

Lisa Nichols: I'm pleased to welcome Scott Kuehl to the show today. Scott is the Founder and President of Brand Resolve, a coaching and consulting firm. Scott, I am so excited to have this opportunity. You and I've talked so many times on the phone. And we met 2016 I think and just became very fast friends. We're going to be working even closer together, this next year. I'm so glad that this worked out for you to be on the podcast today.

Nichols: So, let's jump right in. I want to talk a little bit about your growing up.

Nichols: Great childhood and wonderful models. Yeah, because I see you now, and I just see that you are such a hard worker. You just jump right in there when things need to be done. So I want to go back to supper clubs. Is this like the modern day like farm-to-table? Did any of your produce in that from the farm? Come into the super club?

Kuehl: Now, it was not that. It was very much food service trucks bringing it to it. It was rural America, but it was very much professional restaurant, they would have bands come in. Part of our work ethic was helping my dad load up the liquor load up the food, get it to where need to be down in the lower level, or the upper level being the bar back, etcetera. So I think I learned a lot about being in the public eye and serving the public in that... And I think part of the great irony of

this, is I knew by the time I was 12, I did not want to farm I did not want to own the Supper Club. And honestly, I did not want to work for my dad because although I loved him very much, part of what I got from him was I had to do my own thing. Does that make sense?

Nichols: Then, that took courage on his part to say... So you go be Scott. Not necessarily me, that's wonderful. So you went to college, I assume and got a degree. And what did you get a degree in?

Kuehl: I got a degree in design in to college and one of the things that I found working on the farm working in the restaurants, they had me make signs for them so I learned that I was an ad man, I was a copywriter, I was an art director, I was a creative director and grew up having dreams of doing commercials with Nike and Michael Jordan and Bo Jackson were big at the time in the '80s when I was a kid so that was my dream to do that. So I went off to college, not necessarily to get into advertising that something communications, and I ended up getting into advertising, became an art director at an ad agency and I always wanted to be a creative director, and became that and then at 26 ended up making the leap and starting a business. The first business was called the Kuehl and associates, of course, I had no associates.

Nichols: Associates is like, me, myself and I. That's wonderful, though. I'm so impressed by that at 26. And did you know everything you needed to know? When you were 26?

Kuehl: I'm continually amazed at how much I knew back then. The thing about being entrepreneurial is having the restlessness to want to go and fix or change what's not sitting well with you, and you'll figure it out right as you go. So I had been working in advertising for not very many years at all, but knew that I loved solving problems, I loved serving clients and finding a better way. I'm a maximizer by trade. So, when customers come to you and so we've got this product or we've got this campaign, but it's not performing. Man, I was just on it and I loved that, and I ended up partnering with a close friend of mine, where I had offered him a job. We landed a big account and I offered him a job and he offered me a partnership and that was probably one of the best things I ever did was get Chris Shermer as a partner. We just grew that business over the next 10 years into a top 25 Twin Cities ad Agency and a top 100 US agency.

Nichols: Fastest-growing. I believe you got all types of accolades. Right?

Kuehl: Yeah, and Chris has gone on to just crush it since I left that business. But it's exciting to think about the day I quit my job. April 15th, 1996. I said, "I'm going to go do this myself, which

of course you can't really do anything great yourself. And we ended up building that business and its need to think about the seed that was planted back then. It's just grown into a great tree today and I'm super proud of what Chris has done. That business partnership ran its course after about 10 years but to see what he has done with that business has been fantastic. He's just taken it to complete new heights.

Nichols: Well, in all seriousness, I mean, yes we know everything we need to know when we're 26 in our own mind, but I think about that, and when you're 26, there is so much you don't know. And sometimes I'd say that's kind of a blessing too because you don't know what you don't know, and you just figure it out, right? But did you have people in your life... Scott, how do you lean in if you needed more about understanding the financial statements, PNL balance sheet, cash flow, and those kind of things? Did you have people that built into you during that time?

Kuehl: Yeah, absolutely, it's funny how you find relationships when you're starting a business, or getting into a business one person recommends you to someone and you find that you know them for the rest of your life. When I think about the relationships, Lisa. I think about two of my most recent the ones with the most impact, the mentors are Lee Anderson and Bob Sweeney. 2 men that were business partners in a construction business that I was in. And one of the things that I love about those guys is the encouragement that they would give me going from being 26 years old to 36-years old and going into a different industry going into construction to go from being 26 where I thought I knew everything to being 36 where I realized there was so much more that I didn't know. These two gentlemen really took me under their wing saw something in me that I didn't even see in myself at that time. And were just so encouraging. So those are two people that I think about in terms of the mentorship in my life really that really built in me.

Nichols: Well, let's back up one minute. So you had your own agency with Chris till you were 36, then you got tapped on the shoulder to come into a completely different industry and then you found yourself in another position, that you never dreamed of, right? So talk to us a little bit about that journey.

Kuehl: So 10 years in advertising, 11 years in advertising, or some things I loved about it, but there are some things that I didn't love about it. I'm not even sure if I was exactly clear about it at the time. Burn out is how I would describe it now, I've always prided myself on stamina. I learned that from my dad got that from my parents. But there just comes a time when it's time to move on and when you're 36 years old, that was hard for me, I didn't understand what was going on exactly, I just knew that it was time for me to move on and my family, and I had a lake

home in the Brainerd Lakes in Minnesota, and that place was just calling to us. We just loved it, our children love to my wife that I had been talking about it, we said what if we just moved up North sold our half of the business and what if we just made a fresh start, what if we just simplified and I will never forget we were driving down to my grandmother's 90th birthday party, and then we were going to go on and visit my wife's mother in a nursing home.

So, we had all these thoughts of mortality on our mind, we were driving the mini-van and the kids were in back watching their movies with the headphones and so mom and dad could have a real talk and we just that day we just said, "You know what, let's do it. And so Chris, my business partner at the time, graciously offered to buy that half of the business and it was a very quick transition, it was a very quick sale that was in February, of '07 and by June of 07, we had transition out of the business, we had transitioned the communication, it was just, it all happened so fast but it was so right to do. And I've always kind of been that way, like a clean break type of guy when it's done, I'm out, I just say I want to leave people hanging. But the transition was smooth. Chris has just taken off, at that business. I'm so proud of him.

Nichols: So you came into the construction industry and you came in as what VP you said? Let me be your VP of marketing.

Kuehl: I actually came in as a consultant, this was the state organization that had built that home for us up there and just really love the company and love the people. And ended up talking to the CEO. I ended up doing a consulting project for them is like a four-month project and I just fell in love with the company. I got deeper into the organization got to know their leadership got to know the opportunity to go to a new industry, architecture and construction and for an ad guy who always been enamored with ideas and concepts and campaigns. But that had faded for me, right, this was just so less temporal this was more like this is a building, this is going to be for 100-200 years or more, it's not a brochure, menu, or a webpage or something that's just here today gone tomorrow. So I just really felt there was a legacy piece to this and really felt drawn, to it and had an affinity for design. There's just something about houses that I had always loved the concept of home where you raise your children and come home to from making your living.

So, the concept of switching from advertising into construction came about because of an advertising project for a construction company is re-branding in the organization. And I had a blast and got to know people, as I said, and at the end of that project, I said to the CEO, I said to Bob, I said, you're not going to keep hiring me as a consultant. And he said No and I said, "Well

we've done some great work here together. We can't let this slide back. And I said, I haven't had a boss for about a decade, but I like you, I will follow you, I trust you. Why don't you have me come on, stay with your marketing, hire me and Bob said, "How about marketing and sales?" And I had never been a sales manager before. I'll be the first to tell you, I'm still not a great sales manager, but we took a risk really loved it, got to know the company even more. And within about three years later, I was named the president and the CEO of that organization and no one was more surprised than me when that took place.

AD: We're going to take a quick break and then we'll be back with Scott.

Nichols: So Scott we just talked about you joining this construction firm, and this was about what year was this again?

Kuehl: Well, 2008 is when I became in their employ and it seemed like the very next day, something happened and the recession begins

Nichols: The housing market and construction everything, it was a trickle down. We saw interior design firms go out of business during that time, it was all the trickle down. So, talk to both how did you get through that? I mean, that had to been really hard.

Kuehl: Yeah, it was hard to see an organization that was such a great family culture in a "micropolitan community that had about 225 employees over the course of a couple of years go down to 90. Not only was it hard for all those families that had transition or job loss or all those horrible things that can happen, which can certainly bring renewal as well an opportunity but what that does to families and what that does to the culture of an organization is very real and in damaging a culture and having people be concerned for their welfare for their well-being, of their families. From a leadership standpoint, Lisa, I learned so much about how you never know what's going on in someone's life.

My mentors, Bob Sweeny, that was one thing he always said Scott, you never know what's going on with people when someone's having a bad day, you never know what's going on, you've got to give people the benefit the doubt. So the culture of the organization was there was fear, there was wonder like, you said, businesses were going out of business whether it was interior design, architecture, construction, the trades, and on top of that the challenge of being in more of a "micropolitan less Metropolitan Community. I saw a lot of people leave that organization in tears and layoffs was just, it was just something that was necessary on several

levels, but I saw a mentor in Bob who was not afraid to show an appropriate level of emotion, but also make tough decisions and still love people.

When you have people that you see who do that. I don't even know if Bob knows this to this day when you see people and how they care about people, it inspires you and it shows you how to... How to lead a people, how to love people. Even when you're seen as the bad guy. And that could be one of the toughest things to your ego, your pride of not wanting to be that bad guy but yet the organization needing you to do what it needs you to do. I don't even like to talk about that. So at some point, things start to turn around about three years after joining the organization, a transition began in the company where I was asked to move from marketing and sales into the president and CEO role, and we re-tooled some things we tried some new things, our revenue came back, but our profit wasn't coming back as an organization.

You remember I said I was an ad guy, I was a marketing guy, I was a branding guy I was a sales guy, I was a strategic guy, I was not a finance guy, I was not an HR guy, I was not those things. So getting to learn about those things and having Bob and Lee, these mentors who believed in me and were patient with me and encouraged me, instilled in me a desire to encourage others and I do think of myself. You know who else modeled it for me was my wife Tammy... I've been married for 25 years, we have three kids. And she is the love of my life, she is my most treasured confidant, she is my most overworked, underpaid advisor of my whole 25 years in business. You may relate being with you and Greg on how you guys advise one another.

So, the encouragement aspect from her during this time of trial, and all of a sudden I'm in this role to lead this organization in an industry that I have three or so years of experience in. I really started to lean on the Lord I really started laying on my wife really started on our board, and our leadership team and I became the mouthpiece of hope for the organization trying to cast this new vision that we're going to rise again we're going to climb the mountain, we're going to get back to excellence in this organization. It was one of the toughest, most worthy journeys I've ever been on in my life and to this day, just think so fondly of the people in that organization in that craftsmanship. And the things that men and women built, right? We look around at buildings, and we see buildings like "Oh there's this building, it's like every millimeter of that building was manufactured craft and created by something is things don't just happen.

Nichols: I always look at that, and I look at these big buildings, and I'm just fascinated that... People can put the structural pieces in place. So the building does it fall down? I mean, it's

fascinating to me too... So you were the message of hope you were that voice of hope. And that is hard but it can be, Scott, here's the thing, it can't just be empty words, you had to roll up your sleeves and there had to be some muscle behind all of that, right?

Kuehl: Our people were muscle. Our people were our minds and they rallied and 2012-2015, things started to come back and we went from 225 to 90, back to 150, we got our EBITDA in line, we got our our hope back in place. I should have been the happiest guy through all that, and I was certainly proud of what our people had done when we got some things righted after that recession, all so den. I found myself saying I don't think I'm supposed to be doing this anymore. And it was confusing. There's that comfort of, there's that ego that pride of... Hey, we've done it. Let's keep going, much like in 2007. I just wasn't supposed to be doing that.

Nichols: You knew that there was another assignment for you. Yes, do that in your gut. But Scott, I think about it and I think you know what, it's kind of like for such a time as this. You were the guy that was needed at that time to bring that organization through that really hard, dark time, and to be the voice of hope. It's so interesting to me because I'm just thinking about how you're talking about Tammy being your encourager or Bob and Lee were encouragers, but I see you as that and I have told you that. You are sad and encourager... So it's really funny to me that you saw that given to you as a gift and now I see you as... And you probably were always that but it's even magnified. I believe. You really took that to heart and now you know what that did for you and so you are that to other people. I have expressed that to you.

Kuehl: Yeah, you have to... It's very edifying when you do that, and I think there's just something really powerful about hearing someone say, to you. Hey, you're really doing a great job.

Nichols: And it's funny because as you're talking about Bob and Lee, and will tell you, you said something in the beginning and you said they saw something in you that you did not see in yourself. And I can't tell you how many times I've heard that. So it just makes you think you need to be doing that for other people. We need to be constantly having our eyes and ears open, so that we can call out that greatness.

Kuehl: Absolutely that is exactly the phrase. Call out someone's greatness. And so many times we do not see the gifts that we have and the power of someone saying you really have this and oftentimes when you have a gift or a talent and it comes easier, it seems effortless, and it doesn't seem like work. How can it be a gift, how can it be anything special?

Nichols: Well, you're kinda getting into our something extra. But I want to talk about that time of restlessness, for you, and you and I, I believe, met right before you made that decision to exit the construction firm, you had voiced that to me, that you were kind of feeling this, but talk to us a little about that journey, and because you took... Here we go, you took another big leap of faith and what did you do?

Kuehl: The short answer is I read the book Half-Time by Bob Buford. Yes, great guy, great book. The first time I read that book was in 2007 when I left the ad business and something happened in 2016 where the book came across my eyes. Again, it was an email that I'd gotten from a gentleman. He said something about half-time and I said "Oh the book Half-Time, and he said, yes. And there's a Half-Time Institute. As well, I learned, so I pulled the half-time book off my shelf. This is 2016 re-read it. And I started spending time on Half-Time Institute website, just watching videos of the CEO when videos of Bob Buford and it videos of Lloyd Reed. And just this concept of going from success to significance what do you want to do in the second half of your life? You know, the place you've run in the first half, you know, what's worked for you what you're not good at, what you're good at. And I just really felt like I was in this season again, of restlessness. The difference between reading that book the second time and reading that book the first time was in moving up to the northern Minnesota area.

My wife and I had found a church that we started attending. And one thing I didn't tell you about growing up with the farm and the Supper Clubs, was, my mom was the faith leader, of our family so my little brother and I made her late to church, every Sunday. We'd slink and sit in the back row and my dad just didn't go to church, I could not wait to grow up and be the dad that didn't have to go to church and that's exactly what happened. And what I realized was, as I had to at some point be a faith leader, in my family through a couple of different circumstances, had a couple of things happen where I realized that, that is exactly what I needed to do. Ended up seeing the movie Courageous with our small group from church and walked out of that theater. Number one, in tears and number two, with the commitment to be the faith leader, that my family needed me to be for my two sons my daughter... My wife our marriage our family legacy and just realizing that it all comes from somewhere and it all comes from Him. So as I'm watching these videos, this becomes every night, Lisa, I'm watching these videos and re-reading this book, I start praying around this and really seeking guidance and talking with my wife about it and really no one else but she got to a point where she just didn't want to hear it anymore, and I love her for that. So there was one other person that I thought I was going to share this with.

His name was Jason friend of mine, who just happened to live in Texas, in Dallas, the one person I know in Dallas, Texas, Jason Wilford so I call up Jason, he had been a consultant through the last six or seven years, a trusted guy. I was going to confess this to him. I feel like the Lord is pushing me out of this job. And so I asked him, I said, "Have you ever heard of the Half-Time Institute? And he said, Yeah, Bob Buford. Wrote that book, Half-Time and I said, yeah, exactly. Have you read that book? And he said, "You know why I haven't he said, but when we moved here from Kansas City, we bought the house of the CEO of the Half-Time Institute, and I could not believe my ears. I said He's the biggest God wink you could ever get. So believe it or not, that was what gave me the conviction to say, I'm supposed to be moving in this direction. I enrolled in the Half-Time Institute fellows program for 2017. It was life changing.

Nichols: How long were you in the program, how long is the program, Scott?

Kuehl: It's a year-long program. And you know what, sounds robust when you hear that word Institute and they have many programs in it, but really it was like a three credit class, the lasted year and one of the most valuable parts of it was just getting in a cohort with 11 other people who are all feeling that same stirring, they're all sensing that there's something else that I'm supposed to be doing, there's these gifts that I have that to be called out, and be used for something else for God's Kingdom.

Nichols: So if someone out there in the listening audience is sitting there right now going... Wow, I'm kind of feeling this right now, I want to go to the Half-Time Institute. How would they go about finding out more information in besides getting on the website like you did and looking at it every night? They could do that, right?

Kuehl: I would say that's a good start. If you haven't read the book Half-Time it's a good book to read. And there's other resources too that they have. But if you Google Half-time Institute and you're stroll find some things that you're looking for, and those folks are equipped to deal with people who are stirring for that second half. And my stirring led me to make another leap to go in and say, "You know what, it's time for me to move on. So sometimes that's a hard thing for people to understand, right? You're walking off of something into nothing. And that doesn't make sense to everyone. And it made complete sense to me, even though I wasn't sure where I was going, I had conviction, I felt like I'd been given direction, but the aspect of taking a leap was received so well. By my two mentors, Lee and Bob and our board.

The other thing that I didn't mention before was I also thought I was maybe supposed to be a pastor, the same visit, I went to visit the halftime Institute, I also visited the Dallas Theological Seminary, and I do feel that there's a pastor in me, there's a shepherd in me. I think it's in the marketplace, I think it's coming along side people and my business is about that today coming alongside folks and talking about their business and their leadership teams and bringing the Lord in the conversation because He has it all.

Nichols: We have someone in common that you and I both love, and it's Dr. Richard Blackaby and Richard is all about marketplace and really we don't have to be a minister per se, by profession. It's just wherever God has positioned to you, you can make an impact, right?

Kuehl: Yeah, well said Dr. Blackaby. Find out where God's at work and join Him.

Nichols: So let's talk about what you're doing today. Okay, so you do have a new assignment to talk about Brand Resolve.

Kuehl: My new assignment, is just coming along side business leaders, mostly men, that I'm working with one-on-one talking about their spiritual aspect of their life certainly their vocational aspect which is they're obviously their business, their job if they're a senior leader reporting up the physical aspect, the mental, the emotional, the financial, this holistic coaching approach and really trying to take the things and the experiences that I've been given through my life and share it with others and hear them and ask questions. We were talking earlier. I said, I used to be the young guy in the room and all of a sudden, I'm not the young guy in the room anymore, so I'm trying on that suit to be that it's a little more gray than the black suit used to be.

Nichols: But really what you're finding it fulfilling, though, right?

Kuehl: Absolutely, and I don't think just like when I was 26, I didn't think that just starting that business that was just one person was the end game. I knew there was more at that time, I was convinced that I was going to make it happen some years later. I'm waiting on the Lord, for this and trying to be patient. I'm trying, not so hard to be striving all the time. There's still a striver in me.

So just really trying to be still yes, and know, more often right, that's important, that's good, resting. So I'm loving it, and being patient, it will grow in the way that He wants to grow, He will

water it the way it needs to be water in right now, I'm just stewarding it as He guides me through it.

Nichols: That's a great way to put it, and you will know and everyone will know that it's Him, right? It's Him that built whatever he has for you. So it can be a hard place to be, but it's a trusting day-by-day. I, I think I... Let's talk about... What do you think...? And it can be more than one thing, Scott. So what do you believe is the something extra that are leader needs?

Kuehl: The first that comes to mind, especially off of our half-time conversation is rest, when you're wired to go, go, go, when it's hard to shut your mind off, rest is hard to find and it's easy to complain about not having time to do it and it's hard to find, but as a leader, it's important for you to schedule it. And one of the things that I learned was through this half-time sabbatical just taking that time to really disconnect and reflect was I didn't know at what speed I was running, that's not to say I didn't think I knew because I thought I knew but I was wrong. And I think there's so many people out there with great ideas with amazing stamina that are not aware of the pace they're running the carnage, they're leaving, how hard they are to keep up with, and how sometimes the standards for excellence, that they have for themselves are not attainable consistently by everyone in the company and that is not to say that a leader thinks they're better than everyone else.

Everyone is gifted in different ways, but oftentimes, the stamina that a leader has the vision that a leader has the ideas that a leader has the pace that a leader has is the leaders and to be a true leader, to be the shepherd. Sometimes you've got to leave the 99 to go get the one. So rest in reflection, it's the something extra that I think we all need.

Nichols: Yeah, great words of advice. This has been so much fun.

Kuehl: Yeah, you said it, thank you so much!

Nichols: Thanks for being with us.