because of the work we've done with you, we are doing both of those things. I thank you for that.

Kyle Cartwright:

Yeah. I think one of the things I think a lot of businesses enter business for is not just to make as much money as possible. There's certainly businesses out there that is the prime goal. I absolutely believe there's a place for this work, this type of consulting the path that we're talking about here. But it's also the businesses that go into it to serve their people, serve their client, or to just enjoy their work. And if that is the stakeholder you're really working to steward it behooves you as well to think about how are you a competitive business on the profit front and the shareholder front so that you can do more good within the scope of serving your stakeholders. So again, these things are inextricably linked.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah, really good comment there Kyle, because I think if the three of us were only out for money, we would probably all three be in different fields than we are today, but there's this thing called passion I think that fuels us - passion and purpose. I'm thinking back to the first time we talked in 2020 on the podcast, we were in the midst of a global pandemic at the time. And here we are two years later. I mean, it certainly had an impact on the way KidGlov does business. Kyle, I'm curious, how has the pandemic impacted how SEAchange helps its clients? And if I can add in there, what was it like to be entrepreneurs starting a business in the midst of a global pandemic?

Kyle Cartwright:

Well, first my head is spinning a little bit because I thought it was still 2020. No I'm only kidding. Time has taken on a whole new meaning in the course of, especially going through this entrepreneurship journey. But I'll be honest, I think the reason that we are here today, an unfortunate circumstance, but a really strong outcome, I think for the general business consciousness that propelled our business model forward. I think the pandemic really showed a lot of disparity in community and how it impacts how the health outcomes and economic outcomes were disproportionately impacting different elements of our community and different subsections of our people in the world and business acknowledged that they were hiring people across this threshold. And so I think it really elevated the understanding and awareness of business that we have to take care of our people. And we have to take care of our community because if we don't have those two things, we don't have a business.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah, 100%.

Kyle Cartwright:

That really, I think, elevated the call to action for us and elevated the alignment of the language we use and the way that we're trying to shift business practice. It was much more palatable for many established businesses.

Graham Pansing Brooks:

And I think just to add in there, Kyle, I think that one of the things that we often talk about, the way that we speak is oftentimes very much in transformational organizational change. And I think what the pandemic also allowed us to do is find ways to be very much more on the grassroots. How do we find ways to engage traditional corporate through traditional corporate social responsibility means how do we find ways to make sure that we're meeting organizations where they're at and that we're communicating that, we're not trying to throw the baby out with the bath water here. We're trying to find ways to amplify impact. We're trying to find ways to align impact so that business can continue be that strategic partner to people, to the community, to the environment that's going to provide stability and structure and impact moving forward.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. It's kind of amazing that it took something as horrific as a global pandemic, I think, to awaken certain change in the world, but it certainly did and there are some positives that came out of it. I'm also thinking about the fact that we are all located in the Midwest. And I've heard the two of you talk about what sets businesses in the Midwest, apart from others, in other parts of the country. Graham, what do you think makes this area, and especially even, Lincoln, Nebraska, such a great place to start a business?

Graham Pansing Brooks:

Yeah. For those that are listening that live in and around Lincoln probably have a good familiarity with what makes this place unique. But for those listeners that maybe haven't had the chance of the opportunity to get to Lincoln, I think this place has a tendency to surprise.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah.

Graham Pansing Brooks:

And there's so much good work that's happening here. And maybe it translates back to the days of settling and coming across the country and finding ways to rely on neighbors, to be stewards of building this community together. But I think that there's tendencies that exist within there, but also those tendencies I think exist across the country because New York State is more than New York City and California is more than San Francisco and LA. Their community is very similar to Lincoln that exist across the country. And so for us, we are very proud of Lincoln and we're very proud of Nebraska and what we see as an opportunity to prove a model here that is then transferable and can translate across the

country in communities that are very similar, that are very community oriented, that rely on the neighbor, that are interconnected and very deep ways. And so we love this place and we're excited and if you haven't been to Lincoln, please come visit. But also we're excited to find ways to take this model and amplify it out from, as we say, the middle of everywhere.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. Fantastic. That's great. So you guys have some big news to share about something you recently accomplished. Kyle, do you want to do the honors and share that news and maybe explain what led up to this moment?

Kyle Cartwright:

Sure. Yeah. Thank you for giving me the honors. We have achieved B Corp certification.

Lyn Wineman:

Woohoo. Yeah.

Kyle Cartwright:

As you might imagine for a company like ours, working with companies of purpose and helping to create more good work through the scope of business. This has always been, I think, a path that we knew we would be taking, but in the early stage of our company, not really having a lot of structure, not necessarily having a ton of clients and people to really show and prove that we do have all these stakeholder values and they're documented, and that you can show the flow of capital being really intentionally applied. And so as we've grown this last year, especially it's really offered us the opportunity to go in, go through the assessment process for, I don't know, the third or fourth time, right Graham?

Graham Pansing Brooks:

Yeah.

Kyle Cartwright:

And apply the values that we've carried and actually show how they've lived through the course of growing our business.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. How cool? If I could rewind KidGlov, which was founded 11 years ago to think about being that intentional and purposeful early on, I just think you guys are on such a great trajectory because of that. And I'm curious, Graham, when you both founded SEChange was becoming a B Corp always part of the plan?

Graham Pansing Brooks:

Yeah. We knew from the get-go that we wanted to be a purpose-oriented business in whatever way and context fit. And so B Corp certification was something that we were certainly aware of and wanted to pursue and had aspirations and dreams that we would be able to accomplish one day. But I also think that it's just the start, Lyn as you know, the certification is wonderful and it provides a great celebratory moment to recognize the good work that has allowed us to get to that point. But there's also a recognition that the journey doesn't end. And we often talk about in the same way that you and I are on a lifelong journey of personal development. Our businesses need to be on a lifelong journey of corporate development because hopefully our businesses will outlive us.

If that's the case, then the businesses can be a legacy of this good work that we're doing today. And so for us, again, B Corp certification was a wonderful celebratory moment, but we also want to be thinking about the long-term, what is the legacy in 50 years in 100 years, in 200 years. That's what we want to build towards is a sustainable, vibrant business that is going to be rooted holistically top to bottom in purpose.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. Graham, I think the ink is still wet on our B Corp certification. We achieved it late in 2021, but one of the fun things that has happened, not even six months out, is it's been fun for me to see our KidGlov team members really rally around certain aspects of our assessment and really being intentional about how do we improve for next time? So we've got a whole group of people, one of our lower scores was in the environmental aspect. Not because we're doing anything bad, but because we weren't very intentional. We have a whole group of people rallying around petitioning our landlord to start composting and setting up a KidGlov carpool channel on Slack. We're looking even into buying carbon offset credits, which are all just really fascinating things that we can do. And there are other aspects as well, but that has been a really cool aspect of it. And I'd love to hear for the two of you, what's next for SEAchange? What are the big next goals that you're working on? And I'd love to hear from both of you. Kyle, let's start with you and then go to Graham.

Kyle Cartwright:

Sure. I think big picture, we want to grow this movement from the center of the country, from the middle of everywhere. But it doesn't stop there. We have talked a lot about what does that look like five, 10 years from now? What does our team need to start to look like? What does our corporate structure need to look like? And so we've had a lot of conversations, but the beauty of it is our mission doesn't change through the course of that. We've really embedded the purpose and the vision of our values and our goals within the scope of the business so that as it grows in scales, that's retained. I'm really excited to see that grow. I'll also mention, I guess, in the short term here, Graham mentioned the opportunity for us to really start working with more businesses and even nonprofits. Meeting organizations, regardless of tax status, where they're at in the scope of helping them.

I'll put it this way, I think every business, 99% of businesses, let's say that, have some sort of purpose or have some sort of values outside of just making money. And so I don't think we have to take a very developed purpose oriented company to this transformational scope of capitalism as a force for good. I think we can really work with... We're building out ways to work with companies even just who are kind of starting the corporate social responsibility journey and maybe are making a handful of charitable donations or sponsorships here and there, but don't have strategy. We're really building our focus to serve more companies. And even again, in the nonprofit space to do some strategy. And we've got

between Graham and I, and folks who are excited about this movement, a lot of skillsets that really can serve within the scope of nonprofits as well.

Lyn Wineman:

Kyle, someone asked me recently, why can't nonprofits become B Corp? And I was like, I don't know the answer to that, but even though they can't become a certified B Corp, that doesn't mean they can't really lean into social responsibility, the culture aspects. I could see where your work could really help nonprofits and a lot of nonprofit leaders really want that for their teams and their cultures and their very mission driven, and this can become part of their mission.

Kyle Cartwright:

Yeah. And I'll just mention, the functions of nonprofit work very similar, they just have different terminology. And so I think we have experience in fundraising, in strategy and operations. And so it's taking these concepts of purpose and values driven approaches. And applying them in the context that we're comfortable on kind of both sides of that coin.

Lyn Wineman:

Fascinating. I love it. It's so, Graham, what are you excited about for the future of SEChange?

Graham Pansing Brooks:

Yeah. I don't think that Kyle could have stated it any better. It's really focusing on this opportunity to grow organically, to find ways to meet organizations where they're at and amplify their impact regardless of business structure, regardless of organizational structure. There are ways that we can do more, as I mentioned earlier on, we're not stagnant as individuals in our journey for growth and development. And so let's find ways to help continue to push our organizations to reach that next level. If we can be 1% better today than we were yesterday. Imagine the change that could take place in the future when we're all working together in that way. And I think that you mentioned as well, Lincoln in our focus here in Nebraska, and there is such a sense of pride and purpose here. I'll throw out sort of the long term aspirational for us is that the Midwest begins to be recognized as the purpose-driven capital of America. I think that there's so much good work that's happening here.

And there's so many different opportunities to build a quality life. Whether you're talking about work life balance or safe communities, or we have four seasons, so you get a little bit of everything. But there's so many great pieces to this community. We're very squarely rooted in workforce development, finding ways to help bring that attention and notoriety of the great work that's happening here. And so that is also a piece of our mission and long-term belief and work.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. I really do think Midwestern companies, Nebraska companies, I feel like there are so many great businesses here that really are doing so many things and maybe just don't even give themselves credit for it because it's just what you do here when you're in Nebraska or in the Midwest. And I think because of that some Nebraska businesses really are maybe a step ahead on getting B Corp certification if they

want it. And I'm curious, Kyle, for businesses who might be considering getting B Corp certification, what's a sign that the time might be right or what circumstances might say, 'Hey, maybe you hold off for now.'

Kyle Cartwright:

Yeah. That's a very personal question I think, for each business. And certainly, we acknowledge that B Corp path is not one that's accessible to every business. It's not one that even feasible for every business. But I do want to acknowledge as well that every business would benefit from going through the process, whether or not certification is the end state or the end goal. There is so much to be learned simply by understanding the impact that your operations and your giving and the allocation of your people's time and your executive leadership and governance and diversity equity. I mean, the list goes on. There's so much value to be gained in just understanding the intersections of all of these things and how they create impact, because then you retool so that you have focus and you can tell a great story and engage again, those stakeholders. To me, that's what it's all about.

Lyn Wineman:

I've been on record as saying the first time we met and talked about what you all do and B Corp certification process, my thought was, yeah. That's all nice. But I'm a busy entrepreneur. I don't have time for that. And then kind of circumstances changed for KidGlov from a standpoint of, we decided to really define our purpose as helping those who are mission driven socially conscious, impact driven. And when we did that and started telling people that they would come back to us and say, oh, you guys must be a B Corp. And I would be like, huh. Well, not yet, but I know who we're going to start talking to. It's interesting. I felt some market pressure, particularly as I started working in larger metro areas. I'm curious Graham, what advice do you have for businesses who may be interested, but just feel like they're not quite ready. How could they be more intentional about their culture, their mission, or how they give back?

Graham Pansing Brooks:

It's a great question. The number of organizations that we talk to that indicate that they're not ready to go through the B Impact Assessment or that go through B Corp certification is quite a few, but I guess the piece that I would lean back on is recognizing that there are systems and structures out there to help support you through this process or to help support starting to increase the intentionality with which you're thinking about your impact. And that it doesn't need to be a fire sale approach. But how do you start taking that a little bit more seriously, adding a little bit more intentionality, because at the end of the day, corporate impact shouldn't be something that is sort of Frankenstein together. This is something that needs to be as core to your business as accounting, as finance, as marketing, as operations. Because again, the data suggests and the research suggests, and the case study suggests that organizations that prioritize purpose actually outperform their peers who don't.

And so for those busy entrepreneurs, for those individuals that are being spread thin, one of the ways I think that we see to help organizations get re-energized to find a fuel and a passion is really, again, prioritizing impact because at the end of the day, Kyle and I, as much as we're talking about these aspirational things are capitalists. And so how do we find ways to make sure that we're bringing our businesses into the 21st century understanding, appreciating and recognizing the data, the research and

the case studies that are out there and starting to implement that more holistically, even if it's just one step at a time. Adding just a little bit more intentionality helps move us forward in a great way.

Lyn Wineman:

I think that's great. I think too, people can see it when you're not authentic too. If your purpose is just or social consciousness is just surface level. The first people that will see it will be your employees. And then they'll be disillusioned and then your clients and prospects and communities will be disillusioned as well. It's got to be deep

Graham Pansing Brooks:

And you don't have to look far for examples of that too, in the seventies and eighties, when environmental stewardship was such a big conversation topic, green washing was a common issue. I think that again, to your point, Lyn, there is being authentic, being true to those values is something that can't be faked. It is something that sort of is very transparent and screams out. If it's something that's just being done, because that's what you think is expected of you.

Lyn Wineman:

Since I know you guys, I know how smart and passionate you are. I'm really excited to ask you this next question. It's my favorite question on every podcast. Our listeners know that I am inspired by motivational quotes and so I'd love to hear some original words of wisdom and Graham let's hear from you first, and then let's go to Kyle.

Graham Pansing Brooks:

The quote that comes to mind is one that we created as a part of SEChange. I don't mean to have a cop out here, but our focus is do good, thrive. It's really rooted in that notion of doing good work in the world and being able to thrive as a business, as an individual, as a community, as stewards of the environment.

Lyn Wineman:

That's awesome. Those things definitely go together doing good and thriving for sure. Excellent. Kyle, how about you, a motivational quote from Kyle Cartwright?

Kyle Cartwright:

Yeah. You know, something a value or kind of a characteristic that I've seen as a theme through my growth and development has been humility and a learner mindset. And so that is really important to me. And so something that I've struggled with as well at times is asking for help where it's needed. I kind of came up with this on the spot. It's really revolutionary, but don't be afraid to ask for help.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. Good one. It's a good one. Why is that so hard for us? And I think as entrepreneurs, I remember I still ask for help, but in the early days, too, the people of this community were so generous to me in their advice. Right. A couple of people took meetings with me and they just helped me get started and asking for help in a lot of different ways is really important. Both of you, those are awesome. So for our listeners, who'd like to learn more about your work. How can they find out more about SEChange?

Kyle Cartwright:

A lot of simple ways SEChangeLTD.com and that's SEA as S-E-A changeltd.com. Come check out our website, our emails and phone numbers and all that good stuff is on our about page. That said if you want to reach us via this podcast, Kylec@seachangeltd and GrahamPB@seachangeltd. We've got a podcast as well if you're okay with us.

Lyn Wineman:

A great podcast. Yes, absolutely. Not only I would highly recommend it. It's a great listen.

Kyle Cartwright:

Thank you. It's called the Stream of Conscience. A little play on words there. Stream of Conscience Podcast, find it on all the places you would stream right alongside our favorite Agency for Change.

(Listen to the Stream of Conscience podcast here - <https://www.seachangeltd.com/podcast>)

Lyn Wineman:

There you go. It's the one, two punch of podcasts there.

Kyle Cartwright:

That's right. That's all you need. And of course, LinkedIn, you can find Graham and I on LinkedIn.

Lyn Wineman:

Great. We'll have all those links in the show notes as well. As we wrap up our time together today, another just great fun, rewarding conversation. Graham, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

Graham Pansing Brooks:

Yeah. Thank you, Lyn, again for having us, we really love all of the work that KidGlov is doing. You are an inspiration to us. We're grateful for the leadership that you provide in Lincoln, Omaha, Nebraska and beyond. And it's a real pleasure to be able to get to work together and it another real pleasure to be able to be on the podcast, talking with you. For the listeners that are thinking about SEChange, the one thing I think to take away from this is that we're here to be a partner and purpose. Wherever you are along your journey, whether it's just starting out, trying to move down this path or whether you're an expert,

we're here to be able to help collaborate. We're here to be partners. We're here to find ways to do more good together.

Lyn Wineman:

That's awesome. Here, here. I agree if I had champagne, I'd toasted you both right now over that comment.

Kyle Cartwright:

I can arrange that.

Lyn Wineman:

I think we definitely will. Kyle and Graham, I fully believe the world needs more people like you, more companies like SEACHange. Thank you for taking time to talk with me today.

Kyle Cartwright:

Thank you. Feelings mutual.

Graham Pansing Brooks:

Thank you, Lyn.

Announcer:

We hope you enjoyed today's Agency for Change podcast. To hear all our interviews with those who are making a positive change in our communities, or to nominate a changemaker you'd love to hear from, visit KidGlov.com at K-I-D-G-L-O-V.com to get in touch. As always, if you like what you've heard today, be sure to rate, review, subscribe, and share. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time.