

Nichols: Yeah, yeah, oh that's wonderful. So you've done a lot of different things career-wise, and I think you even started at an art gallery.

Howard: I did, yeah, yeah. My background is very much like a quill.

Nichols: I love it, I love it. Talk to us about how did you go from the art gallery to a corporate position at Peabody?

Howard: Well, it's fun to tell that story because I think that I can be an example for folks that may have majored in a liberal arts degree and to show that many people's path is linear. And I always felt a little bit strange that mine wasn't linear, and I remember going out after having majored in art history, how many people said I mean, what will you ever do with that? And so I really had to overcome, I think a lot of people thinking that has no vocational application. And so I spent a lot of time basically just explaining to people or convincing what you can do with an Art History Degree, and I was able to convince enough Ronnie Greenberg, who still today as a mentor of mine, he ran a very prominent art gallery both in New York and St. Louis and was cool enough to hire me and that was one of my very first jobs out of school. I had interned one summer at Sotheby's in New York, and it just kinda gave me that bug.

So, what I loved about the gallery was the business side of it and so at that time I started really thinking about how I would parley my interest in the arts for the future, and I knew it was not in a museum way too quiet, I'm way too talkative and extroverted, for a museum and even the gallery life, it was changing so much, it was all happening in New York and the gallery environment was not about people walking by. When's the last time you walk by a window and decided to buy a million dollar painting? It was just the dynamic of that business was changing so much that it inspired me to go out and really pursue what else was out there business-wise, and making that switch from the gallery to corporate America was an unbelievable leap. And a lot of people just said I cannot picture you in corporate America. And I almost did it to prove them and maybe myself wrong.

Nichols: So how did that happen then?

Howard: And I met with so many hiring managers I went from company to company and ultimately it was through an introduction, a relationship where someone said You know what, she may not have been in the energy industry she may not have majored in something to do with the energy space but I know she's smart, I know she's hard working, and I know she can

connect that. And so I was given this opportunity to become a manager of really communications and human resources, so it was a really nice blend between communications, but that also had implications for workforce development, workforce engagement.

I always still remember the person that said hard skills are teachable, the soft skills are not. I remember exactly where I was on Market Street when we had that conversation and I thought, "I think he's going to give me a chance. And five years later, I was working on some really high-profile prominent change management activities related to acquisitions advocacy campaigns and so it's just a real source of pride that I was able to pretty much overcome every objection, because I got a lot of doors closed in my face. When I said an art history major, looking for a job with a Fortune 100, Fortune 500

Nichols: But that person certainly saw something in you, as for skills like you've said you're intelligent... They knew that you could figure it out. You're a hard worker. Those are things that are sometimes hard to teach.

Howard: It was so encouraging, especially at a time when I had gone and met with so many people, him saying that, it kind of turned a light bulb on in my... Like Yeah, he's right. You can go and learn some of those hard skills but the other skills are a little bit harder to teach, so

Nichols: I remember I love Southwest, so the southwest way ever it a lot about Southwest and that's what Herb Keller used to say True. It's like trained for the skills but I... I look at these other core competencies and I hire for that.

Howard: It's a great point. We were just talking myself and a colleague about Southwest yesterday. The fact that we can cancel up to 10 minutes before a flight. I said what they are doing is so important and it's so admirable. And that's just one more example. I totally agree with that

Nichols: All about the customer, right? And I know that's a great segue, because it's got a... What you're helping companies with today and telling their story. So you were at Peabody? Yeah, had a very successful career there. I did and what, five years ago? You decided to jump on to the entrepreneur wagon. I did you founded your current company, which is?

Howard: Kaleidoscope management group. And I have not looked back that took courage. What was it that you said? You know what, I think I'm going to go do my own thing now I've

thought a lot about that period in which I was deliberating, whether to make the change or stay in a very steady, reliable salaried position. And I think that what I've learned from that period is that everyone has their different levels of risk tolerance. And so mine was a very studied approach in risk and so for the first six months prior to even embarking out on my own, I really studied... Okay, what's my risk profile, what's my risk tolerance? And I kinda tried to stay within that.

So, even though there are stories of people jumping off of cliffs without a net I kinda don't fit into that category because I have that Capricorn side of me that says, if I'm going to do this, it's going to be successful. And so part of making that... So is making sure that you do have... I always say I have plan Cs for my plan Bs. So I was pretty much setting up safety nets and trying to make sure that whatever I did, wasn't going to too much put my family in jeopardy or do something that was so risky that I couldn't come back from it. Let's say if it didn't work. And so I felt strongly enough about the fact that there were agencies out there being paid to do work that I thought I could probably do better because I was on the client side, and I said to myself, "What if I could start the firm that I wish had existed when I was hiring an agency, and so that's what really was the genesis of Kaleidoscope and what those things were, were becoming a little bit more of an extension of a client's team. It was feeling transactional, and not to say that the firms we hired weren't excellent, they were in high demand, they were making really great hourly rate.

So, it wasn't as though there wasn't a market for that, but I just knew for what I wanted out of a partner, I wanted to go be that. And so whenever I think about what those elements where it was being an extension of my client's team delivering work that was meant to be a collaboration. And so, if I turn something into a client, it's with the intention that we're going to get it to the finish line and it's going to be right and not that I'm going to give you work that then you have to go and kind of try to the finish. And then really just more than anything, I wanted to work with clients that valued relationships, as much as we did. I want to be working with you, 10 years from now. Whereas a lot of the agency relationships it was sort of like how long is the budget, let's knock out whatever we can do in a year and then they're off to maybe greener maybe more rich pastures. Whereas I really wanted to start building something that could be built to last. And how you do that is create long-term sustainable meaningful relationships in a transaction world.

Nichols: So Cabanne, I love the name Kaleidoscope management group? I love Kaleidoscopes. So where did that name come from?

Howard: Well, thank you for saying that we have loved it, and it's so nice to have a brand that I feel like has carried us since day one, and we have no intention of changing or moving away from that. And it's because when I described actually to my husband, I should give him credit because when I described to him what I wanted for this firm, I said, It's like this. I've been in so many situations at companies where everyone has a lot of ideas and there are tons of initiatives, swirling around, but it takes someone to actually harness all of that, bring it into a well understood and thought out plan. And so I said, It's kind of like being able to bring the complex into focus. And that was him Seguin and saying... Well, like Kaleidoscope. And ultimately, management group is because we harness talents of so many different people in our firm. So you come to us and you may say I want box and dice, I want the full soup to nuts. Marketing support for major brands, for example, we represent their marketing department, and so we're social, social media management media relations as needed. Sometimes we'll do strategic relationship building initiatives, and we'll be strategic, think partner for them.

So from a digital management standpoint, from a media relations and a reputation management standpoint, we are really an extension of their team, and so for us bringing the complex into focus can take so many different shapes and Management Group is really us being able to provide our clients with a number of different services that you may or may not need all of them. So we've got top-tier graphic design talent, but we work with firms as large as Emerson they have graphic designers, so we'll work with them on hyper-digital-focused change management activities that for them, they may not have the in-house full-time, employee capabilities but what a great way for them to move strategic balls down the court with a partner that they can turn the volume up or down. And pick things ala cart, for instance, if you don't need our graphic design support will be your project manager will be your communications expert, and we'll be able to help you manage communications via digital channels, and you don't have to hire full-time employee for it.

Nichols: Well, now you can't steal this. But, technology partners, we say we like to be the 360 solution. Yeah, you can't steal it but if we're not doing it in-house, we have trusted partners that we bring in, but they are all SMEs in their particular area.

Howard: Perfect way of putting it. So when I said, Management Group, and it was actually our friend that we have income in Laura Herring who's a very important mentor to me, she actually said What you're doing is more than just providing a communications service you are harnessing talents. And ultimately, the management of various SMEs is part of our value proposition.

Nichols: Very good. I don't know if you can talk about this or not, but I have looked at some of your post and you talk about gratitude, how important that is I saw a post on being kind a company that exhibits kindness and how important that is in the reputation of the company and culture. Can you do a deeper dive on any of that?

Howard: So I would love to the art of my favorite topics, and I spend a lot of time thinking about these concepts. The gratitude piece I think for our company is so important and it's so central to ICR employees share on their LinkedIn how happy they are to work for a company that places gratitude at the heart of everything we do and that just warms my heart so much because it's gratitude from an employer standpoint, for our people in gratitude from the employee perspective, that they get to work for a company like ours. It's gratitude for kaleidoscope that clients trust us and so it's just this incredible experience when you can really find meaningful gratitude that it's almost like jet fuel for the company. And so, I try on a personal level to really remember it in my daily life. But I think if you can start to apply it more broadly and in a company setting it's right there in our company values and I think that it's something that everyone in the company says. Gosh, I haven't worked somewhere where this is so central and I really like it and when I hear that, that makes me believe that we're on the right path to continue to keep it central.

Nichols: I can't quote it exactly, but I've heard it often said that people that are grateful are just happier people.

Howard: The science supports it so neat to see some of that data coming out, because I've sort of inherently known it, but how nice that we could actually say research is reinforcing that this isn't just a bunch of fluffy stuff that's really cool, right? And I think the same goes for kindness. You asked about that. And I think for me the longer that the company has been in business, the more I'm thinking that this is something that I'd like to study over time is high performance and kindness or happiness. Are they mutually exclusive? And I study companies of varying sizes and of varying success and I think to success depends for different people on different metrics, but I really would like to believe that companies can approach business and approach relationships from a place of abundance and kindness and still be hyper-successful.

Nichols: I love that. Well, I want to take a deeper dive into that, but we're going to take a quick break and we'll be back with Cabanne Howard.

Nichols: It's so important for companies and their digital presence, and they need to pay attention to it. And I think I even read something. I may be putting words in your mouth, but where it's like you need to be paying attention to it all the time. 24/. It's around the clock. So talk about that and maybe give our list or some ideas.

Howard: So I think that I always or have started this company even 10 years ago, because there weren't enough tools even that recently that would give us the edge to be able to measure everything we do, and so I wouldn't want to lead a company whose connection to clients, wasn't so sticky that we get to say we measure everything. The ROI on the investment that you are making in marketing is absolutely measurable and that is a huge source of pride for us, and digital and the move towards digital transformation is the way that we do that. And so with that ability to measure one of the things that we've been extremely grateful for, whether it's our real estate client or our hotel clients is we are at the heart of where the customers are, so we do "B2B and "B2C and in the case of B2C, you talk about a hotel with a social media presence that's rocking and rolling.

We are absolutely converting room bookings straight from our content calendar. And so while it may seem like a trivial thing, do I post once a week, do I post five times a week? Those are not questions that we have to wonder the answer to. We have hard science, we have good data, we're big believers in dashboards, not a single one of our clients has experienced any dip and in fact, they've all had upward growth trends in revenue and customer acquisition in the time that we've been working with them. And I think I would actually go so far as to say, if that weren't the case, we'd probably need to fire ourselves, because we are tied to our clients. Growth, right? Their success, revenue and metrics. And how fun is that? And so for us, digital transformation is about recognizing that depending on your industry, your social channels are probably more important than your website.

Today, we have clients where we do 24-hour monitoring in the real estate business and healthcare, where the client and the customer is skipping right over that website, and they are direct messaging us on Facebook, they are direct messaging us on Instagram and they're doing it on Twitter, and so for us not to be able to respond in a timely manner, is a bad look on the client. And so, they are so happy that they have a firm like ours that can be eyeballs to quickly rustle up a response. Some clients we don't even need to run our responses by them anymore, because we've been doing it long enough, but knowing when the judgment is to go to them and say Here's what we recommend you say. And the social channels really are replacing the website as a place for people to go and communicate with brands.

Nichols: It's so interesting, and for people that think... Oh, you know what, it's not important. It's a must. You don't have a crystal ball or at least... I don't think you do. But what's around the corner, what's next do you know?

Howard: Yeah, so for our industry, I have a lot of thoughts on this, and I think the industry as a whole is going to continue to evolve and migrate much more into a... You can't talk... Marketing without talking analytics, you can't talk creative without talking. Measurement is no longer a beautiful ad campaign going to rule the day we're going to always be talking about beautiful creative in the same breath as we're talking about dashboards and metrics and outcomes and ROI, which to me being a left and right brain, and equal measure person is awesome. I'm excited about the future. And that's definitely where KMG is going.

We want to continue to sharpen our saw every month we report on very specific metrics for clients but we want to continue to customize those dashboards, we want to be the leading marketing expert to where when you know you work with Kaleidoscope that connection to ROI is so tight that you can't help but want to keep us in the mix.

Nichols: Yeah, so it's such a breath of fresh air because often times you hear, "Well you can't really measure it. Advertising is not something that you can measure. So I love hearing that because we believe in that as well. If you can't manage it if you don't measure it, that right. Alright, so Cabanne to borrow a line from Simon Sinek, what is your why, what is the why behind what it is that you do?

Howard: My favorite question? So I've answered this a multiple of ways but I think today, again, you're getting me at the five-year mark and I've been reflecting on this myself, is two-fold. My kids, I want to show my kids that their mom is number one, I'm their mom. But number two, were so much more and we can both be an awesome mom and also build something and so I believe in what I'm building and to be able to do that for them, and show them that that's possible is actually very inspiring to me. The kids for sure. And then also just for my fellow business women seeing that St. Louis just ranked number one on female founded startups.

How cool? And so, to just be part of what I feel like is truly a movement, both nationally, it's happening in other cities but our city needs good news, so badly to these part of the narrative that is shining. Actually a positive light on St. Louis is so special, and it's very both personally, but also professionally rewarding to be part of that momentum.

Nichols: Wonderful, I love it. Let's talk about something extra. Do you have a current or former team member that you have seen a something extra embodied in and what was that?

Howard: What a great question. So our team is honestly one of the greatest sources of pride for me as a leader and they are the strength behind the machine that is Kaleidoscope management group. And in thinking about that, I think the one thing that came to mind for me is an owner mindset, and I know that people talk about millennial generation and that is that a lost cause. I have living proof to say that there are team members that I am so fortunate to have that have an owner mindset. And what does that mean? It means that some... And tell me any given day. That's not my job, or even give me the non-verbal cues that that's not in their job.

It's thinking, the way of an owner as though you live and die by the results of the company. And so when you find people like that, or when I find people like that I keep them very close and I want to make sure that they are very happy in their job. Because they're hard to find, but when you find them, the client feels it. There is no job too tall. There are things that happen on the weekend, in our business where you can't believe the number of hoops that our people will jump through. And when I see that over email or over social media exchanges, I look at that and I think, Wow you are really putting yourself in the chair of someone that is running this company. And I think that's something extra, because it's not in their job description.

Nichols: I do to. And you said you'd take somebody like that over a very highly technically skilled person. Any day I'm reminded there was another guest on the podcast, there's another company here called Tropiclean and I remember when they were in they were saying the CEO will go and make coffee for everyone. And you said you're not going to tell the names you're not going to tell me any of their names. Hold those close to the chest for sure. So what about a leadership misstep that you are one of your team members have made... Can you think about that or missing something extra?

Howard: Yeah, so I think when you're a startup it's all about the hustle, right? I know technology partners has been around a long time, so the hustle may always be there, but I think when you're brand new and you're still wondering, "Is this going to work? The hustle is real. And what comes with that, is busy. You're always fighting fires, you're making sure that if you're not busy, you feel like you're dying, or if you're not growing then you're dying. And so I think sometimes that mentality can really get in the way of moving big rocks and making big long-term strategic impact. And so one of the missteps I think I would just tell myself, is that when you get busy, you

forget to do the blue sky thinking and come up for the 10000-degree view. And so I would just say one of my valued coaches and mentors says and I'm sure you've heard it before, is just the concept of slowing down to speed up. And when I do that, oh my gosh, on paper.

It feels strange because it's like we've got a to-do list of 400 things on... However, that to do this really doesn't mean anything if you're not planning for the future and stopping to do the strategic planning and the meetings with your team to make sure that they understand the future and where we're headed. So I would say that probably is the thing that would trip us up the most is letting the to-do-list get in the way of that big picture mindset. And where are we going, right?

Nichols: I just said that to a team member yesterday, I said, Sometimes you... You have to slow down to speed up and that planning piece in that blue-sky thinking like you put it... Cabanne is so important because if you're so busy you may be on the completely wrong track,

Howard: and you can chase your tail for the next time a year then you wake up one day and you go. Oh my gosh, I got a lot of things knocked off my list, but what was there.

Nichols: Yes that's great advice. Talk to me about what do you believe is the something extra that every leader needs?

Howard: I think that as I get further along in my career, this answer would have changed, about 10 times, but you're getting me at a time as we kind around the bend on five years of having the company. I would say that self-reflection, I think there's this concept that you get to a certain place in your career, and that seniority is right, or that the higher up you are, you're probably well-intentioned and your ideas are great but the more I get going, I think to myself, Wow, if we can stop and actually look at where our strengths are, but also where we may have blind spots, there's such power in that. And so for me, I just get chill bumps talking about it. It's like you may have reached a position of leadership, but that absolutely doesn't exempt you from saying what else am I going to do better or different today? And so that's something I'm thinking a lot about is how do you continue to evolve and not just say, I've made it or I've figured it out, and I'm just going to maintain status quo?

Nichols: That is great advice, I love it. So, Cabanne is there anything coming up that you want to tell our listeners about, even you know how they can connect with you or...

Howard: Absolutely, so I think one of the things that our team has looked toward 2020 about is specifically around the digital aspect of marketing. So keep an eye out for... We're going to probably be hosting a marquee event in 2020 just around specifically marketing, and the digital space, and data and measurements so more to come on that front that we're really excited about. But it's still early days. And I think, too, for us, 2020 is all about identifying the dream client and trying to point your compass toward that, right? So we could go after thousands of prospects but for us it's about trying to find that right cultural match, for our firm to who we believe are our perfect clients. And it's so fun to think about it in that way.

Visionary collaborative and growth mindset. And so I would urge anyone in the business of whether it's marketing or any industry, as you go out and make your growth plans, it's like, who specifically whether it not industry, not vertical, not size of company, but like an actual person. And so, for KMG at least in 2020, finding the visionaries, the collaborative folks and those who are happy, and ready to grow. We're going to be looking for them.

Nichols: Those are the clients you're looking for... So if you were in the listening audience and you are that type of person or that type of organization, make sure you reach out to Cabanne. Well, Cabanne this has just been such a pleasure. I just, I feel like I've had a little mini coaching session myself here.

Howard: I think it was a pleasure.

Nichols: Thank you for being on.