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Chad Chancellor: Welcome to this week's episode of the Next Move Group We Are Jobs podcast focused on creating economic growth for small to mid-sized companies, communities, and non-profit organizations. I'm Chad Chancellor, the co-founder of Next Move Group and today we've got Bob Leak with us. Bob is from the Winston-Salem Business Inc. over in North Carolina; the Winston-Salem Economic Development Group. Bob, you're kind of a legend in this business. So, I thank you for being with us today.

Bob Leak: I'm not sure I'd call it a legend. I think maybe it just means I'm old, but I've been really blessed in economic development. I was born into the business. Some of your listeners might know my dad; Bob Leak Sr. He and Bob Goforth had a very successful consulting business for years.

Dad was head of the North Carolina and South Carolina Economic Development Programs at one time and when I graduated from college, it was like what am I going to do? I can sell soap for Procter & Gamble or I could go into the insurance business or who knows what. One day, I was having a little heart to heart with dad about my future and he said you know, you all just write down in a ledger what you like in the business and what you don't want in the business and then let's talk. So, I spent a little bit of time doing that, came back, we sat down at the breakfast table. He took a look at it, started reading the things I wanted and he said you know what, it sounds a lot like what I've been doing the last 20 years.

So, he was able to make some introductions. I got in the business in Greenville, South Carolina back in 1981, have been in it since, but I've been in Winston-Salem for 30 years.

Chad Chancellor: Wow! So, he was in business 20 years. My first job, the first report I read was a Leak-Goforth workforce report I think it was. So, your family name was the first one I ever saw.

Bob Leak: Oh, there you go. He and Goforth were-- they were the legends in the business, not me. I've been just kind of tagging along, but I learned a lot from them. I've learned a lot from a whole lot of people in this industry and it's a great industry. It's interesting back when I got in the business, literally in 1981, nobody got into economic development. There was no school for economic development. There was no formal program.

Somebody knew you or you knew somebody and they needed somebody. So, you got in the door and you kind of learned by doing. And now, you've got schools, you've got EDI, you've got a couple of universities that have programs. I think you just lectured at one and the reality is you can get in this business now as kind of a normal business track.

Chad Chancellor: That's right.

Bob Leak: 30 years ago, it was a little bit harder to do.

Chad Chancellor: Well, to the folks out there who are listening and maybe-- whether they are young or if this is a new career stop for them and they are just getting into economic development, what tips would you have for them? Two kinds of tips: 1) how do you make it a good career, but 2) how do you learn how to close deals and be productive? What would be your tips for both those?

Bob Leak: Well, what you're talking about is kind of the essence of economic development. You've got to identify opportunities, you've got to assist opportunities, and you've got to close opportunities. I think for people just getting in the business, first thing I would do is say find yourself a good mentor or two in the business and talk to them. Find out how they did it, why they do it, etc. I would attend events like SEDC and IEDC and your state economic development program if your team will let you do that so that you can put yourself in the audience with other people that are in the business.

And then what I always have respected are the younger folks that have worked with many saying hey, I'd like to go with you while you're making that pitch or I'd like to go on sales calls with you or do you mind if I join you while you're showing that building so they can kind of learn as they go and then ultimately, I think people can-- if you're good with people and you're a problem solver, you'll be great in economic development.

Chad Chancellor: Well, we're recording this in SEDC in early August. I'm not sure when it will air, but for the listeners, SEDC is Southern Economic Development Council. I think it's the 17 southern states, isn't it? 17 or 18.

Bob Leak: It is; 17 southern states from Maryland all the way to Texas.

Chad Chancellor: Mississippi has always been strong.

Bob Leak: Mississippi is strong. Alabama is strong. Georgia is really strong. Texas is really strong.

Chad Chancellor: I got in it in 2004 when I first started and some of the first folks I met were through it and you got relationships here 15 years later.

Bob Leak: That's right.

Chad Chancellor: I think it's just-- and you were the chairman at one time if I remember correctly.

Bob Leak: I was. Two years ago I was the chairman and--

Chad Chancellor: That means you don't have to do any hard work anymore--

Bob Leak: No.

Chad Chancellor: --or you still have to do the work?

Bob Leak: You know what? I didn't pack a sport coat for this trip, you know. I figured I'll sit in the back and I'll listen and then I can critique later--

Chad Chancellor: That's exactly right.

Bob Leak: --as we go along.

Chad Chancellor: That's right. So, for the folks out there, I encourage you to get involved in SEDC if you're in one of those southern states. If not, get involved in a regional deal because if you just go to your states stuff, you're going to meet everybody in that state, but you never know when-- and actually, we've had projects where I've had to call you because I didn't know somebody in North Carolina and just say hey,--

Bob Leak: Absolutely.

Chad Chancellor: --what do you think? I think those regional groups and IEDC can really be helpful.

Bob Leak: Well, it's a relationship business and the more people you know in the business, the better you're going to do. Consultants will call you, but even better, as you advance in your career, it's not going to be likely you're going to be in a place for 30 years like I am. Most economic developers change in five-seven, but ironically, I'm only the third longest-tenured North Carolinian in economic development.

Chad Chancellor: Really?

Bob Leak: We've got a lady down in Wilson, North Carolina and a guy over in Gastonia, North Carolina that are a year or two ahead of me in terms of longevity in one place.

Chad Chancellor: Did you start out as a CEO in Winston-Salem--

Bob Leak: I did not.

Chad Chancellor: --or did you work your way up?

Bob Leak: No. I was actually in the real estate business in Raleigh doing commercial real estate and I got hired to be vice president working for Rick Wedell who a lot of people know and Rick left after about a year. I was promoted and so the rest, as they say, is history.

Chad Chancellor: Awesome. Well, I know Winston-Salem is really growing. You all got some good stuff going on. So, tell these folks a little bit about Winston-Salem.

Bob Leak: We do. Winston-Salem is a great mid-sized community kind of centrally located in the middle of North Carolina between Raleigh and Charlotte. Raleigh and Charlotte get all the press, but the nice thing about Winston and Greensboro and High Point which make up our regional-- kind of our regional group, we've had steady growth.

We see a lot of manufacturing and distribution, logistics kind of projects. Big in health care, starting to have a burgeoning airspace business with our airport and Honda Jet is headquartered there for instance. HAECO has got a big fixed base operation to do maintenance and repair and so we've seen a lot of steady growth over the years.

We're focused on trying to expand the office market a little bit more now. We've had some changes and little disruption and the financial industry with BB&T merging with Sun Trust and that will change the landscape a little bit in the region, but overall, we've been really steady and it's been a real good place to do economic development.

Chad Chancellor: Well, I know you all recently did some regional branding. So, why don't you talk a little bit about that?

Bob Leak: Well, we did. I think that as your listeners may know, kind of coming up with a brand is a very challenging proposition because regardless of how you do it and what you come up with, there's going to be a faction of people that don't like it. There is going to be people who don't understand it. People like the old one, but we realized as we were out making calls on people around the country and in fact, around the world, when you tried to tell them I'm from the Piedmont of North Carolina, unless you live relatively close to there, you had no idea where that was.

Chad Chancellor: Yes, I don't know where that is myself.

Bob Leak: No, you don't. You don't. You can't find it on a map. There's no website. It's just an area that we've coined as the Piedmont Triad because there's three communities and piedmont means foot of the mountains and we happen to be right at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains, but if you didn't know that, you wouldn't know that.

So, we engaged DCI about a year and a half ago with an eye toward what is our it, okay? And as we work through what is our it, we decided that the best thing we could do to help people understand what we were is come up with more of an area description. Well, in the process of doing that, we looked at-- there's a highway called U.S. Highway 421 that links Winston-Salem to Fayetteville, North Carolina. Along that highway are four mega sites.

Chad Chancellor: Wow!

Bob Leak: Four certified developable mega sites. The smallest one is about 1200 acres. The largest one is about 3,000 acres.

Chad Chancellor: Some real mega sites.

Bob Leak: Real mega sites. They've all got all the utilities and everything else and they all are linked by this highway and so, looking at that, that highway is in the center of North Carolina and so, at the end of all of the discussion, we looked at about 12 different names. We debated everything and finally settled on one called the North Carolina Core and while that's again is not on a map in terms of being able to find the North Carolina Core, at least if you look in that North Carolina and you think core, you're going to look kind of in the middle and that's exactly where we are.

Chad Chancellor: Makes sense.

Bob Leak: So, we've taken it on the road. We've been to Chicago, we've been to Greenville, we're getting ready to go to Dallas, making the tour to see a lot of site consultants and others and as much as what we're doing on that visit is saying hey, we'd love some opportunities, we're introducing the concept and saying does it resonate? And I'm pleased to say that almost every group that we

talked to said boy, that's a lot better than Piedmont Triad. At least they have a concept of what that is and where that is.

Chad Chancellor: I can picture right now that you see it on a map and DCI does great work.

Bob Leak: They do great work and they focus entirely on economic development marketing and they came in and did probably half a dozen focus groups. They interviewed a bunch of people. We had from citizens on the street all the way to CEOs got to weigh in. There was a website set up where you could kind of weigh in on what you thought and at the end of the day, I think we had a pretty good one.

Chad Chancellor: Yes. Well, I admire you for doing it. We've been working on a new website and branding for our company for a year and I'm near to killing it.

Bob Leak: It's hard.

Chad Chancellor: It is. It is hard and you always wonder what are we not thinking of and we're about to hopefully come out. Well, probably by the time this podcast goes up, but it took us a year of real studying and hiring consultants to help us.

Bob Leak: But you want to do it right. It's not cheap--

Chad Chancellor: Yes, you don't want to mess it up.

Bob Leak: --and you kind of get one chance to do it right and so, you're right. You want to make sure that you put the time in.

Chad Chancellor: I see you got you Wyndham Championship shirt on.

Bob Leak: I do.

Chad Chancellor: We're recording this the week of the Wyndham Championship in Greensboro.

Bob Leak: Yes, Sunday afternoon and right now, there are about five guys within three shots of the lead playing in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Chad Chancellor: I could start it all in a minute

Bob Leak: What's really exciting about that tournament is the Wyndham last year stepped up in addition to the FedEx Cup for you golfers out there, there's the Wyndham Championship Cup and that is a \$10 million pool of money with the winning golfer throughout the season up until this tournament. This is the last tournament in the series. The lead person gets \$2 million and then it works its way down to the top 10 or 12 and they split that \$10 million and it's the next step into the FedEx Cup which-- those playoffs start in a couple of weeks. So, we have a lot of golfers that have come to the Wyndham purely for the opportunity to hopefully advance in the FedEx Cup rankings so they have a better chance of making it to Atlanta for the championships.

Chad Chancellor: So, how close is that to Winston-Salem?

Bob Leak: It took me about 26 minutes to get to the golf course and that's with traffic. So, it's literally-- Greensboro and Winston are connected by Interstate 40 and there are about 16 miles apart.

Chad Chancellor: Did you play in the Pro-Am?

Bob Leak: Two years ago I did. I didn't this year. I believe your partner played in it this year.

Chad Chancellor: Yes, we're kind of or somebody was to invite Alex Metzger, he'd play with Charley Hoffman.

Bob Leak: He did. Unfortunately, they had a little lightning problem and they got about six holes in.

Chad Chancellor: Oh, I heard that.

Bob Leak: They had to call it, but I think he had a great time. I spent a little time with him after and he seemed to be-- really enjoyed his time and said Charley was a good guy to play with.

Chad Chancellor: You know just watching the tour if I was going to pick one, I'd love to. He just seems fun watching him. Some of them are really serious.

Bob Leak: Well, most of them are serious. That's their job, but you can get lucky and get a go and it makes it a lot of fun.

Chad Chancellor: That tournament left for a while, didn't it? It came back?

Bob Leak: Well, no. It never left, but it has changed dates and it has changed names and it has changed golf courses, but if you look at the history of the Wyndham Championship, it used to be the Greater Greensboro Open, the GGO. Guys like Sam Snead, older crowd--

Chad Chancellor: Yes, he won there.

Bob Leak: He won it several times. He won every time he played there, but that is one of the oldest continuous operating PGA tournaments on tour. So, it didn't ever leave. It never shut down, but it changed from a couple of different golf courses in the area to where it is now; Sedgefield and I think it's got a good home. The Wyndham just renewed their sponsorship for I believe another 15 years, so they're set. They're in a good place.

Chad Chancellor: I remember watching that as a boy. It seemed like it was in spring then.

Bob Leak: It was. It was in the spring. I say it's moved around. They kept looking for more advantageous slots because in the spring it was a week or two before the Masters and if you'd already qualified for the Masters, you were laid out so you could practice and get ready for the first major of the year.

Chad Chancellor: Right. Well, our listeners know I love sports and I know you're a North Carolina man. So, I can't let you get out of here without talking about-- you Mack Brown-- I'm sure you'd rather talk about basketball.

Bob Leak: I'd love to talk about basketball, but I'll talk about football.

Chad Chancellor: You've got Mack Brown now.

Bob Leak: We're in a good spot for a while. Mack left North Carolina twenty-something years ago to go to Texas and obviously, he had a very successful career in Texas and then left there and was on the air doing play by play.

Chad Chancellor: He was really good on the air.

Bob Leak: He was very good on-air and he's-- while he's a little bit older, he has come back to North Carolina with a vengeance and he's hired great staff. He has really ramped up in-state recruiting, which we had a challenge with over the years. People would leave the state and go to

South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, wherever to play and the better players left the state and so, we have fought that battle for years.

I understand from some of my colleagues that have tickets that the season has been sold out for the first time in a long time. There's an awful lot of excitement about Carolina football this year. We don't expect to win the championship. We don't expect to even win the SEC Championship. We've been three and seven or three and eight for the last number of years and weren't really showing a whole lot of promise. So, anything better than that is going to be good.

Again, I think that Mack brings an energy and people know him. He was kind of in the Dean Smith era if you follow basketball. They were there together and were kind of colleagues at one time.

Chad Chancellor: I remember he had a great team. They were highly right one year when Florida State had all those great teams.

Bob Leak: They were and we've had a lot of players that played Carolina under Mack go on and have a good pro career. He knows how to coach and what's even better, he knows how to recruit. He gets a lot of really good young coaches around him and kind of steps back and lets them coach and I think that's really the way towards success.

Chad Chancellor: I was in Kansas City this week and Les Miles went to Kansas. I will be following North Carolina and Kansas just out of curiosity to see how Les does at Kansas

Bob Leak: See how he do.

Chad Chancellor: I think North Carolina is better set up to win football than Kansas, so we'll see Mack's--

Bob Leak: They're two mighty good basketball schools, so the worst case we'll wait three months then it's game on for us.

Chad Chancellor: I was at the-- Carolina beat Kentucky in the Elite Eight in Memphis two years ago or three. Remember when May made that great shot?

Bob Leak: I do.

Chad Chancellor: Well, I've worked in Kentucky, so I've got all kind of Kentucky friends. So, I was one of the few rooting for North Carolina. I don't root for Kentucky.

Bob Leak: We appreciate that.

Chad Chancellor: I lived up there with them, so I can't root for them. They win so much I was one of the few in Memphis rooting for North Carolina. So, I played my little part.

Bob Leak: We appreciate all the help we can get.

Chad Chancellor: You all went to win the national championship. Bob, thank you for being with us today. I've looked up to you for many years and we've known each other through SEDC and I really appreciate it. Is there anything that I didn't ask you that you'd like to share with the audience?

Bob Leak: No. The only thing I would say is if you're thinking about economic development as a career, I think you'll find that it is a great career. You're not going to get rich necessarily, but at the end of the day and at the end of your career, you can look back at things you've had a hand in; businesses coming to your community or expanding in your community, new jobs where people get to go to work, expansion of the tax base. You've made your community better. You've made your region better. You've made your state better and that's an awful good career if you can do that.

Chad Chancellor: And I will add too for the folks out there that may be just getting in that people like Bob they will help you.

Bob Leak: Oh, yes.

Chad Chancellor: I've probably counted three times since we started our business and the conversations are less than five minutes, but hey, I need this. So, don't be bashful. This is an industry where while everybody competes fiercely, everybody really helps each other if you get to know them. So, for the folks just getting in the profession, I would go to organizations like SEDC and meet people because you just never know when there are going to be able to help you.

Bob Leak: Yes and the cool thing is for those of you getting in the business, again, there are several YP or young professional groups that are springing up. SEDC has one. I think IEDC is working on them. A lot of states have them. If you're young, get involved in that because that way

you'll meet your peers and your fellow colleagues and together you can kind of map your future in economic development.

Chad Chancellor: That's right. Well, Bob, thank you for being with us today.

Bob Leak: Thanks for having me, Chad.

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Chad Chancellor: A special thank you to Younger Associates for recording, editing, and publishing this podcast for us. I encourage you to visit their website at younger-associates.com.