

EPISODE: #10 Hosting Kellie Brunn, XS Sight Systems & Dr. Dwan Bryant

Shannon Bryant(host):

Greetings and welcome to the tenth installment of our podcast series the work force lands brought to you by Tarrant County college in North Texas. I am Shannon Bryant executive vice president for corporate solutions and economic development and I will be your host moderating strategic conversations with employers and economic developers on all things related to preparing in growing the workforce today in the future. Today please help me welcome our guest Kellie Brunn of excess sites here in Fort Worth Texas and Dr. Dwan Bryant subject matter experts for the corporate solutions and economic development team one also serves as our industrial organizational psychologist for the team and helping businesses with organizational effectiveness and leadership welcome ladies so happy to have you both here today

Kellie Brunn & Dr. Dwan Bryant:

Thank you.

Shannon Bryant(host):

So that's the focus of the podcast today Kelly is actually your company XS sights so if you could please tell us a little bit about your organization.

Kellie Brunn:

Glad to I am a co-owner of the business this is a very exciting year for us as we're celebrating our twenty fifth anniversary.

Shannon Bryant(host):

Congratulations thank you.

Kellie Brunn:

I think it's been quite substantial over the twenty-five years we've had a lot of changes were second generation family-owned business and we manufacture and market fast acquisition night sights for pistols rifles and shot guns the dynamics definitely change and we're very very excited about the growth and innovation that we see coming forward.

Shannon Bryant(host):

Thank God so tell us a little bit about the history of the company if you will.

Kellie Brunn:

My dad started the business twenty-five years ago and more of a hobby business that was really funded by our manufacturing company but over the past twenty-five years we've grown into quite a substantial organization and we are really dedicated to serving the good guys to be more prepared and self-reliant and increase shooting abilities with functional firearm upgrades so the past couple of years we've taken a second to go back and really go back to our foundation and decide who we are and who we want to be moving forward.

Shannon Bryant(host):

So, as a co-owner of such a profitable organization because I've gotten to know your company since being here tell us more about you specifically your story and what brought you to be the one of the leaders of the company.

Kellie Brunn:

While growing up from an entrepreneurial father I always said I would never work in small business because it was so much work in so much uncertainty.

Shannon Bryant(host):

Never say never.

Kellie Brunn:

Yeah exactly and it's been such a blessing to come back full circle I left our family business after I graduated from undergrad at Texas a and M. and moved to North Carolina and had a real job in a big company for fifteen years and when the oil and gas and firearms industries really started booming my brother had taken over after my dad's passing and was just saying he needed some help I was so fortunate that my husband jumped on board and we moved our family back home which I'm from fort worth so glad to be back in we my brother and I decided to take a second and look at where we are as a company and we decided to continue forward we were going to invest in our businesses and grow them to be the companies that we knew we could but our formal education and the way that we were raised with the background of the entrepreneurial spirit my parents both had so when we took over the company's we were given some really strong foundations but at the same time we had to make them our own and over the past few years we've got our feet underneath us and we've got a great team bill and we're really really excited about the future.

Shannon Bryant(host):

So will being fortunate enough to be in your organization getting to meet your brother your mom and everyone there is a really great organization and Don I know you've had a chance to work with Kelly and her team what's been your insight on the company and Kelly's leadership she's a great leader.

Dr. Dwan Bryant:

Absolutely the one thing that is most attractive about their company is the roots of where they began and actually where they're headed in so just being able to work with them one on one, I think it had been an absolute pleasure because of Kelly is the type of leader that wants to make sure that she empowers her people in so making that investment in the leadership training that they had just a couple of months ago. I have been truly a great investment according to Kelly because her father didn't have the opportunity to create that path for her the leaders within the organization so Kelly felt like it was critical especially during this season up the business for the leaders to understand how to effectively navigate and lead a team and so it was really truly a pleasure to be able to give them some of the leadership foundations to help them to pave it and move forward in their efforts so they can't be successful in their endeavours.

Shannon Bryant(host):

Very good so Kelly it's always great to see female leaders especially in the manufacturing industry in the industry that you're in tell us about any great feats that you've had as a leader in your position.

Kellie Brunn:

Well when we started when I came back one of my goals was to get our women owned certification and that has given us a lot of credibility in that space but at the end of the day I go back and I say we don't hire you know women to fill certain roles we hire the best candidate and we genuinely believe that and we believe that that women are personally I believe they have some different strengths and rounding out the team with the strengths of every single person that comes around so we can get some advantages when it comes to certain contracts but the biggest part of that is that we believe in the right people in the right positions that everybody brings value to the team.

Shannon Bryant(host):

Yeah, I've met most of your folks and they certainly bring a lot of value to your culture that's a great culture really appreciate your company so Kelly and that the dawn this is questions really for both of you.

Dr. Dwan Bryant:

Okay.

Shannon Bryant(host):

How important is it for leaders to integrate a productive work culture that enforces the mission of their company specifically years Kelly?

Kellie Brunn:

So, it's ironic you bring that up after we spent some time in our leadership training earlier this year it was really valuable take away we always get communication we want more communication so Mike what more can we do I communicate practically everything and then I realize we're missing the big goals of communication and that insight taken from that leadership training has forced us as a leadership team to come back and really realign our mission statement which it's time we rewrite it's changing it's evolving a we're an innovative company so who we are and who we want to be is something that we need to think through and we've taken that that revised mission statement and rolled into a new three-year plan and now are rolling it into a one-year strategic plan on how we're going to execute that in the communication isn't just the day to day you know where what time we're going to close on Friday making sure everybody gets the memo it's more of the strategic vision of the company and outlining those exact goals the plan of how we're going to get there and then giving that feedback on the back end of where we are and how each person's contribution is valuable you will not find a more hard working team than ours but I keep saying we don't have to learn that all the hard way there's some lessons learned that Dr. Don was very grateful to should ever regret for she shared with us but at the same time we need to own it ourselves and take it back and implement it and make sure that we're using our lessons learned so we don't lose it along the way.

Shannon Bryant(host):

You can also can I ask Kelly a lot of times we are talking with companies organizations when they're working on strategic plans I always say go and create the front page of the newspaper a year from now what is it going to say what would it say for you in relation to the plan that you're putting together right now.

Kellie Brunn:

XS sights is thriving and all the craziness that has come up that has come through in the past couple of years especially is covid in the changes in personnel and the growth that we've experienced we are going to come out on top and what's going to be an exciting exciting ride for the team.

Shannon Bryant(host):

Awesome so Don can you talk a little bit from a broader perspective of work culture and leadership.

Dr. Dwan Bryant:

No well culture is the heartbeat of an organization in Kelly hit the nail on the head when we talk about culture it's greater than just black or white it's encompasses everyone and that is participate with in that organization and I believe what has been very Intracoastal is where Kelly recognize that everyone needed to make sure that they had a voice and that they could participate as a part of that vision emissions so she had to make sure as a leader that she activated their ability to up respond to what it is that she needed to happen within their organization as it relates to their responsibilities but the one thing I want to mention is that as far as culture you always want to make sure that you're checking the organizational pulse of that particular company because once you flat line that's when you start losing your people so you want to check in regularly to find out that the make sure that everyone is still has a heartbeat for what they do and that's why Kelly in making that investment with her team was so critical because she wants to make sure that she didn't have those ghosts emails of resignation because this is the year of the great resignation so when we check the heart beat out of our organization to make sure that everyone. As a line with that culture that mission in that decision we know where they stand and if in if they are ready to jump ship you know we want to make sure we have aids control so we can see what it is that we can do to kind of meet them where they're at so we can retain that talent and not lose them during the time where we need them the most.

Shannon Bryant(host):

And that's a great segue into the next question so one of the keys focuses of this podcast obviously is workforce development talent acquisition and economic development issues that impact our economy correct and so Kelly what has been one of the greatest hurdles you have had it access sites in attracting retaining quality talent or have you.

Kellie Brunn:

And we have some issues finding people with certain skill sets in our especially in our machine shop. It's kind of a lost art so we hire and people at a higher level of skill set there and that's very hard to find so we've had to transition more to an internal training program and looking for people with attitude and then training them up we

are so blessed to have some brilliant people that work for us that that no programming and how the machine side of things works so that's been a huge blessing for us but those people are very hard to find so it's retaining those talents is critical for our success every single person has a different language I laugh you know it's pretty easy to see the ones whose love languages money. Autonomy flexibility empowerment and giving people when people think that way their spark comes from being able to touch things and create things so of giving a lot of freedom and flexibility and the work is key for those talents but then also seeking out people that are like minded in culture and values and have a desire to want to do more and providing that career path in the long term career path this past year has shown a huge increase in pay for different positions and so being competitive as a small business with large companies offering these really large signing bonuses and finding new people to come and we have to really bank on the fact that they want to grow into a career that is viable and in the future I would say it's definitely been a challenge but we don't have a lot of turnover fortunately we're very family oriented and our team is state we've lost very few people and when that has happened it has been you know if they find something better for them we certainly want to help get everybody to their personal dreams and you know we'll help them whatever that might be get to where they want to go but for the most part it is been a good year for us in that we have not had a lot of issues with covid it fortunately and our team has been able to work and stay working we haven't missed any large blocks of time or had to close so our customers have been able to rely on us to meet their demands and our team has stepped up in every opportunity.

Shannon Bryant(host):

I love that so then that is one of the things talking to businesses and organizations you know. Defining the career path it is important people want to know where can I start work and I finish what does that look like I love the fact that you brought up the fact that you hire for aptitude because if they do have the aptitude for the positions they can always be taught the skills then and that is key and important and that retention piece you know and in building the culture around that because I always say people are the number one investment for any organization and you have really seem to have mastered that your organization so kudos to you and your leadership team.

Kellie Brunn:

Well thank you as we grow we always try to promote from within whenever possible and then strategically bring in some new skills you know as we need them because we don't know what we don't know a lot of times so being able to identify where we want to go and how do we get there clearly with the team with the involvement and then seeking out people with those skills to help us along the way and that's where you guys really stepped up you know we're like do we hire somebody with this leadership skill to come in or is that some a skill that we can find and bring them in and sure enough we developed it and it resonated and it's been a huge blessing for us this past year.

Shannon Bryant(host):

So, Kelly can you talk a little bit about the skill sets in the business acumen that you're seeking and the talent you hire specifically to either the technical jobs leadership positions within the organization.

Kellie Brunn:

So for the technical skills I mean it's running machines it's knowing how to program and do the quality control work reading the blueprints using the equipment that's there those are that's the hardest skill for us to find right now and on the customer service side of things for our access sites I mean finding people that know a lot about the firearms industry and can talk the talk walk the walk in and live with the same purpose of supporting the second amendment and the rights that come with that and that's so it's a big push for us to find people that are like minded and that way.

Shannon Bryant(host):

So, talk a little bit so being in the firearms industry what strategic initiatives have you implemented to intentionally set yourself apart from your competition and who would be your competition can you talk a little bit about that in the firearms industry.

Kellie Brunn:

So we do a lot of production assembly work I would say that our competition is finding people that you know that do that kind of work that our technical and have a fine attention to detail what we attempt to do to set ourselves apart as offer very competitive pay with the benefits package and the flexibility that people need to have that work life balance we hire very slow and we were very very cautious about who we bring into our family and I would say that we work hard to make their work situation as best as it can be at the benefit of the company.

Shannon Bryant(host):

Right Don can you speak a little bit about culture and work force in a competitive environment.

Dr. Dwan Bryant:

So the thing I believe is most relevant during this time for work force culture is having empathy for the people that work within your business structure in a lot of times people particularly workers are attracted to the attitude of the leader do you care do you have the capacity to see beyond just an employee but you know even as a person within this organization I think that really helped shape the culture when the leader shows an interest in that particular worker beyond just them being an employee because when a person feels like they're being seen as an individual and that they have other needs that could potentially impact their work into leader stepped in and find out how they can still be able to meet their needs as a person of influence in that organization and personally because when you come to work you can't separate who you are personally professionally those two go hand in hand you have to marry those together in a way you can still show up authentically so now you're creating a culture where people feel like they're empowered to be who they are rather than coming in pretending or exercise an imposter syndrome where they have to be one person at work on another person at home so when they come together and when we create a call when leaders create a culture that makes it easy for a worker to insert themselves into sync a part of for their beliefs and their value system within that culture then it works out nicely so we're not creating a culture of toxicity we're saying oh well I have to be this person the order to be able to accomplish this goal to promote with particular area that I see myself long term so we're talking about creating this this culture that is going to help retain that talent we

have to make sure that the leader is demonstrating what it looks like to be authentic what it looks like to be empathetic what it looks like to have certain characteristics that embodies long term long lasting results for that company.

Kellie Brunn:

And that's a challenge for us we're always trying to grow the person not the role.

Dr. Dwan Bryant:

Right exactly and in developing I think to this is also a hot topic for the work force is developing leaders with in that organization successors people that you want to keep a long for the long term is so you have to make sure that in this is what you've done Kelly that you invested in that person who has the skill set but not it wasn't completely trained in the area where you needed them to be and so we have to make someone we're making decisions about if a person is worth the investment and this is a part is a cultural issue as well you know looking at okay untrained unskilled which one cannot work with which one is going to be the greatest impact our greatest investment which one is going to work to the benefit for the long term as a successor as a leader as a person that can pick up the baton in route with the vision wrong with the mission that we set for this particular organization and not change the long term of what we want it to be so.

Shannon Bryant(host):

So exactly so Kelly what that what is the mission statement of the company.

Kellie Brunn:

Our mission statement is empowering the good guy to be more prepared self-reliant and increase shooting abilities with functional firearm upgrades. And we do this with mutual respect a passion for excellence seeking out and continuous improvement personal integrity and professionally responsive communication.

Shannon Bryant(host):

Love it love it absolutely love it you are definitely a leading example in our shining star of the clients that we've worked with over the past year so.

Kellie Brunn:

Thank you we got so much out of that training I can't even begin to explain it people still reference remember this remember that. She eats my words even but I love that accountability because it got us really all on the same page and that reset was exactly what we needed coming out of covid and everybody's burnt out professionally and personally. It's you can just see it and everybody's face and we've been very busy this past year so what's been a sprint and recognizing that we not only survive this but we came out where we wanted to be and now, we need a reset to think we're gonna set ourselves up for success for your next year and it was the foundation was perfectly laid Sam thank you.

Dr. Dwan Bryant:

What I ownership comes with accountability and I think you killed yourself accountable for how you want to develop the people within the organization so it really caused him to own what they are that what they were responsible for so.

Kellie Brunn:

When I came back working for our family business I realize we were so fortunate that we have a lot of employees that have been with us for so long and that's you know a metric of success of businesses how the succession that you've had for people in your organization and I realized when you get that as an as an owner of a business you owe them something back you have to make sure that if this business fails and they've been working for you for twenty years there are viable member of the work force and they can go out and get an equal or better job somewhere else and if you don't give them that then you're not giving them the stability that you that you need and that's a disservice as an owner so I realize that there are some things and as a training in a leadership team that we didn't develop properly and they learned from watching my brother and my dad and I and we needed to break that cycle and give them some more solid skill sets and tools on their belt to be successful whether it be with us or anybody else and I want people to work for us because they get to they want to they choose to and at the end of the day the only thing we know is things will change and it's our reaction to and in developing ourselves along the way so that we can handle those changes that's critical to the success and these people have given us years of their life so making sure that they're set up for the future is really important to me.

Shannon Bryant(host):

That is such an awesome statement you really changed the trajectory of someone not only their own individual career paths but the trajectory of their family for the long term right changing that pathway for them and it's you know nothing makes me cringe more when I go into an organization and we talk about work force in the companies say I don't want to train my people I don't want to invest in my people because then they're going to leave me well guess what they're gonna leave you anyway and you have really been a shining example of what that looks like so kudos to you

Kellie Brunn:

When I had at my previous job I would entertain other offers or think through talking to a recruiter because I wanted to make sure that's where I wanted to be and I and I encourage people if they're questioning like you know look out and see what's there this may not be the right place for you but if you choose to be here and it's mutually beneficial I'm gonna make it as best as I can but at the same time you don't owe me this the this is your choice and I believe that whole heartedly and I think if people are in the right relationships professionally personally then then it can really be a beautiful thing and if it's not your heart's not there then it's not gonna be good for anybody.

Shannon Bryant(host):

You remind me a little bit I think it's the model and I'm guns probably screw this up but I think it's the model of Taco Bell of all places I think their motto is something they'll start here or stop or start here and stay here and so it gives them the option of you know start with the company and then go on to bigger and better things if that's what you want or you have the option to stay with the organization for the long term and so it's kind of and to some of the discussion here today.

Dr. Dwan Bryant:

Could I answer really quick?

Shannon Bryant(host):

Absolutely is it.

Dr. Dwan Bryant:

So but how comfortable is that for a leader when they know we had discussed this during a leadership training is if you have someone that has been on the team who's been loyal for years like I know you had mentioned that some workers that your dad hired and have been there but if you know that their time is expired that they may need to move on how comfortable are you with having that conversation where you're still looking out for their best interests and the interests of the company how do you have how do you handle that and say okay you did a great thing here we love everything that you contribute but we feel like how do you have that conversation well you know that it's time for an employee to move on.

Kellie Brunn:

Those are critical conversations you're afraid. You know one of the key takeaways I had was that you had mentioned you can't let the company be dictated by one or two people and what they what they might contribute in a negative way to the company so we've faced a lot of the issues that maybe we had put under the rug for a little bit too long and it's been it's been quite eye opening that even just that self-awareness has gotten people into a different mindset and perspective and the constant feedback and going back in and making sure to be very clear about that we've got a lot of issues corrected but at the same time I take my responsibility at the at the business very part very personal in that we have a family is counting on us and we have to move forward in the right direction of the company for the sake. All the rest of the people that work there so the conversations have mentally gotten a lot easier for the reason that I know that my heart is in the right place and if that person is not in a particularly good spot in our company they're going to be better served somewhere else maybe they need some encouragement maybe they need some help in development figuring out what that is and I'm certainly willing to for the people that have you know showing their loyalty all this time to help them find that next path.

Shannon Bryant(host):

So kill your brother and your family owned business obviously I know it's you your brother your mom is still involved in the organization can you speak a little bit about prior to me entering into higher education I work for a family owned business for seventeen years it certainly has its pros cons and celebrations it's bad days and good days? can you talk a little bit about your perspective of you know you had left the business and now you came back and just being a family owned business and what that means?

Kellie Brunn:

I love it I can't imagine working with a better group of people my mom and my brother included I have to remind my mom just because we all work together doesn't mean we can discuss what time we're doing violin lessons in our morning meetings but. I can't imagine anything better than getting to pick to work with your family and there are definitely some challenges we think differently. If you've ever met my mom

and my brother you can see that we're very different people but we are all completely of the same faith and completely of the same thought that we want to be the first choice for our consumers for our customers for our employees for strategic partners and our suppliers and while we embrace our legacy we are looking forward and development growth and innovation so however we can get there as a family we're committed to doing so and we have a lot of respect for each other my brother is a visionary he's way smarter than me he's such a charismatic person and he's the nicest person I've ever met so he brings a skillset and mindset that's different than me whose logical execution all very practical slow to move cautious and then my mom she just you know constantly asks questions and pokes holes and you never know where she's going but it keeps you on your toes and keeps things light and she's relate to our to our core gives back in every single way that she can her talents and treasures to the community and puts that back in perspective when you're blessed to use your relevation to blast back to community so we all come together and bring our thoughts but at the end of the day our core stays the same.

Shannon Bryant(host):

That's right and I have been blessed to meet both your mother and your brother. Great people and it's you know better together for certain so Kelly really appreciate your time today any last thoughts or comments that you would like to make to our listening audience about being a leader in this industry anything at all that you would like to add.

Kellie Brunn:

My biggest take away from these past couple of years is to realize how burnt out. I've become and I see it in all of our team and so I have decided that I'm going to figure out how to create that spark of joy it back and myself and also all of our team. So I would just encourage the small business owners to seek out some help and look for opportunities and you know just like we talked about with the training here and realize that it's going to get better it's going to get easier this past year of uncertainty and struggle has worn on you even if you don't recognize it and it's also worn on the teams that we have so setting ourselves up taking a break at the end of this year and 2022 is we're going to springboard from and everybody else can have that same perspective but you have to set yourself up for it.

Shannon Bryant(host):

Those are great last words for the podcast today Kelly said thank you so much for being here today Don thank you appreciate your feedback and working with the organization's Kelly any year from now we're gonna be looking for the front-page article this is XS sights is thriving that is great although thank you so much and we think the listening audience and we look forward to seeing you all on the next edition of The Work Force Lanes.

Kellie Brunn:

Thank you

Dr. Dwan Bryant:

Thank you.