

Something Extra EP 112 - Kyle McClellan

Lisa Nichols: Chromosomes, little strands of nucleic acids and proteins, are the fundamental genetic instructions that tell us who we are at birth. Most people are born with 46 chromosomes, but each year in the United States, about 6,000 people are born with an extra chromosome, making them a person with Down syndrome. If you've ever encountered someone with Down syndrome, you know that they are some of the kindest, most joyful people you will ever meet. They truly have something extra.

My name is Lisa Nichols, and I have spent the last 24 years as both the CEO of Technology Partners and as a mother to Ally. Ally has something extra in every sense of the word. I have been blessed to be by her side as she impacts everyone she meets. Through these two important roles as CEO and mother to Ally, I have witnessed countless life lessons that have fundamentally changed the way I look at the world. While you may not have an extra chromosome, every leader has something extra that defines who you are.

Join me as I explore this something extra in leaders from all walks of life, and discover how that difference in each of them has made a difference in their companies, their families, their communities, and in themselves.

Lisa: I am thrilled to have Kyle McClellan on the show today. Kyle is a former pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals and is the founder and president of Brace for IMPACT 46. Kyle, thank you so much for being on the show today. I am so excited about our conversation. You and I have had a chance to visit, and there's just so many awesome things that you're doing right now that I want our listeners to hear about, so thank you for being here.

Kyle McClellan: No problem. Thanks for having me.

Lisa: Well, let's just jump right into it. I think people know you as a Cardinals pitcher, and then I think you went to the Texas Rangers for a while. I want to talk about that, but let's back up a little bit because people may not know how you grew up.

The funny part and the ironic part about this trip is that purposely-- I'll be dead honest. I didn't want to do international. I wanted to be in St. Louis. I'm born in St. Louis, I'm raised in St. Louis. St. Louis supported me throughout my entire career, and I wanted to support St. Louis back through that. International wasn't where I thought that we would end up.

What I quickly learned was that there was some selfish intent into that that maybe I didn't know at the time, but I think deep down inside there were some selfish desires of like, "This is going to build my name in the community." There's some selfish stuff to it. What I also realized is how big the kingdom is on that trip in Haiti. What I realized is God loves those kids in Haiti just as much as he loves my kids, and that changed my life.

Before that, I would tell you that my kids were more important. The people in my bubble, the people in my city, my interaction, they're more important, but God doesn't see it that way. God sees it as, "I don't see city and county and state and country lines. I see everybody as one, and they're my people." That was a perspective I didn't have until we got out of our comfort zone, went over there, and it completely changed our life and the trajectory of my wife and I's relationship, our faith, and our organization that was created after that because our eyes were open to so much more.

More so, what I also saw over time was that we had the heart and we had the passion, but we didn't have the training. What God was saying is, "I love your heart. You're going to do some great things but you're not ready. If you come to St. Louis and start here you're going to fail," because my mindset would have been, "This is what you're doing, this is how you're going to do it, and this is what it looks like." What we learned in Haiti is the value of local leadership, and how to play your role and not come in and say, "This is what's going to happen," because you don't know.

I tell all the time, "Everybody listen to this. We can all jump on a plane and head to Haiti right now, and you can all give me ideas of what you think need to be done, and they will all be good ideas-

Lisa: This is why it's going to be done.

That all happened in 2014. I had to go down there five or six times a year, lead groups down there and trips. It's been life-changing, but what it also helped us do is two years into that, Bridget and I sat down and we said, "We have to come back to St. Louis. There is a need here locally and I love what we're doing there, but we have to have a local component to this." We came back and quietly started looking. We're a really good partner. We fundraise for you, so everybody wants us to be their partner. We quietly started looking and got connected to someone that's very connected to the inner city. I said, "The city is where I want to go." As I look at our city as a whole, I just feel like there's a need there. I'm not afraid of tough areas in Haiti. We chose Haiti knowing it's one of the toughest places to do ministry, so we're okay with that. We found an amazing partner, his name's Andre Alexander, at the Tabernacle Community Development Corporation. My wife and I sat down with Andre and said we were connected by a mutual friend, so we had a lot of respect for him going into it. Essentially said, "I'm not going to tell you anything about us or what we're looking for, but I want to hear your plan."

He just rattled things off, and my wife and I actually had a checklist going into this. Like, "Okay, what are some of the things that we've seen successful that are going to carry over?" It was like we gave him the answer sheet. He was just checking everything off. Just a brilliant mind, an amazing heart, and a tremendous leader. We said, "This is our guy. This is what we need to do."

We started a partnership with him to fund his vision. Again, this is his vision not ours, and his program. What we do is help him and his organization buy and renovate homes in a very targeted area that surrounds his church so that he's the center point of that. They're renovated by all local contractors, so we don't do any volunteer work. It's more expensive, but it's also the way that we get to support the community. What we do is we hire probably 50 to 60 people per every job, but we also hired a 77% minority rate. What we're doing is saying, "This is your community, and we want you to be a part of that transformation." We learned that in Haiti. Again, like I said, instead of us coming down and telling them what to do and taking the jobs from them, we're now coming down and creating those jobs, and what you see is the stories have been tremendous.

I could share all day on the stories that have come out of this from the workers' standpoint, from the community standpoint. From people that aren't even benefiting directly from the program but that are all in on the program and take care of it and take ownership of it because it's truly been theirs to create.

Then once the homes are done, and these are homes that were built. The last home I think was built in 1896. We restore it to its original beauty and then families are placed into these homes. These families are placed in through a long interview process. We're looking for the families that truly want change for their kids. The only requirement is you have to have kids. That's who we want to make the difference on. They get in there, they pay rent. It's a discounted rent, but they pay rent based on what they can afford, and then they have a few commitments they have to make.

We say, "We'll come halfway, you come the other half. We're not going to give you anything. You're going to have to put some sweat equity in here because this is how you're going to change." They have to volunteer in the community two to four hours a month as a family, and then they have to meet with our community coordinator that's been placed with them. Every family is placed with a community coordinator that is in constant contact with them and writes a program specifically for their family.

Not a blanket approach that we're forcing upon them, but finding out what their needs are and then addressing those needs through all the resources and non-profits and things that are around that we have access to. It's been amazing. We have six houses that have been completed through Tabernacle Development Community Corporation. Most of these are duplexes. You're getting two families in each one, and it's been tremendous.

Again, it's supporting the people in the local community, elevating their platform. It's not about Brace for IMPACT. We're not looking for the credit and we're not plastering our name-- In North St. Louis, we're very isolated. We don't talk about it as much because it's taken us so long to build trust and relationships. We wanted to do that through our partner and not through us.

I don't know anything about medical. I have access to amazing people that can play those roles and do the education side of this. SLU School of Education we partner with to help empower and train our teachers so that we can get the most out of our teachers that we have, and that's going to trickle down to the education of our students.

That's really a strength of ours, find the right people that you can plug in, but it has to be the right partner. We've walked away from partnerships that just weren't-

Lisa: Weren't right.

Kyle: -catching the vision, you can tell they were going to be difficult to work with, but people that truly say, "This is your project. You guide us, but here's the things that we can bring to the table." That's a huge way of how we've had strength.

Lisa: Yes. There may be somebody listening now that says, "I've got the strength." We'll talk to you about how you can get involved. I want to talk about Tricia Zimmer Ferguson. This good friend of mine and her family owns Kaldi's. I know that you've got a new initiative; you're calling it Brew for Impact. Tell us about that because you're also engaging the local coffee farmer, and anything.

Kyle: Yes. Brett Israelson, who runs Kaldi's-- I don't know what his job title is, but he's right underneath the owners there. He was going to Haiti with us and reached out beforehand and said, "Hey. Haiti used to be a massive coffee producer to the world. I think there's a way we can do something. On this trip, can we go do some coffee stuff?" It just didn't work out. Then and I said, "You need to go first. You need to see it because to get to the coffee farms, by the way, is like 16 hours on these roads, and I ain't driving on those roads. We'll have to do a separate trip." We looked into it a little bit, and then he got there and got to see it and understand it. He got back and this was kind of his thing.

He said, "Kaldi's wants to and can support you, but instead of just sponsoring an event here and there, we can create something for you that can be long-term."

Kyle: Yes. It's braceforimpact46.com, and then on there you'll see the shop icon. You can pull down on that and it will take you to our Shopify. I'll get the alert on my phone and I'll get to work. I'll write a handwritten note to you, and we'll package it up and get it out. Sometimes my kids will write a note to you too, so if it's a little sloppy don't be mad. [chuckles]

Lisa: Sure. I think that's awesome to get your kids engaged in that. Well, Kyle, this has just been so much fun. It has been a joy for me just to sit and have a conversation with you. I know that your story, I know everything is going to be so impactful for our listeners. Impact. Use that word impact. [chuckles]

Kyle: That's right. I appreciate the platform and the opportunity to share.

Lisa: Thank you very much.

Recorded voice: Thank you for listening to today's show. *Something Extra* with Lisa Nichols is a Technology Partners Production. Copyright Technology Partners, Inc. 2019. For show notes or to reach Lisa, visit tpi.co/podcast. Don't forget to leave a review on Apple Podcasts, Google Play, or wherever you listen.

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