

Agency for Change Podcast: Bo Jones, CEO, CareerPathway.com

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Bo Jones: 0:01

Success requires patience.

Announcer: 0:09

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: 0:30

Hey everyone, welcome back to the Agency for Change podcast. This is Lyn Wineman, President and Chief Strategist of KidGlov. Now have you ever heard the saying necessity is the mother of invention? I think that saying is really true for our guest today, Bo Jones. He is the president of Tru-Built Construction, a company that he founded with a partner at the age of 19. Now, a few years ago, when Bo started to experience the workforce shortage in construction, he realized that the industry needed a smarter solution to connect job seekers with employers in the industry, and that caused him to create a platform called CareerPathway.com that is really shaking things up in this space and across a number of non-traditional or trade-oriented industries, including construction and including advertising. So today we're going to talk a little bit more about how that platform was created and what it's doing, and I can't wait for you to hear from Bo.

Bo, welcome to the podcast.

Bo Jones: 1:44

Hi Lyn, Thank you.

Lyn Wineman: 1:45

Yeah, absolutely so. Bo, you are president of Tru-Built Construction and also the CEO of CareerPathway.com. I know you're a really busy guy, but can you start by telling us about Tru-Built and then how that led into CareerPathway.com out of a specific need that you had?

Bo Jones: 2:07

Yeah, I started Tru-Built Construction back when I was 19 years old. We were both students at the University of Nebraska. I do have a business partner and we were just kind of working around class schedules. We got tied up with a couple of guys that had a bunch of rental properties and we were their grunts for a number of years. We would do everything from trim hedges to remodel kitchens and put

new roofs on, and word got out and projects got bigger and next thing we knew we were hiring people. And here we are, 25, almost 26 years later with a full team and building some amazing big projects.

Lyn Wineman: 2:38

Wow, Bo, you were a young entrepreneur 19 years old. That's amazing.

Bo Jones: 2:45

Yeah well, and I guess I didn't really think of it as a career at the time, but we just kept going and there was never really a stopping point and we love what we're doing. Pretty good at it.

Lyn Wineman: 2:54

That's fantastic. So how did that lead to CareerPathway.com?

Bo Jones: 2:58

Okay. So, as as often times, this happens is you're you're stressed and you're frustrated by a situation and you look for solutions. So I was frustrated on two fronts. Front number one is Tru-Built Construction for the last decade has been miserable. Trying to hire young help.

We just we're not seeing it on our team, we're not seeing it on the plumbers, the electricians, really any of the construction teams is aging out and is not being backfilled by the younger generation.

Lyn Wineman: 3:27

And Bo, it's not just Tru-Built. I mean, that is a nationwide situation.

Bo Jones: 3:34

And that's exactly what we found out is, somehow it's every industry it's accounting, it's truck driving, it's manufacturing, it's construction, it's education, teachers, go on down the list and somehow every industry is short on workforce. So that was very frustrating and started thinking about some ideas there. But on the other front, at home I have two kids that are making the transition right now from high school into college.

And after 12 years of public schooling, my daughter graduated from high school and had zero clue what she wanted.

Lyn Wineman: 4:07

What she wanted was for you to spend a lot of money for her to go to college, which is just kind of what everybody wants at that point in life.

Bo Jones: 4:14

The college lifestyle, yeah, and we're dealing with that a little bit, but not on the extreme. But you know, as a parent it's frustrating. You want to encourage your children to go and be successful and find their way, but you don't want to push too hard because you don't want to be the one that pushes them down a path and so there's a fine line in there somewhere, but it is frustrating to watch their, their stress and their hesitation and all the emotions that come along with not being able to make that really important decision.

And frankly, on the other side, there's real consequences, there's time, there's a lot of money and you know when, when I went to college, if I failed miserably, it was a couple thousand dollars.

Lyn Wineman: 4:50

Right. Now they add a decimal to that right.

Bo Jones: 4:54

Exactly. It adds up quick. So just frustrated on both fronts and and just got to thinking that you know me as Tru-Built Construction. We've been in classrooms, we've done job fairs, we've built houses with students over the years we've done everything that we possibly can to engage this emerging workforce and had very limited and, frankly, minimal results out of it. And how do I get our message out as it relates to construction and then our company in general, to a bigger audience with less effort?

So what is this generation doing right now? This is the TikTok generation that we're trying to recruit into our industries. Where are they at? How do they interact with anything?

Lyn Wineman: 5:35

They're all on their phones.

Bo Jones: 5:37

Photos and videos on their phones, that's how you get to them and as we were formulating the ideas that were career pathway, we interviewed a ton of students and we asked them. We said hey, if you pick up your phone right now, what are the first three things you're going to do? They're going to go to Instagram, snapchat and Tik TOK.

Lyn Wineman: 5:54

Yep, yep, yep.

Bo Jones: 5:55

Okay, and then we asked the businesses hey, you have something really fun that you want to showcase about your business and something that you did and interact with the next generation. Where do you put it? Facebook, LinkedIn, and your own personal website.

Lyn Wineman: 6:08

Yes, all the places that the youth are not going.

Bo Jones: 6:15

It could not have been further apart. It was the bottom three for students. And so here we are as industry, frustrated that we're not getting through to this next generation, while we're putting it in the wrong spot.

So the premise behind CareerPathway is how do we create something that allows us, as industry, and all the colleges to get in front of this generation on their level? So what we've created is essentially a social media type of platform where a student can grab and go, it's very intuitive, and start to understand what's available to them in colleges and in industry.

Lyn Wineman: 6:43

That's fantastic. Bo, what I love about that is that you had a situation, a challenge. It wasn't just your challenge, it was the whole industry. But you didn't just complain about it. You didn't just throw up your hands and say there's nothing I can do. You didn't wait for someone else to solve it. You went out and did something, and I love that story. So tell us more about CareerPathway.com. How does it work? What does it look like? You know, just give us a feel for it.

Bo Jones: 7:16

Yeah, like I mentioned, it functions just like a social media platform. You have a feed which is the businesses and the colleges that you follow, so every time you land on your feed, you can always see the latest and the greatest from the companies and the colleges that you're interested in. There's a discover mode, and that's kind of where all the magic happens to where there's a search bar at the top and these students and these job seekers can go in and type in anything they want. They can type in nursing or trucking or construction, or actuaries, advertising.

And what we do is we display for them, in sequential order, the leaders in the industry at the top. We show them the actual industry that it's in. So if they type in architect, we show them that it's in the construction industry and then we introduce them to all the top pros, the top pages and the top posts as it relates to that search term. So they're always learning from the best of the best, from those of us in industry. Those from the industry come in and we have photos and videos, what does it mean to be a general contractor? And you see me walking through a job site talking about a general contractor being like the coach of a team. They can relate that to something that's in their life of. Oh okay, a coach has all these people that comes in and you accomplish something. That's what a general contractor does.

So now we have industry experts talking to students on their level about what it means and we're giving them advice and coaching them through some of the steps necessary to get into our industry. So very fun to see everybody taking a little different spin on it.

You have Lancaster County Sheriff's Office, where you have a cop on a donut shop and you know they bring a little humor into it. And then you have Kawasaki just posted a video today that was their Super Bowl ad.

Lyn Wineman: 8:58

That was pretty cool to see Kawasaki on the Super Bowl.

Bo Jones: 9:01

Yeah and go on down the list and you know Duncan Aviation talking about how you can work on jets and upholstery and stuff like that. So it's fun to see every industry participating and chef's doing some real fun videos on cutting up food and what does it mean to be in culinary arts. So everybody's put a little different spin on it. But what I love about it is they're putting it at the student level. They're really engaging with them and talking to them and being funny and being interactive. It gives the students something exciting and fun to learn from.

Lyn Wineman: 9:32

Absolutely. You know what I love about that, Bo, is I have three adult children of my own that are off and in jobs and I'm so thankful as a parent that they're on a good path. But you know, one of my kids was more inclined creatively and she wanted to go into and did go into and is very successful in graphic design. And I'm not, I don't want to give grief to the school system because I know they have their hands full, but I think that her teachers and her counselor didn't really understand the possibilities of a creative career and they really wanted to point her towards business school or an English degree or education field. And I knew, because of the business I'm in, that she could be wildly successful in design. And it's a kid who probably would have really been frustrated if she had gone down the path of a business degree because it just wasn't her passion or her skill set.

And I feel like you are introducing, you know, maybe a whole new world to these kids. If your parents or your family or your close friends aren't in any of these industries, you may not really understand that not only can you make great money, you can be happy and fulfilled, but also, a lot of these areas lead to the pathway of entrepreneurship, just like you, where you, you know it's probably a lot easier for you to own your own construction company than to start a bank, right, I'm guessing I've never started a bank or owned a construction company, but you know, you found that path and I think you're opening that world up to other people.

Bo Jones: 11:20

Yeah, a lot of points there. I would say, on the education side of things, is they teach what they know. It's not a dig on the education system what they do, but they kind of focus in on what they know. It's not fair for those of us in industry to look at the education system and say, hey, please give every student that you have a very unique career exploration opportunity in the I don't know 20,000 different opportunities.

It's not a fair request. It's good enough for us in industry to stay up to time with all of our changing the things that are happening in our industry, let alone asking the education system to do it. So that's not really fair, but yeah it giving students exposure to things, opening up their eyes.

Let's use Kawasaki for an example. When you think of Kawasaki, you think of manufacturing. Kawasaki has everything they have marketing, they have HR, they have going, they have transportation. Go on

down the list. It's a whole environment of different opportunities that the students don't know about. So you know we talked about brain drain and students leaving the state. Well, if they knew about all the amazing opportunities in the state of Nebraska, they were more likely to stick around.

Lyn Wineman: 12:27

Absolutely, absolutely. So can you talk me through a little bit more? And of course, Bo, we're going to put the link to CareerPathway.com in the show notes, but talk to me a little bit more about like. So let's say, we have students that are listening, or, probably more likely, we have parents of students that are listening. How would a student engage with the platform?

Bo Jones: 12:49

The neatest thing that we're doing in our entire project that is CareerPathway.com is the student profile. So we define the student profile as a student that is between 13 and 18 years old, primarily middle school and high school students. Their profile is really locked down. It's a privacy thing and, working with Lincoln public schools, they're very passionate about student safety, which I love.

But what happens is the student gets to build their own profile. Their profile has two components. It has a portfolio which is a quick reference back to the colleges and the businesses that they like, that they want to follow. We also give them a resume template where they can go in and customize their own resume.

But, most importantly, we have these dynamic icons on their resume. It's called career interests, engaging in the content within the platform or tracking on the backside what industry they're gravitating towards and, more specifically, the careers that they're gravitating towards. So they can always go to their resume, their career interest section, click on the icons of all the industries and we pull up in sequential order all of the careers that they've engaged in. They can click on the word architect, for example, and we introduce them to all the architect colleges and businesses to help get them down that next path. So it's a really easy exploration connection and ultimately a recruitment tool for the businesses and the colleges. It fills our pipeline.

I need students as early as 13 years old learning about construction, considering construction so they can try it out during summer jobs. They can take the courses and certifications so that when they do graduate they're prepped and ready to go in the construction industry. That's our win. There's not a simple solution. There's just not enough people sitting around idle that we have to raise them at an earlier age.

Lyn Wineman: 14:34

Absolutely so, Bo then let's take it from the other side. I know we have a lot of business leaders that listen to the podcast. If let's say, I'm a business leader, somebody in construction or architecture, any of those fields that you mentioned and I want to engage with the platform, what does that look like?

Bo Jones: 14:53

Super simple. Five minutes or less, you can have your profile set up. The neatest thing that we're seeing is this was really a primary focus of ours was the middle school and the high school students.

We're seeing a lot of college age and young working professionals on the platform. I would say the 18 to 30-year-old age group that are really just kind of sorting out where they want to be, and there's a lot more of that group than I ever thought there would be. So this is not just a middle school and high school tool. This is anybody that's 18 and older to retirement age has the ability to come in, create your own profile takes a few minutes and then you're off. As a business, we have three different options you can come in for free and you can share photos and videos about your industry and your company. And then a little about section.

Lyn Wineman: 15:42

That sounds pretty good. I mean, you can come in for free and get started. That's a nice starting point.

Bo Jones: 15:47

Yeah. And then for those of us that need to hire, there's a premium, and that premium allows you to post all of your job opportunities. You can receive resumes right in-app. You can message back and forth with educators and other professionals. So if you see somebody on the platform that you're interested in, you can reach out to them and say hey, why don't you come in, let's sit down and chat. It basically doubles your profile exposure within the platform. But then the really neat one that the big companies are grabbing onto the Sandhills Globals and the other groups like that is what we call leaders. So they recognize as a leader in their industry. So every time a student or a job seeker types in a search term related to that industry, they're front and center. Their company is right there, it's branding, it's awareness, it's job postings and job positions available right there, front and center.

Lyn Wineman: 16:38

Absolutely. You know, Bo, I think there are not a lot of people like you and I right now who chose our career in college and stayed with it all the way, right. I mean you in construction, of course. You've got the entrepreneurial edge with CareerPathway.com, me in advertising, I mean, I do think that all of the data shows people who are entering the workforce right now are going to change careers. So I love that you're starting with middle and high school. But you're right, there are still people out there in that 18 to 30, 34-year-old range who might be looking for something different. Maybe they realized they did go through the wrong path. Maybe they're trying to pay off student loan debt and need something a little bit more lucrative, right, and I love that you have got a platform that works for that whole age range. So I'd love to hear just some firsthand experience. What are you hearing from industry? Like, what are they seeing as results from CareerPathway.com?

Bo Jones: 17:46

Fun things, fun connections with the students. So think of it as a 24-7 career fair on a way bigger scale. We just hit 32 states. We have thousands of people on the profile and platform engaging in the content and learning about opportunities. So it's fun. It's a thriving and building community. First thing I do every morning is I log in and I hit refresh and I get to see all the new users.

So it's super fun and exciting and there you see classrooms of students coming in and then there's a job fair group and it's fun to see all of the interaction and the likes and the shares and all this stuff going on like a social media platform does. But you know it's a resource that we built. It's safe environment. We screen all the content on its way in, we make sure that it's appropriate for all and once you're in, you can just kind of free travel around where you want to go and search anything you want to learn about.

Lyn Wineman: 18:42

Fantastic Bo you mentioned the Lancaster County Sheriff's Office and the play on the donut shop. I'd love to hear what are some of the more fun videos that are going on to the platform.

Bo Jones: 18:53

Okay, so our all-time favorite, and probably most popular, is Jeremy Montgomery with Stevens and Smith Construction.

Lyn Wineman: 19:01

I love Jeremy Montgomery.

Bo Jones: 19:03

Awesome. So he does a segment on the difference between cement and concrete and he's very funny about it and he says raise your hand. If you've ever skinned your knee on a cement sidewalk or a cement driveway, you have, are you sure? Because cement, my friends, is powder.

Lyn Wineman: 19:20

I love it. You know I'm laughing only because I know Jeremy and he has caught me in this conversation before. I have had this conversation with Jeremy.

Bo Jones: 19:31

So that's a fun one. We have a financial advisor here in town that has put a different spin on it. He's not looking to get spin on it. He's not looking to get any more clients. He's not looking to hire anybody to his team, but he's doing a whole series of videos on what is your credit score and why is it important.

Lyn Wineman: 19:46

Oh wow, Such good content.

Bo Jones: 19:49

Just down to the basics. Just you know what is a credit card, when to use it, what is a savings account, how to save. You know all the things that just basic financial awareness that, coming from a professional, has been very successful. It's kind of fun to hear.

Lyn Wineman: 20:05

That's awesome. I love it. So what do you think, as you think, about CareerPathway.com and your experience at Tru-Built, what are some of the biggest barriers you see when it comes to connecting students and job seekers with opportunities, and how are you solving this?

Bo Jones: 20:23

Well, the logistics. The logistics of transporting a student from a school to a construction job site, and even if you do get them there now, you have all the safety things to be, able to do and that applies to manufacturing and just about any industry is you have the logistical challenge, and we're seeing this out in the West side of Nebraska is they may be a hundred miles away from the nearest hospital, but they have students in a classroom that want to learn about nursing or be a doctor.

You know how do they do that? Well, now we can do it virtually, you know, through photos and videos and learn from the pros and understand all the good stuff right there from their classroom. They don't have to travel or bus expense or all the things. For us as industry. We don't have to take a half a day out of our schedule to do the things. And while we're all doing the job fairs and the stuff like that, it's a lot by the time you plan for it, you set up for it, you do the booth. It's a full day.

Lyn Wineman: 21:17

And when you're already short on workforce anyway, then you're going to pull people out of the field and put them in a job fair all day. Right, and that may not be their first and best talent also being in a job fair all day.

Bo Jones: 21:30

Yeah, yep, well, and the other thing that we're seeing is there are so many opportunities for these students coming out of high school. It's overwhelming, and one of the things that's flushed out and very specific is students don't know the difference between a job shadow, an internship, an apprenticeship and a part-time job.

If you set all four of those side by side, they couldn't tell you which one was which. On the platform we can share with them. You know what does it mean to be an intern at Tru-Built Construction, and we very clearly explain that. What does it mean to do a job shadow at an architecture firm? Here's the clear explanation. They can apply for scholarships, they can look for part-time jobs, full-time jobs and then on the college side of things, it's everything from credits like dual credits, like community college and like a public schools partnership, certifications, all the way up to doctoral degrees. They can explore all of their options straight from the colleges.

So this puts everything on the same platform, same user experience, output being the same. But my favorite part, going back to that student resume, is they can go wherever they want and they can make the connections that they want.

Lyn Wineman: 22:37

Yeah, yeah, I love that, so they can select the information that's being, you know, channeled toward them. I really appreciate that. So, Bo, based on this experience that you've had, what advice would you give to students or job seekers trying to find the right career path?

Bo Jones: 22:56

Oh, advice. I would say take your time, do your due diligence. You don't need to rush anything, Time is on your side.

Do some sampling. I wish every student could do an internship or a job shadow or an apprenticeship that gives them a real world glimpse and hands-on experience of what that means.

You know, and unfortunately for us in construction, we're somewhat limited in our ability to insure them while on job sites. So, unfortunately, their initial experience on a construction job site is well, here's your broom and your shovel have fun, right.

Lyn Wineman: 23:37

But at least you can observe what's happening, right. Like you can observe what's happening, you can talk to people, you can see what's going on, yeah.

Bo Jones: 23:40

It's not a great introduction to the construction industry. We want them hands-on building stuff. But saws and power tools is not real great unless they've been trained and experienced.

Lyn Wineman: 23:49

I'm somewhat relieved to know you're not just handing anyone a saw and a power tool.

Bo Jones: 23:55

Yeah, no, we don't.

Lyn Wineman: 23:57

So, Bo, you've had this success. You have companies coming in, you have schools coming in 32 states. What's next for CareerPathway.com?

Bo Jones: 24:08

Well, we have a fun moment coming up in August, so we're working with Nebraska Department of Economic Development specifically for the Governor's Summit out in Kearney and we're going to be doing some fun engaging in-person connections right there in the moment with students across the state, so we'll see how that goes. It's a fun moment. Some amazing partners in there. There's Symphony Workforce, teammates and some others, so all-star team.

Lyn Wineman: 24:37

And having the support of the governor and the Department of Economic Development doesn't hurt either, so that's fantastic. So I know I've said CareerPathway.com about 27 times and we'll have it in the show notes. Is there anything else people need to know as far as how to connect with you, if they just go straight to the site, will it be easy to figure out what to do?

Bo Jones: 24:59

Yeah, go to the site and create your profile.

Lyn Wineman: 25:02

That's fantastic. Fantastic, and you mentioned already you can start for free, so I think that's a great way for anybody to jump in and experience and see what's going on there. So, Bo, I want to take this a little bit different direction, because we've done a lot of podcasts here on Agency for Change, and on every single podcast I've asked this question because our listeners know I'm inspired by motivational quotes. I'm inspired by the people I talk to like you. I would love a Bo Jones original quote to inspire our listeners.

Bo Jones: 25:37

Okay, I can't claim original, but in working with the 15 to 30 year old age group, that we do, it has become the instant gratification generation. So I find myself very clearly saying success requires patience. You don't make a decision to save a thousand dollars and tomorrow you wake up and you have a thousand dollars. You have to save five dollars and then ten dollars, and then it adds up over time, you have to be patient. And that's really hard for this generation because they're used to seeing everything right at the touch of a button and getting everything instantly. So slowing them down a little bit, letting them know that, hey, you know you have a long, long horizon ahead of you and just take your time and put the plan in place.

Lyn Wineman: 26:23

For what it's worth. Bo, I think you're the first person I've heard say that success requires patience. I think it's really great advice. I remember once again, quite a long time ago, starting at my first advertising agency job and just going in and expecting I'm gonna pay my dues, I'm gonna come in, I'm gonna work as hard as I can work. I might be the last one here every day, and when you talk to the current generation, if you say, hey, you're going to come in and pay your dues and you're going to work harder than anybody else and you might be the last one to go home, that doesn't work anymore. You learn that you have to change your language.

But I like the simplicity. Of success requires patience, because I think that is true. It's not going to come to you overnight, but there is a pathway and it will come, and I do really appreciate that. So, Bo, I've loved talking to you about this. I love what you're doing. As we wrap up our time together today, what would you say is the most important thing you'd like our listeners to remember about what you're doing?

Bo Jones: 27:30

I would say that the solution that we need is now in hand. We can work with CareerPathway.com. The workforce solution that we are all looking for does not happen overnight. The success requires patience, right. So we have to mold this emerging generation into understanding what all of our opportunities are, and we have to be on their level. So we have CareerPathway.com now as a resource for everybody to get in, share their story, share their advice and their wisdom and help this next generation find their place. The sooner that generation finds their place, the more success we have in industry they're coming to us earlier.

They're less stressed because they have less student loan debt. They're bouncing around less. It's a game changer for the entire life cycle of that employee or that team member because they're better positioned from the get-go.

Lyn Wineman: 28:24

Absolutely. That's fantastic, Bo. I love what you're doing. I fully believe the world needs more problem solvers like you, more solutions like CareerPathway.com. I just really appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedule to share with us today.

Bo Jones: 28:39

Well, this has been a lot of fun, thank you, Lyn.

Announcer: 28:43

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