



Regions Next Step Podcast

Young Professionals Series: Jumpstarting Your Career & Leveraging Social Media

In this podcast, we explore how five young professionals in Houston jumpstarted their careers and found their passions. We also hear their perspective about how to best leverage social media to boost professional development.

Tune in to hear about how modern professionals are approaching career advancement in today's business environment, as told by:

- Will Davis, Branch Manager and Vice President at Regions Bank's Alder Trails Branch
- Pierce Bush, CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters Lone Star
- Kelly McCormick, Managing Director at UH RedLabs
- Grant Pinkerton, Founder of Pinkerton BBQ
- Ryan Soroka, President and Co-Founder of 8th Wonder Brewery

Episode Transcript

Narrator:

You're listening to Real Talk with Regions. In this special podcast recorded at a panel discussion before a live audience, Chris Matthews, Finance and Innovation Reporter at the Houston Business Journal, interviews five accomplished young leaders from the Houston Business community to discuss how they jumpstarted their careers, found their passions and how to best leverage social media to boost professional development.

In part one, we'll meet each of these professionals and get to know how they found their passion for their career and best practices for fast tracking your career growth. Will Davis is Branch Manager and Vice President at Regions Bank's Alder Trails branch. Pierce Bush is CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters Lone Star. Kelly McCormick is managing director at University of Houston Red Labs. Grant Pinkerton is the founder of Pinkerton BBQ, and lastly Ryan Soroka is president and co-founder of 8th Wonder Brewery. Now, let's hear from the city's young professional leaders themselves brought to you by Regions Bank.

Pierce Bush:

My name is Pierce Bush. I am the CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters Lone Star. Not a native Houstonian because I was born in Colorado but pretty much grew up here and spent my whole life and my entire career post college here. So, honored to be here with you all.



Will Davis:

Good afternoon. My name is Will Davis. I'm with Regions Bank out of our Alder Trails office. I'm a branch manager Vice President. Been in the financial industry for over 12 years and excited to be here tonight and share some insight as well.

Kelly McCormick:

Hi. I'm Kelly McCormick and I'm the managing director of RedLabs which is the University of Houston's startup accelerator. So, I help University of Houston students, faculty and recent alumni launch startups.

Grant Pinkerton:

I'm Grant Pinkerton. I'm the owner of Pinkerton's BBQ. I am a native Houstonian and original inner loop. So, we have a restaurant in the heights and we're opening another one in San Antonio.

Ryan Soroka:

Hello, everyone. My name is Ryan Soroka. I am President, Co-Founder and hype man of 8th Wonder Brewery and Distillery. I'd like to welcome all of you here. Thank you for being here. I am a native Houstonian, born and raised. Then I went to college in New Orleans and moved right back to Houston. So, it's bayou, swamp and bayou for me. I know nothing else and I love it. But excited to have you all here.

Chris Matthews:

Great and thank you for hosting us here, Ryan. Here someone to pick on you and have you start it off. So, tell us your story and sort of how you jump started your career.

Pierce:

Sure, so I graduated college in 2008. Anybody else graduate college in 2008 or 2009? Nobody. Okay. One guy. So, not the best time to graduate college especially I went to the University of Texas in Austin which is a great university. But I was an American Studies major which unlike say you're a petroleum engineer where you kind of know what you're going to do like American Studies is like a liberal arts major and a liberal arts school. So it's very wide reaching.



I grew up in a family though that was very much dedicated to the notion that you should always find a way to be a part of something that mattered, something that was bigger than yourself. So, I graduated. I came to Big Brothers Big Sisters first and foremost just as a volunteer. I never dreamed when I signed up to be a big brother. I got matched with a young man named Jaylen. Never dreamed in a million years I'd actually work for Big Brothers Big Sisters Lone Star. But I fell in love with the mission.

At that same time, I started working for Wind Energy Group. I did -- that led me to a venture capital group and kind of out of the blue I was actually on the board as a really young board member for Big Brothers Big Sisters here in Houston. I got approached about a job to come just as a fundraiser. Frankly, I was thinking oh my gosh this might be a great opportunity for me to go differentiate myself, not just be another dude in finance, right, so go be a part of a mission I really cared about and maybe use that experience to go to business school. But what I love about my current role is it's really challenging. Our agency is the biggest affiliate Big Brothers Big Sisters agency in the country. We cover about half the state of Texas. It's eight agencies merged together. I have a staff of 175. We have 6,000 volunteers that are there. And so, my plans to go to business school kind of evaporated when leadership opportunities opened up at Big Brothers Big Sisters. So, I think to answer your question that's a pretty rambling answer. I would just say the important thing is to find something that you really care deeply about. Doesn't mean your job is going to be easy. In fact, your job is probably going to be harder because the more you care about it the less you're going to sleep, the more you're going to stay awake, the more you're going to wrestle thinking about it. But always try to find something that is challenging.

When I took on this job as CEO I was 29 years old. I had been working at the agency for three and a half. We were losing money every year because we had lost government funding. Our mission was the same. Our outcomes are amazing. The number of kids on our waiting list were incredible. And I knew we had to think about how do we do our business differently. And to me that was such a fun big challenge and it's still a fun big challenge. So, I think the best way to launch your career is to do something that matters, have it benefit other people. In other words, don't make it just about yourself. And find something that really challenges you and grow into that challenge. The best way to learn is by doing. And that's my biggest belief probably.

Will:

I would say the same thing. Find something that you're passionate about. So, for me it was, college job was in banking and the hours were good and it worked out well with where I was going to school and I graduated with my degree in business management.



I stayed with the bank and moved back to Houston from east Texas where I was going to college and I found my passion. Really being able to help people, helping that family buy their first home, helping that family buy their child's first car, helping that family send their first child to college. Being a part of something bigger than myself. Learning. How to help them any way it was possible. Whether it was budgeting, whether it was you know again saving for retirement to buy that RV they want to travel the country in. Whatever it is being able to be a part of that for those families and make a difference and every day when I went home that I made a difference in someone's life but also enjoying them at the same time.

Kelly:

So, my career is kind of bounced all over the place. And I've gone from things that I've gone to like grad school programs and to law school and ended up not doing that and I think one of the most important things when you're trying to figure out to do with a career is just to like bounce around and try things until you figure out what you really want. I think passion is really important. And I love the idea of being passionate about your work, but I think too many people are waiting for passion to fall into their lap. You know, they want to just be able to know their passion, and I think what helped me actually find something that I'm passionate about in my career and move forward in my career was literally just bouncing around and trying new things. And not stopping until I found something that I was really passionate about, and I get to work with people every day at the University of Houston with entrepreneurship program with students that are really passionate about what they do and excited about their startup and their work so I think landed some place really great but I see them all the time to try new things and do new things just to try and figure out like what the best path is and I really believe in doing that, getting out there and trying things, finding things you're excited about.

Grant:

For me, I think one of the things I tell people is it's a lot easier to figure out what the heck you're not passionate about, right. So, I love pizza but I'm not actually passionate about pizza. I'm passionate about business and I'm passionate about growth and I'm passionate about implementing and not wearing pants at work and wearing shorts you know. Those are things that I'm passionate about. And so, for me it was a lot easier to sit down when I got out of school and say I don't want to work at a desk job. I want to be my own boss. I actually can cook really good barbecue. So, I think that that is something that I can sell to people. And kind of back myself into my career that way and open those doors. Like I said, sometimes it's a lot easier to find what you don't want to do and let that guide you into what you want to do and that can be a good bouncing off point for things you can do in the future and when you're passionate about something a lot of times you're willing to, like he said, invest a lot of time and energy into it and make it successful you know.



Ryan:

I studied at Tulane University in New Orleans, finance and marketing degree. And growing up in Houston a big food and beverage town and New Orleans is probably the biggest food and beverage town in the country, definitely was something that I was passionate about that seems to be the common theme here, passion, right. But so I graduated from Tulane in '06 a few years before the recession, but I was a bright eyed financial consultant here in Houston and you know kind of first hire, first fired during the recession.

So I got laid off and I hit the bar and restaurant scene pretty hard. I went out and enjoyed myself. I bartended. I worked at restaurants and I realized this is something that I love. I love hospitality. I love people. I love food and beverage. So, I decided to go back to school, and I applied to the University of Houston and entered into the master's program for hotel and restaurant management. And then the next semester, I applied and got accepted to the MBA program at Bower College, and I skipped something actually.

At Tulane, my friends went abroad junior year and I said I need to get a hobby. So I got a dog and I learned how to brew beer. And that was something that I stuck with throughout my time in New Orleans and moving back to Houston, and so when I got laid off and I went back to grad school I was still brewing beer. And I started writing really this light bulb came on and I realize that we're the fourth largest city in America and there was at that point only two breweries in the city of Houston. And I said something isn't right. There's an opportunity here. And I started writing a business plan and I met one of my business partners at the program and a few years later we launched 8th Wonder. But if I had to say one thing, I would say invest in yourself whether that's through education or through real life experience. It's something that you are passionate about and want to gain experience in. It's crucial whether you're going to get the education or the real life experience I would say do one or the other or perfect scenario do both, but that's a sure fire way to figure out if you can do what you're passionate about.

Narrator:

Certainly. Career growth poses plenty of challenges and to reach success you must first work through those career challenges. Leveraging smart advice, tools and resources like those we learned about in today's discussion are great ways to set yourself up for success. Helping you achieve your goals is something Regions Bank understands.

Regions Next Step is a financial education program offering advice, tools and guidance to help you accomplish your goals at every stage of your life. No matter your goals, Regions will help you with each step you want to take.



Chris:

So, Will, I wanted to ask what resources do young professionals have today that weren't previously available maybe that can help people fast track their career growth?

Will:

Well, everybody is holding one right now which is a smartphone, and social media is a big part of that. LinkedIn is a great network to connect with influencers that can provide you with content for any type of industry you're trying to get into to make the connections for leaders that you are trying to be a part of. Just be mindful that it isn't Facebook, and it is a professional networking social media site but having that available to you. But also I'd say alumni associations are another great one to join for your college. You meet people from all different walks of life, all different generations and you all have a common ground because you all went to the same school. So, being able to get out and network at some alumni associations you meet key people and key players and different industries you may be exploring in, maybe interested in or people that you may already be working with now and you have that common ground.

Grant:

It's a necessity now. We are driven by 140 characters and a picture at a time. We with our eyes and we let those 140 characters, or I guess now it's like 240, dictate like where we go. So, I have I always like to say 140 because if you just write 240 it's too many but you have 140 characters given to you to come eat my barbecue over nine other places in town. And you know social media, how many people get online, as much as I detest Yelp, Yelp is technically a form of social media and I'm sure that a lot of you guys have it. But that is something that's a business driver for restaurants. I try to choose not to use it or entertain it, but that's something that the consumer is using to look at us.

So, from strictly a barbecue standpoint that's me making sure every tray looks perfect, making sure my managers know how everything is supposed to go. Why? Because every photograph -- I mean every tray of food we're sending out is going to be photographed and could end up online. And you know ten, 15 years ago that wasn't the case. It could taste great but not look good and everybody tells you to go. Now if it tastes great and looks crappy, nobody ends up coming. You don't get 150,000 likes on a really horrible piece of brisket right. You get one if it's like dripping and super moist and everybody wants to eat it. It could taste exactly the same but your impact is going to be a lot different.

Ryan:



I mean what we do is an extension of hospitality as well. I would say we're definitely the food and beverage obviously industry and it's a key driver in what we do and it's a way for us to connect personally with customers and fans and really keep our finger on the pulse of current trends, the marketplace, our competitors, what is successful out there and what's not successful out there. And honestly it's a way for us to project our voice and share our story and our personality.

When we opened, we were the sixth brewery in the city of Houston in 2013. Now there's over 65 breweries in the city of Houston. To put things in perspective on a national level when we opened, we were in like that 3,000 brewery count. Now there's over 7,000, some say close to 8,000 breweries in the nation. So, look we all make beer or spirits or what have you and in a crowded marketplace the one thing we can do, and as Grant just touched on is that people make purchasing decisions with their eyes first and so for us being able to share our story, our voice, our personality, our brand and really stand out is a huge way to drive business and connect with the community.

Narrator:

And that concludes part one of a special three-part podcast recorded live in Houston. Presented by Real Talk with Regions Bank. Look for part two, where we'll continue our discussion with these leaders and hear all about overcoming career obstacles, workplace challenges and achieving better communication in the workplace. Thank you for listening.

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