

Agency for Change Podcast: Eric Davis, CEO, Co-Founder, Pretred

- Connect with Eric on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/eric-davis-296a471/>
- Learn more about Pretred: <https://www.pretred.com/>

Eric Davis:

Anybody and everybody can make a difference.

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:

Well, hello everyone. This is Lyn Wineman, president and chief strategist at KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of Agency for Change podcast. So, question for you today. What do you do when you are enjoying the resplendent beauty of nature and suddenly come across trash in the middle of the woods? It seems totally out of place, right? It feels, for lack of a better term, completely unnatural and gross. Today's guest was inspired to take action after seeing waste tires and plastics polluting Colorado's rivers during a fly-fishing trip and thank goodness he did. Today we'll talk to Eric Davis, CEO of Pretred, a purpose-driven business dedicated to environmentally responsible manufacturing and inspiring sustainable development in a pretty unique way. Eric, I can't wait to hear your story. Welcome to the podcast.

Eric Davis:

Thank you, Lyn. It's a pleasure to be here.

Lyn Wineman:

Oh, I am so looking forward to your story because I love talking to people who see problems and take action. So, let's just get right to it. Can you just tell us more about Pretred and the work that you do?

Eric Davis:

Absolutely. So Pretred, we take recycled tires, and we turn them into sustainable industrial barriers and blocks. So, if you look on the roadway and you see those large concrete barriers going down the roadway, or you see them in parking lots or you see them at special events right downtown around buildings, et cetera, we make those very heavy products from recycled rubber tires.

Lyn Wineman:

That is such a brilliant idea. And so, I'm curious how you source your materials, because the other day I was walking down my road, somebody dumped a load of tires, can I just bring them over?

Eric Davis:

Well, you can't bring them to us. That's a great question. Right. But there are specialty locations that accept tires, and many times you can actually pay a small fee and they'll go ahead and take the tire and they'll process it. So once that processor grinds up the tire or decides what they want to do with it, we then take that ground up material and we turn it into a new product being the industrial barriers and blocks.

Lyn Wineman:

Wow. I had no idea it was such a complicated process, although I haven't really ever thought much about creating construction barriers, right, but it's pretty cool that you do this. Eric, do you have to take any extra steps to ensure that the tires are sustainably and ethically processed and the barriers are produced in that way, or does that happen automatically?

Eric Davis:

No, that's a great question. We are GreenCircle Certified, and that's where you have an organization that goes out and evaluates your material content and your recycled content, and then they come back and they'll give you a certification indicating that you are basically environmentally good. Additionally, we also have independent laboratory testing that tests our products in various environments. So that could be for heat, that could be for rain or water running off, leach aids, right, anything that we've put in the environment, and we've taken that out and we've passed all those tests with flying colors. So, we're very excited to say that yes, we're 95% plus recycled material. We're GreenCircle Certified, and we are also independently laboratory tested to be environmentally friendly.

Lyn Wineman:

Eric, I love all of those things because every once in a while, when you hear about a company that's doing things sustainably, just the tiniest little bit of skepticism creeps in, right, and you're like, are they really as good as they say they are? And to have those certifications and that testing, I think that's really great. And the GreenCircle Certified, I know particularly means that you've met a very high level. I'm going to tell you another area where skepticism creeps in, and I don't know if it happens to you, but it happens to me as a purpose driven business owner. Sometimes I have peers ask me if the purpose-driven part of my business gets in the way of profitability. I'm curious how you balance those things because I know you have to balance them.

Eric Davis:

That's a very good question. So, when you start up a company of this nature and you go out to seek, if you choose to seek venture capital funding or capital funding and support, you have to have a pretty comprehensive business plan, especially in this market. As I'm sure you're aware, right, with the, we'd say the recession or the potential recession and what's happening in venture capital. It's extremely difficult. It's more difficult now to get support than it has been for many years. Obviously, we have phenomenal support, and have got a very good business plan. We've got great opportunities for growth. Our customers are very engaged, and I'm very pleased with the overall numbers and the models. So yes, it's a good balance. Right. So, we've struck that good balance between sustainability, venture capital, and also growth and profitability.

Lyn Wineman:

Sounds like the trifecta there, right? Without revealing any secrets, are there any strategies that you use in that business plan to ensure that you're financially viable?

Eric Davis:

Yes, there are many. So right now, we have a brand-new state-of-the-art facility in Denver, Colorado, and that facility is, it's a clean facility. It's very tight. One of the strategies we look at is, as we grow is partnering with major global corporations in different countries and being onsite in their facilities. So, you can imagine that somebody might produce a significant amount of waste or they have a lot of transportation items, right, trucks or planes or things along those lines, partnering with them and being there reduces your carbon footprint substantially because you're not trucking the materials anymore, you're not handling them as an intermediary. Right. You eliminate all those steps and what you get is the waste comes right off of a manufacturer or producer, and then it's immediately turned into a new product.

Lyn Wineman:

Wow, that's such a great idea. I love that advice. So, thank you for that. Sounds like you've done so many things right. Knock on wood, congratulations, kudos, all the things. Have you faced any challenges, Eric, and if so, what are some of the biggest challenges you faced as being a sustainable manufacturer?

Eric Davis:

Well, we faced, that's such a great question, and if there's a startup on the planet that hasn't faced challenges, I'd be surprised.

Lyn Wineman:

That is kind of, as I was coming out of my mouth, you were nice enough to say it was a great question. I'm like, this sounds like a silly question, but have you faced any challenges? Yes.

Eric Davis:

Oh, yes.

Lyn Wineman:

Tell me about those. Yeah.

Eric Davis:

Oh my gosh, so many. The skepticism on making a difference, that's one that we faced. That people, it was hard for people to understand the depth of the tire problem. And when you start saying, there are 300 plus million tires generated every year in the United States,

Lyn Wineman:

That's a lot of tires.

Eric Davis:

And you,

Lyn Wineman:

Where do they all go? Right. They're not breaking down.

Eric Davis:

They're not. And you try to explain to people that the top two utilizations are, we burn them and then we chop them up and we send them to landfill, and we bury them, and those are the top two. And people say, well, there's no way that you can make a difference. They're just highly skeptical. And it's like, well, one Pretred line can make about 150 million pounds of difference a year. And that's a pretty big difference.

Lyn Wineman:

That's literally huge. Yeah.

Eric Davis:

Yeah.

Lyn Wineman:

That's literally huge.

Eric Davis:

So, I'd say the skepticism on getting people to understand the impact we can make, that's a big one. And then the skepticism of scaling. When you look out and you say, hi, I'm Chipotle number one, I'm in Denver, Colorado, and I'm Chipotle number one, and I'm going to be across the United States and across the globe. And people say, "I don't know about that."

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. They pat you on the head figuratively and say, "that's nice."

Eric Davis:

Exactly.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah.

Eric Davis:

So yeah, I think dealing with that skepticism is another challenge, but I'm proud to say on both we've overcome those hurdles and we've moved past them.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah.

Eric Davis:

But definitely a challenge. And then I think that a major challenge also, or a major area is just staffing dynamics, right, how times are changing.

Lyn Wineman:

Right. And quickly, they're changing so quickly. Just when you think you have it figured out, you pretty much should know it's changing again. Right.

Eric Davis:

It is, and it's a unique time. So, it's like, I do think it's good to say that since we're a startup, we're agile and we pivot constantly. We ask ourselves and we change. And I think that having that pivot mindset, right, being flexible and being adaptable is just, it's a major, major important point for us.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah, really great. Any advice? So, let's say somebody is at that point where they're ready to say out loud, "Hey, I've got this dream. I've got this entrepreneurial venture. I'm going to go for it." Particularly if they're in this sustainable space. Do you have any advice for those entrepreneurs?

Eric Davis:

Oh my gosh, where to start?

Lyn Wineman:

Right.

Eric Davis:

Let's write a book.

Lyn Wineman:

Actually, I think that's a really good idea. Eric, you should write a book.

Eric Davis:

Oh, no, thank you. I tell you what, for any aspiring entrepreneur in this space, I would say the most important thing is to really create a strong model and business plan. Start with something where you look at what it is that you want to do and you say, "could we come away from doing something and actually have a company?" Right. You have to start with that. And it's, I can't stress that enough. Right. If you come out and say, when I started Pretred, I came out and I said, "hey, it's going to cost us \$2,000 a barrier to make. And then it was \$1,500, and then it was \$1000." And finally, we got the numbers to make sense, but without making sense, it can be a tough road.

Lyn Wineman:

Right. I mean, it's a great idea, but \$2,000 a barrier, when you think about how many barriers most of your clients'—municipalities, organization—need, that seems like a pretty high price tag.

Eric Davis:

Oh, no one would've purchased our product, right? It's like, "Hey, can I sell a chocolate bar for \$20?"

Lyn Wineman:

Right.

Eric Davis:

No.

Lyn Wineman:

No.

Eric Davis:

No, you can't.

Lyn Wineman:

There's going to have to be some pretty amazing stuff in that chocolate.

Eric Davis:

I do think for the aspiring entrepreneurs, right, having just a good business plan, doesn't have to be fancy, but thinking it through and then surrounding yourself with people that will challenge you, that will look at it and say they are skeptical, so they have a strong foundation of support, but they kind of say, "hey, why wouldn't this work?" Right. And if you can come away from meetings with good, supportive, intelligent people that have challenged you and they've challenged your model and they've challenged your plan and it holds up, then you're onto something. Right.

Lyn Wineman:

That is such good advice. That circle of mentors and friends who are willing to ask the hard questions while also supporting you, while also maybe doing some brainstorming with you, that is a really great and invaluable thing to have. That's great advice. So, at the end of the day, Eric, you're kind of at the beginning of this journey, but growing fast. What lasting impact are you hoping that Pretred will have on road safety and sustainable manufacturing?

Eric Davis:

So, on sustainable manufacturing, we're looking at, our vision is just global impact in the waste, rubber environment. So, we want to be the leading waste, rubber processing and high value product company. We're on target for that. We're very excited by where we're heading, and we're very excited by our results. Additionally, when we look at taking our products and placing them out in the different customer environments, we're very diverse. So, kind of to your question, we have a military barrier that you can fire munitions at.

Lyn Wineman:

Oh, yeah.

Eric Davis:

We have a flood control barrier that is meant for, right, it's environmentally safe that it's meant to help in flood zones like Oklahoma or Alabama or Louisiana, or a product for, let's say the Bureau of Land Management, right, the Army Corps of Engineers, other people like UPS or FedEx, construction companies, RTD, Caltrans, the list kind of goes on and on.

Lyn Wineman:

Right.

Eric Davis:

And as you drive down, say if you're in Colorado and you drive down I-70, you can look at rockfall barriers. Right. They keep the rocks from coming in on the highway. So, our goal is to really be a strong, sustainable alternative to concrete. And when somebody, any kind of construction company or any engineer or engineering firm comes in and specs a job or the military, they look at what are the sustainable alternatives in this application, and do they perform better, and are they the same price or very close? And we tick all those boxes.

Lyn Wineman:

So now we just need to make sure everybody who's researching these products knows the name Pretred. That'll be part of our goal with this podcast. Let's get that name Pretred out there. It seems like such a great solution that I've got to believe once people hear about it, find out about it, understand that it's real and it works, it's not too hard for you to convert customers once they understand what you're doing, which I really love that, Eric. So, I'm curious, I want to switch gears a little bit because you talked about one of the goals being a leader in the field of waste rubber. I'm curious, how did your personal path lead you in this direction? Were you a teenager and people were saying, Eric, what do you want to do when you grow up? And you said, I want to be a leader in waste rubber.

Eric Davis:

Well, I like, that's a great question. I can answer that one in a fun way. I absolutely, positively knew I was going to be a roboticist. I absolutely,

Lyn Wineman:

You did. Wow.

Eric Davis:

I absolutely knew.

Lyn Wineman:

A roboticist. Okay.

Eric Davis:

A roboticist. Yeah. And obviously it didn't work out, but at least I get to make the factories that have the robots in them.

Lyn Wineman:

There you go. So, you know a thing or two about how all this stuff is done. That's not one you hear very often. What do you want to be when you grow up to be a roboticist?

Eric Davis:

Roboticist.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah.

Eric Davis:

Yeah. I was probably that weird kid. Right. But my career led me down a path of just figuring out how to make things, how to fix things, how to build things, and how to address problems. And one day I was fly-fishing in my local creek outside my house here in Denver, and I saw a pile of waste tires and plastics sitting on the bank, and I looked at them and said, it's just a great raw material.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah.

Eric Davis:

It's a large quantity of raw materials. There's got to be something we can make out of them that are high volume and high value. It had to be both. And I went in with high volume and high value, and I got a whole group of people together that were much smarter than I was. And I sat down and said, heads up, can you help come up with products that you think we could make that would use a lot of tires and people would buy a lot of the product? And it was things like mats or flooring or fence posts or. And I was like, well, that uses a little,

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah.

Eric Davis:

But I mean, the tire problem's pretty big. And then one Department of Transportation executive looked up and he said, man, if we could make an alternative to concrete barriers, that would be the first of their kind in the world, and we could buy a lot of those.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. Yeah.

Eric Davis:

And I went, that's a great idea.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah.

Eric Davis:

So that's kind of where we got started.

Lyn Wineman:

Oh, I love it. I love it. So, you've provided some great advice for businesses, but going down this path of your personal journey as a leader, I'm curious what advice you could give to people who want to make a difference in the world?

Eric Davis:

I think that some good advice would be if you have some good ideas and things you believe in, definitely look at the accelerator programs or the support programs that are outright now by various global corporations and incubators and startup funds. I definitely recommend taking a look at, I'm a Techstars affiliate and graduate.

Lyn Wineman:

Nice. That's great.

Eric Davis:

And that Colorado company. Right. The Heritage Group Accelerator, which is a phenomenal organization with fantastic people. And also, being able to take a look at any of your local support organizations, like many states have next cycle, right, or various other types of support. I highly encourage people to go have conversations with those groups and say, "hey, I have an idea and I think it makes financial sense. Right. I've got some basic numbers, but I could really use some help turning it into a full-fledged business."

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah.

Eric Davis:

Right. "Would you guys be willing to help me?"

Lyn Wineman:

That's such great advice. I feel like there's more resources, there are more resources available for entrepreneurs than there ever have been. And what I love about the accelerator programs is you're working with people who have been there before, who have done it. They may not know your product and what you do, but they know what it's going to take. That's really, really great advice. All right, Eric, I'm going to ask you my favorite question next. I've asked it on every podcast, and we're almost 200 in now, but I am inspired by motivational quotes, and it feels like I have the benefit of getting to talk to so many motivational people like yourself. Could you give me a few words of wisdom to inspire our listeners?

Eric Davis:

Oh, well, I have some thoughts there.

Lyn Wineman:

I knew you would. I knew you would.

Eric Davis:

All right. And don't chuckle. All right. But I am a large fan of Walt Disney. I admire the man, and what he did and what he accomplished.

Lyn Wineman:

For sure.

Eric Davis:

And his ingenuity and creativity and his passion for getting results.

Lyn Wineman:

Yep.

Eric Davis:

And I use a quote every day in our business, every single day, and on most of my emails, and that is, "Keep moving forward." It's so important to have that. And I find that when I use that along with a different one, which is I feel that business is comprised of three primary rules. And those three primary rules are communicate, communicate, communicate.

Lyn Wineman:

As a communications professional, I certainly appreciate that.

Eric Davis:

And my team laughs. Right. They're like, okay, so we know we're supposed to keep moving forward and we better communicate a lot. Right. But I'm like, yes.

Lyn Wineman:

You're making it clear. And that's also an important principle, right? Yeah, that's great.

Eric Davis:

I think there's one last one that we use, and that is we try to surround ourselves and create the art of relationships. And I call that you surround yourself with people that you admire, you respect, and you trust.

Lyn Wineman:

Wow.

Eric Davis:

And so, everybody that comes into our company, and its customers, vendors, investors, partners, employees. We're like, we do the art of relationships.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah.

Eric Davis:

And I found that when I put those three, it probably sounds a little wonky, right?

Lyn Wineman:

No, it's beautiful.

Eric Davis:

But that's kind of like who we are. Right. We really try to keep moving forward, communicate a lot, and surround ourselves with people that make us, our company and our products better.

Lyn Wineman:

Eric, I am going to give you an endorsement for authenticity as well, because in the last 24 hours, I received an email from you and I noticed the line, "keep moving forward" at the bottom of the email. And I stopped for a moment, and I thought about it, and I'm like, that's pretty cool. And in the email you sent me, sometimes emails can be cold and cryptic, the email you sent me was so warm, and it was like, I am really excited to talk to Eric tomorrow because of the way you phrased that email. And I was excited already because of what you do, but I'd never met you in person until we got on Zoom today.

And then the third thing before we hit record today, you already were talking about the importance of relationships for people. So, I love that not only do you have and use these mantras, but I have observed them all in the last 24 hours, which is the first 24 hours that I've met you. So, I think that's pretty cool. So anyway, Eric, for our listeners who would like to learn more about Pretred, I hope there's a lot of people that spec construction barriers listening today. How do they find out more?

Eric Davis:

Absolutely. Yeah. They can reach out to us on our website. They can also contact our sales or our marketing leads directly.

Lyn Wineman:

Nice.

Eric Davis:

So, we do have Toni Olson as our marketing lead.

Lyn Wineman:

I do know Toni. She's fabulous, so

Eric Davis:

Yeah, she's great. And reach out to her on LinkedIn. And also, we have Royal Rich who is our sales lead, and reaching out to Royal Rich is a great opportunity for sales. And we also have a business development lead that helps us with partnerships and growth.

Lyn Wineman:

Great.

Eric Davis:

And that is Jeff Olson, and again, he can be reached on LinkedIn or just contact us directly.

Lyn Wineman:

I'm sure Royal is fabulous. I have not met Royal. Jeff Olson, pretty cool guy as well, I must say. So fantastic. We will have the link to your website also in the show notes on kidglov.com for anybody else

who wants to grab that. Eric, I have just loved this conversation. I mean so much great advice and insight, personal levels, business levels. As we wrap up this time together today, what is the most important thing you would like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing?

Eric Davis:

I think the most important thing from this conversation is anybody and everybody can make a difference.

Lyn Wineman:

I love that.

Eric Davis:

Anybody and everybody. Just go out with passion, right? Sit down and keep moving forward. Surround yourself with some good people. Talk it through and you'll make a difference.

Lyn Wineman:

There you go, kids. That is the key to life right there. Eric, thank you so much. I love this conversation. I fully believe the world needs more people like you, more ideas and companies like what you've got going on at Pretred, and I thank you for taking the time to share with us today.

Eric Davis:

Oh, thank you, Lyn. It's been a pleasure and I look forward to staying in touch in the future.

Announcer:

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