

Jenn T. Grace – Episode 99 - Are We Innately Driven to Serve Others with Matt Kidd

Jenn T Grace: You are listening to the Personal Branding for the LGBTQ Professional Podcast, episode 99.

Introduction: Welcome to the Personal Branding for the LGBTQ Professional Podcast; the podcast dedicated to helping LGBTQ professionals and business owners grow their business and careers through the power of leveraging their LGBTQ identities in their personal brand. You'll learn how to market your products and services both broadly, and within the LGBTQ community. You'll hear from incredible guests who are leveraging the power of their identity for good, as well as those who haven't yet started, and everyone in between. And now your host. She teaches straight people how to market to gay people, and gay people how to market themselves. Your professional lesbian, Jenn - with two N's - T Grace.

Jenn T Grace: Well hello and welcome to episode 99 of the Personal Branding for the LGBTQ Professional Podcast. I am your host, Jenn Grace, and I am almost stunned that we are at episode 99 and the next episode will obviously be 100, that will be the last one of 2016 and it's almost a big monumental time to be hitting this 99th episode before going into the triple digits.

So as I have been doing for the last couple of months, I have another interview to share with you and it's with Matt Kidd, and he is the Executive Director of Reaching Out MBA which is an organization that is focused on LGBTQ folks who are pursuing MBAs, and we really just had an amazing conversation that kind of went back and forth between LGBT culture and some of the challenges that we see, and personal brands, and how people can be change makers, and advocates, and really it was just a very fascinating conversation to be had. So per usual I will not dilly dally here with the introduction and we can just dive right into today's interview with Matt, and I will see you in episode 100, but for today please enjoy this interview with Matt Kidd, and if you would like to find information about this episode, see a transcript,

any of that, you can do so at www.JennTGrace.com/99 for episode number 99. Thanks so much and enjoy the interview.

Okay so I want to start off with just having you give the listeners a little bit of a background about yourself, maybe what you've done in the past, what your current position is, and then we can just kind of dive into other interesting topics from there. So why don't you just kind of take it away.

Matt Kidd:

Sure so my name is Matt Kidd. I'm currently the Executive Director of an LGBT organization called Reaching Out. A lot of people know us also as ROMBA, and the organization itself is effectively the now global organization for LGBT MBA both students and professionals. And it's something that I've been in this role now for a little over three years, but prior to that was on the board. So I've been involved with Reaching Out now probably for- gosh going on about eight years. But I would say for me being part of kind of the LGBT community is something that has gone on really since I was a teenager in some ways, which I can talk a little bit about later, and I have to say as I came to this role it really was because I was at a time in my life where I started really thinking about what difference can we make in the world? To be honest I'd gone through my own MBA business school experience, I was working at Tech Startup, and about two, three years after I'd been at that company I was number one kind of getting a little bit bored and I was thinking about what do I want to do next? But number two, I actually lost my mother and so at that point I'd lost both my parents. And when you go through something like that I think it forces a lot of self-reflection and kind of thinking about what is your purpose in the world? Why are you doing this? What really matters? And I think that was one of those moments. And so it was kind of probably about a year after that, that the organization was going through this big change where it went from what was effectively an all-volunteer model with a volunteer board, and using students to run basically one event to an organization that really wanted to have a larger scope, wanted to run year round. And I vividly remember we were sitting in a room with some consultants that we were working with and one of them pulled me aside and said, "Hey would you consider raising your hand for this," and my gut reaction was, "No that's ridiculous." And then I think I went home and thought about it, and a couple weeks went

by, and I just kept coming back to it. It was this really interesting part of me, 'What can we do with this? Like if I did this, why would it be interesting and why should I do this?' And it all kind of came back to in a weird way- I view my time at Reaching Out really in a weird way is working with some sort of startup or something entrepreneurial because I came in and it had been this established product which was this conference that's been going on now for nineteen years, but it really didn't do much else. And so it kind of gave me a blank slate to come and then say, 'Well what do we want to do? What impact do we want to do?' And as soon as I kind of had some of the conversations that made it clear that we really would be able to move forward quickly rather than kind of in the traditional slow nonprofit way, I threw my hat into the ring and lo and behold three years later we've built up a staff of three, we're doing probably close to twenty events a year, we have a scholarship program that's giving away over a million dollars a year to LGBTQ students in business school. So we've been able to accomplish a lot, but that's kind of how I got to where I am, and kind of a little bit about what's going on in my world.

Jenn T Grace:

Do you think with your kind of gut reaction of like, 'Oh hell no I don't want to go down this path,' and then somehow that being the path that you end up on, do you think that like if you look back it's just kind of really kind of changed the trajectory of your ability to make- create purpose and change kind of in your life?

Matt Kidd:

Yeah I do. The reality is I probably won't be in this role forever. Some people do ask me, "What are you going to do next?" And I think in a weird way this role has made me really reflect on what would make me happy in life, and what would not? And I think some of that has to do with the type of organizations that you work for. I think there's something inherently nice about working- for me at least, for a small to mid-sized organization rather than kind of a giant corporation. I think it tells you a little bit about kind of the impact that you can have. I think particularly when you're talking about a nonprofit or a v-corp or something like that, then I think in those cases you're doing more than just having an impact on the business line, you're having an impact on kind of the greater community. I think at this point- and I think it's- I alluded to this

before, I think it's been true really since I was much younger, but now I consciously think about what can I be doing to make somebody else's life better at the end of the day? And I think some of that comes from mission driven work, and where you work, but some of that just becomes frankly how you treat people, how you talk, how you position yourself, and I think being in a role like this makes me hyper conscious of that and that's something that regardless of what I'm doing next, I that's had just had a tremendous impact really on my life. And like I said it can be just something as simple as how are you talking to other people? Are you kind of taking into consideration their priorities, their needs, how can you help them, how might they be at a disadvantage to you? Every conversation now in some form, that goes through my thinking.

Jenn T Grace: Yeah and I know that you have kind of information from early back as we were talking before we hit record, do you think that for people to come to the realization that like their purpose in life is to really kind of serve others? Because that's really at the crux of what you're talking about, is serving others. Do you think that it requires some kind of pivotal moment to cause that? Or do you think that's innate to some people? Like what are your thoughts on that, and then of course how did you realize that about yourself?

Matt Kidd: Yeah I think it's ultimately at the end of the day in everyone. I think there probably are varying degrees of it, but I do think it takes something in somebody's life really to kind of recognize it. And so what we were talking about before we recorded today is October 12th and so it's the eighteenth anniversary of the murder of Matthew Shepard, and I really vividly remember an experience when I was probably a junior or so in high school, and this was in Memphis, Tennessee so fairly deep south in kind of the late nineties, and I remember this experience, and I apologize for my language here but there was a teacher who kind of came in and basically said, "That faggot deserved it. He probably had Aids anyway." And you know, at the time I was not really out at that point, I would say I was exploring my sexual identity in some capacity and I think some people probably suspected, but I just remember that just first of all making me feel so little, but then I

think the more I reflected on it, it started to make me angry. And a couple years ago I had the pleasure of sitting down with Judy Shepard, and we were talking, and my comment to her was the murder is obviously horrible, and I think everybody would go back in time and change it if they could, but there is a silver lining that comes of horrible incidents like this, and that's I think it gets a lot of people to reflect on their own purpose and kind of have a reaction. And so I would say if you look at a lot of my peers, particularly in the LGBT social justice faith now, a lot of them would say a moment to them where they realized that this was something that was important to them, something that moved them that made them care, was Matthew Shepard's death. And so for a lot of us, kind of my generation, so people who are in their mid-thirties, I think that was a moment that sparked this idea of, 'This is wrong and I want to change that.' Now how people went about doing that, I think it takes a lot of different paths. And sometimes you'll see have you multiple encounters, like for me a second spark really was my loss of both my parents, that a moment where for me it was like, 'Well why am I on this earth? Like what am I meant to do?' And so I think you do have those points, and I think it's what you decide to do with them that really matters.

Jenn T Grace:

So I have a friend of mine who's writing a book, and it's really about what you're talking about of really kind of taking that challenging situation and turning it into that silver lining. And there's a whole concept around it called post-traumatic growth, and it's really that we grow from those really traumatic experiences that we kind of face. Do you think- because I too am in my mid-thirties looking back at Matthew Shepard, and that being in 1998, and I was also a junior in high school. I remember it really vividly as I think most people our age do, and do you think that there- because I think that Judy Shepard really, really made it her life's mission to use that incident and her experience as a grieving mother to really be a catalyst in so many ways across the board for LGBT equality. Do you think that because it was 1998, if we look back Ellen had come out a couple of years before, LGBT was so not on the forefront as it is now. If we look at something like what happened in Orlando in June, do we look at that as possibly one of those pivotal moments for people now? Like because I know for us, like I definitely- of course we all had a reaction to Orlando, but do we think that that is actually one of those defining moments for

maybe the youth? Especially as you- with reaching out working with students, I'm curious just kind of your perspective and hearing stories that you might have heard from any of the students that you work with.

Matt Kidd:

Yeah you know I think at some level it did, I think that there are certainly differences kind of as you alluded to. In the nineties, LGBT- obviously being LGBT, being out, much less acceptable than it is now. And I think in many ways, Orlando in particular exposed people to this concept of we're still vulnerable. I think one of the things that I see in a lot of students, and it's a little bit horrifying for me to see some students who are kids now getting into the nineties, but some of them have never grown up in an age frankly without Internet, which I think for a lot of LGBT people kind of opened a community, opened kind of access to free communication that you might not otherwise have, and I think they've grown up in an environment thanks to people like Kevin Jennings where a lot of them have seen GSAs in their schools and stuff like that. And so they've always grown up in this environment where it's been acceptable, and I think that there's always this danger that people become a little bit complacent, and so I think it moved a lot of people to think, 'Okay there's still a lot of work to do.' Because I hate to say this, but let's be honest, the fact that not all states have workplace protection for example, it's actually not as sexy to at least a lot of my students because most of them are going to go work for corporations or multi-nationals who regardless of whether the state they're in has work protections or not, they're going to be protected by their companies. And so they're not really impacted by something like that so it's not as sexy. But this idea that there are people out there who want to do you harm, and it's like this in other places in the world, and that particularly is something that I think people start to get with something like Orlando, I think it gets them to move, to act a little bit and it does spark something like that. I mean my true thought, and we saw this last week, we had our annual conference last weekend, and one of the speakers was this guy Darnell Moore, and Darnell Moore is kind of at the intersection of queer and Black Lives Matter as a lot of the Black Lives Matter are themselves. And he really talked about kind of the racial inequality within the LGBT movement and there were a lot of conversations following that, and I think that in a lot of ways Black Lives Matter is kind of the equivalent to some of

the LGBT rights issues that we saw in the nineties, including the Matthew Shepard murder, and I think that's actually going to spark a lot of people towards just kind of general social justice movement. So it may not be precisely LGBT focused, but I think that there's a broad- if people are not being treated equally, that's a problem that people are starting to get in tune with, in part because of Black Lives Matter actually.

Jenn T Grace:

Yeah I feel like it's a collision- there's definitely a colliding of the Black Lives Matter movement and the LGBTQ movement all kind of boiling to a point at the same time, which if we look back just from a historical context, obviously I think it goes without saying that the Black Lives Matter should not be where it's at right now, this should not even be a movement currently. And I think there's a lot of power in the two communities trying to kind of raise one another up. I'm sure there's plenty of problematic areas too of we're all trying to fight for the same thing, but I think more often than not there's definitely a synergy, and a harmony if you would even want to call it that, of it's just injustice across the board, equality across the board, and I think that seeing these two different vantage points is actually I think helping one another in some degree from a media standpoint, or at least what's kind of being talked about because I think maybe the first time in history that these two things are so on the forefront every single day in any media outlet that you look at.

Matt Kidd:

I'd add gender equality to that as well, I mean if you look at what's going on with the whole Trump campaign kind of implosion if you will, a lot of that centers around gender equality. And I think that the fact that people are more attuned to this- you really can't talk about people like that, you really have to treat people equally. If that wasn't going on I feel like unfortunately this wouldn't be as big of an issue as it's turned into over the last week or so.

Jenn T Grace:

Yeah I feel like there's just so much going on, the political landscape. By the time this airs I think we will be post-election, and who knows what exactly that will look like. Good God let's all hope here, and I'm sure anyone listening to this is on the same

page, I can't imagine that I would have any listeners who were not, but who knows. In looking at just kind of maybe how even just the election cycle has kind of gone in terms of opening awareness to all of these mass amounts of issues. Because I really feel like there's a lot to attribute to the Trump campaign of just kind of raising the collective consciousness of, 'Wow there are so many problems.' Whether or not there's any kind of resolution to anything that's been brought up over the last year and a half, who knows? But it will be interesting to kind of see how this all plays out as it relates to any number of disenfranchised communities. Obviously LGBT being kind of the one that we're discussing.

Matt Kidd:

Yeah the Trump campaign on LGBT has just been frankly very confusing, I mean to me as the whole Trump campaign has been. But I do think that it is kind of forcing people to really look at these issues, and the thing that at least is I guess slightly comforting to me is that this election cycle, LGBT has kind of taken a back seat in some ways. That to me means it's being used as less of a wedge issue, or kind of people view it as less of a wedge issue. I think that's promising. I think that there's also an inherent risk to that, which I alluded to in one of the last questions. I mean if you look at workplace equality, housing equality, transgender rights, look at what's going on in North Carolina; there's a lot that we really need to still accomplish. I think to the extent that people feel like, 'Okay we got marriage so we can move on,' which frankly is what a lot of people from the kind of straight- or to be more politically correct, non-LGBTQ population, that's how a lot of them view it is, 'Okay they got marriage last year so they're all set.' The reality is that's not true, but I also understand- kind of like you said the fact that we're still having some of these race inequality issues, essentially fifty years after we went through a whole racial equality movement, is just absolutely insane to me. And to me when people say, 'Well what do you think the importance of LGBT organizations-' like mine going forward are going to be. I think number one there's still stuff to accomplish, but number two, if we look at women's equality movement, and the black equality movement in particular, those are still ongoing, and to think that we're done and that we're going to politically at least get to a point where we're in the clear, we have nothing to worry about, I think it's naïve. I think the reality is we need to continue to be a pretty cohesive community, and I think that there are a lot of ways to do

that, and the way that my organization kind of thinks about that is we want to bring these students together who are ultimately at the end of the day most likely to go onto jobs that are well-positioned within corporations, and pay well, and presumably they'll amass some sort of power, and I think one of the things we're really starting to focus on is how do we plant that seed that gets them to think about how they can number one, support each other, but more importantly, how can they support the rest of the LGBTQ community that may not have that same power, privilege and money? How can they essentially be giving back to their peers who are not as privileged as they are? And I think that's kind of the next wave of LGBT movement, is some of us are doing exceedingly well, particularly if you're a white, cisgender, gay male. Some people are not in as good a position, and how do we lift those people up?

Jenn T Grace:

Yeah I feel like you've kind of said so much because it's almost like you're helping enable an army that can kind of infiltrate from the inside of the corporate walls. And I think that with marriage equality, or even to some degree kind of the non-discrimination legislation that is still kind of in limbo, but the states that have adopted some kind of policies to protect their LGBT work force, so many of them have done so under the pressure of the corporations within those given states. So this seems like it's definitely the long term game strategy that you're kind of viewing, but it really- I think to some degree only takes one individual LGBT person, or even ally within an organization to really affect the type of change that's needed in order to continue to kind of propel things forward.

Matt Kidd:

Yup absolutely, and I spent a day last week at the Out and Equal Workplace Summit, and a lot of the conversations that I was either part of or sat in, really kind of talked about how it's at the end of the day, particularly within corporations, getting stuff done, getting influence can come from two directions, it can come from kind of top down or bottom up, and it really takes passionate individuals to make that happen. The challenge that I think a lot of corporations right now face is that yes you're having these C-level folks, somebody like a Marc Benioff really step it up and taking some bold, bold actions. And you have some really passionate kind of lower level employees particularly amongst the millennials. But

then you kind of have this layer of middle management, and frankly in my opinion to be middle management in a corporation sucks. You're getting a lot of pressure to perform from both ends, you can't take as many risks as you want, and so that is actually where I think a lot of kind of social justice movements within corporations kind of hit friction. It's not actually because of the C-suite, it's because of middle management, and it's essentially a fear, it's a fear for their own careers. And so I think as we think about who we want to influence and whom we should be talking to, I think those are kind of the key stakeholders. As we think about how we can leverage corporations in particular for this. I think yes, if you can get the attention of the CEO that's great, and it lets you make what I would essentially say are like headline plays. Something that you do that kind of is there for a day or two and then potentially goes away. To make something that's really long-lasting, you really need to build it into the culture, and a lot of that deals with middle management and influencing them. And so I think as we think about whom we should be talking to, and where we can make relationships personal, I think it's with those middle managers that really is key.

Jenn T Grace:

Yeah and I had an experience this past year. So I have a corporate client that's a Fortune 100, and I've been helping them- I did an LGBT training for their staff, just kind of marketing wise how to get their salespeople communicating in the right ways. And it was kind of a really fun experience, and that was- I don't know, maybe two years ago, and earlier this year they reached out to me to say, 'Hey we recognize that our CEI score is atrocious, and we see that we're not able to attract the right type of talent because it's just so bad and we're really putting people off.' And it's not that they weren't practicing it internally, but the number on the page was- it was a ten. So I worked with them, and their HR department, and their marketing department, and they had top down buy-in. So I was expecting kind of a Herculean effort to be had of like this is going to be a slog, we're working with an all-white male board of directors who isn't really all about diversity, let alone LGBT, and I was beyond shocked with how easy it moved through because the top executives were saying, 'This is something that's important to us, this is what we have to do.' But it's what you were saying, it was the mid-level manager which is usually where things kind of go to die when- any type of initiative. Like somehow it just doesn't either

get passed going upward, or doesn't get below going downward, and there's always- obviously I'm making a broad generalization, but in my experience anyway, this is what I've seen happen. And it was because that mid-level management was like, 'You know what? This is important. It's important to us from a how do we position our business as- how do we position ourselves as the employer of choice?' And it's amazing that they managed to get themselves up to a ninety with just working with me for six months to really just kind of get their internal stuff together, because again they were already doing it, they just weren't really getting the credit for it. So I think that there's a lot to be said because it was one marketing person in that organization of like 18,000 employees who was saying, 'Our CEI sucks. We have to do something about it.' And she's an ally to the community no less, not even part of the community and was like, 'We have to fix this.' So I think that that should give hope and inspiration to a lot of the young people that are students and going through Reaching Out because they really do have an impact to change so many people, it's just I think if you time the messaging right, you time the conversation at the right time, you talk to the right people eventually- and I'm sure my particular contact was having these conversations for quite some time before I was able to actually come in and deliver, but it took her to stand up to be like, 'This isn't right. We need to fix this.' And I think that anyone has that true potential, but in a lot of ways I feel like the stars have to kind of align to really kind of see that such quick progress. Because especially in corporate it does take a lot of time to do anything usually.

Matt Kidd:

Yeah, you know I think that there is increasing pressure on some of these organizations to really look at diversity numbers, metrics. When I throw around the word diversity, generally speaking I'm really talking about recruiting. I think if that pressure continues, and I think the pressure on that will actually fall on middle management, that by default is going to start making this part of the culture because people will think about, 'Well what can we be doing to affect this?' So I think setting some metrics in the hopes of companies essentially to task for you know, 'Gosh you really have no women.' I think it's a really important thing to do and I think over time that will start to change the culture of these organizations inherently as well.

Jenn T Grace: Yeah and I think it's great that your focus is on MBA students because like you said, they are well-positioned by the time they hit the corporate workplace, so they automatically have an added layer perhaps credibility kind of bringing to the table, even if they are kind of in a very low position, you know that they're going to inevitably kind of succeed through the ranks based on what they're setting out to do.

Matt Kidd: Yeah absolutely.

Jenn T Grace: So switching gears just a little bit and thinking about earlier on, you were talking about for you, Reaching Out is likely not going to be something that you're kind of tied to for life. Do you think about how- like right now is your name- I'm just going down a path of personal branding here. In looking at your name, are you finding that it's becoming synonymous with Reaching Out, or Executive Director of Reaching Out? And are you consciously trying to think about how to gradually- not disconnect because of course your name is everything and it certainly plays a huge factor into your role, but just kind of from a general standpoint of thinking of like, 'How would I actually unravel this down the road should I need to?'

Matt Kidd: Yeah, no I think that is top of mind for me lately. I think that actually if you look at a lot of LGBT organizations you have people who in a lot of ways, the person is interchangeable with the organization. So you look at like Out & Equal, and you think of Selisse Berry. You look at Out Leadership, you think of Todd Sears. And there are numerous cases like that, and unfortunately I think that there's a danger not only to the individual I think as they think about kind of their next chapter, although for some of these folks there may not be another chapter, they may decide to retire. But I think there's kind of a challenge for somebody like me where this certainly is- hopefully, knock on wood, not going to be the last chapter of my career, and so at one level you want to be associated with this but you don't want it to be your entire brand. I think

there's also a danger for the organization because if it becomes so entrenched in kind of my personal brand, then the organization risks- if I'm not there and not present, people could say things like, 'Oh it was not the same as it was when Matt was there,' and I don't think that's good for the organization either. I increasingly as we do events and trying to do things to put a spotlight on our other stuff, because I think at the end of the day those are the people who are working equally as hard as I am, and maybe aren't always the face and voice but I think we should position them more to be in those kinds of situations. So there is a risk and I am thinking about how we slowly kind of unwind that a bit, and I think essentially lifting other people up is a huge component of that.

Jenn T Grace:

Yeah and I partially asked the question because in- everything is always clearer in hindsight, but when I was running the Connecticut LGBT Chamber of Commerce which I did for quite a number of years, and I was the Executive Director I remember that when I left that position the organization essentially imploded, and it took awhile to kind of regain its legs, and it certainly- this was a number of years ago at this point, so everything is on the up and up now, but it definitely was a significant hit because- and it wasn't anything that I intentionally had done from the onset. I wasn't trying to build the organization the Jenn way, it just happened to be a very small organization, not a lot of people. I relied heavily on volunteers and our board, and it was just a matter of we've got to do what we've got to do to get these events going, to get our members happy, and it just happened to be me that was always in front of people. So I think that that's a risk generally for anybody in a position like you're in now.

Matt Kidd:

I think it's a risk for any kind of small to mid-sized organization really to be honest, and part of why we built out our staff is certainly because if we continued on the trajectory that when it was essentially just me as a staff member with some contractors and volunteers, I was going to burn out which would not benefit anyone, and we wouldn't be able to expand and grow the way that we wanted to. But the second is like it essentially puts the institutional memory of an organization really in that one person, and if you lose that one person, back when we were kind of that

staff of one plus some contractors, if I got hit by a bus not that the organization wouldn't continue on, but that would be really problematic. Today knock on wood that's not going to happen, but if it did I have full faith that between kind of the staff embers that we have and how we've kind of been able to lift them up and then have them kind of take over some things, I think that frankly things would go on without missing much of a beat.

Jenn T Grace:

Yeah which is such a good sustainable place to be in, which is not always what is accessible to every organization because they're not really kind of thinking about secession planning and what lies ahead, or if this key person were to not be here for whatever number of reasons, how do we kind of carry on without skipping a beat. And I would imagine- my gut says, and based on people that I know in Executive Director positions for other nonprofits, I feel like most of them are not necessarily thinking that forward in terms of 'what would we do in the situation?' So rather it's a reactive versus proactive.

Matt Kidd:

Yeah and you know I'll be honest, in the LGBT space in particular, I think we have a responsibility to start to think about secession planning, and the large reason actually is that if you look at the vast majority- not all, but the majority of LGBT social justice organizations, they're run by white cisgender gay men, and I don't think that that's the face of the movement going forward. And so I think we really need to kind of pause as a movement in general and think about how can we bring in the faces and the voices that maybe aren't heard as well right now, and put them into leadership roles? And I think we're really at an inflection point where it's time for those of us who- kind of going back to what I was saying before, are fairly privileged within the LGBTQ community, to lift up those who are not and make them heard, and I think that's one way that we can do that. And so I hope that as a lot of other LGBT organizations have to retire, or switch to something else, that that's something that they're starting to think about.

Jenn T Grace: Yeah and so I'm curious to hear your thoughts, and if you've been paying attention to this at all, but I had someone from BuzzFeed reach out to me last week- and again we're recording this on October 12th, so whenever this does come out, it's obviously all a little bit in the past. But I had somebody reach out for my comment on the After Ellen platform kind of disbanding. So what you're talking about I think really kind of goes into that entirety of the face of the community is really gay, white, cisgender men, and we know that that is by far not the reality of the community. But when we look at something like a website, like After Ellen which was kind of a flagship type of lesbian driven centric platform and content generator for so many years. So for that to kind of no longer exist in the capacity that it did, and the reason being is that there just wasn't enough advertiser interest, it's almost like how do we combat that from recognizing that it's not just what this kind of stereotypical highly sought after demographic is, when we ourselves are kind of continuing to perpetuate that that is all there is when we know that that's not.

Matt Kidd: Yeah, no I do know what you mean. The After Ellen thing is frankly a little surprising to me. I think some of what they struggled with is the business model issue, but some of it is- and also from firsthand experience, one of the things that I'm really focused on and the organization is, is really frankly trying to drive more LGBTQ into business school and business in general. And so we started an initiative about probably three or four years ago now that we call Out Women in Business, and we hold a conference in New York, and it's a challenging audience to attract. I think each year it gets a little bit better, and there are some people like Leanne Pittsford with Lesbians Who Tech, who have something really special and magical there, but I mean Leanne will even tell you, like for her trying to attract an audience sometimes is a challenge as well. And so that's kind of a community thing, and I think it all starts with kind of visible leadership, and I think slowly but surely with folks like Megan Smith for example, we are carving out a space and leadership examples for the LGBTQ community in particular, so I think that that's kind of a key component to it. But there aren't a lot of sources. After Ellen was one, there are what, maybe a couple- three or four others that are significant that are left, and that's pretty shocking. And then you get into other pretty gay-focused media sources; like to me, Towleroad or something like that is

frankly pretty gay-focused. So that is a disturbing thing when you consider the fact that particularly bisexual women I think are the majority of the LGBTQ community. And so that's one of these moments where we should pause and say, 'Are we really reflecting what's out there, and is that part of why something like After Ellen isn't failing, it's because there's a representation issue.'

Jenn T Grace:

Yeah I feel like it's interesting because if you look at just kind of general demographic data, it shows that women are more likely to be the primary purchasers of households. So even in just looking at that as women as a more influential audience for buying whatever it happens to be, it seems like it just doesn't add up. And then I think about it, and I wonder if gay men, or any male within the LGBTQ community, is it because there is a bigger sense of community of like actually gathering that makes it easier to see them as a demographic to reach versus women are far more just kind of blending in with the individual cultures in which they live, whether that's geography, or whether it's different areas of interest. It's just really fascinating. When I was talking to the woman at BuzzFeed, I was just saying like, 'This is my lesbian perspective, but you should probably reach out to a cisgender gay male and get their point of view as well because there's got to be some underlying thing that's kind of here, and I do get the question quite often of how do I target lesbians, or how do I find lesbians to market to? And most often my advice is you just have to market to them as women first typically, and then go from there and be inclusive in that approach. But that's not necessarily what's going to be really kind of sexy to an advertiser to say, 'Oh this is a demographic I should invest in.'

Matt Kidd:

Yeah and you know, I think it goes back beyond just media. So if you look at a given city, and you look at like a nightlife scene for example, generally speaking you'll probably find a handful, probably three or four of what you would consider kind of 'gay bars,' and you might find one bar that caters towards LGBTQ women. And I think that's there- I think it goes back to your clusters of people, you see them more visibly, and again I think the more that we can think about how we bring communities together, who's representing them; I think these are all really, really

important things for the movement as we go forward, particularly with social justice organizations.

Jenn T Grace: Yeah, absolutely. And do you see any kind of influence or impact on like the Reaching Out students? Because they are MBA focused, that obviously puts them in a different kind of track, but do you see that that's being another avenue for just kind of shedding light and awareness on all of this?

Matt Kidd: I think interestingly enough we're at the point where we even have cisgender men kind of saying, 'What can we do to be getting more women here?' So like it's becoming front of mind for people. I would say for us probably even as recently as five or six years ago, we were the white gay male conference. And you know, I looked at the metrics this year, it's getting better. It's still not there, I think we were slightly under 50% Caucasian, so that's in my mind kind of a good change, although I think a lot of that frankly is being driven by international students who are at business schools. But the number of women in these programs is picking up a little bit each year, but we're not talking- we're talking like a percent each year. So the difference between like 26% and 27% and we really need to be focusing on it. And for me, I mean this is one of my big passions, is how can we drive this and we're fortunate to have a board chair who is a lesbian identifying woman herself, and both of us feel very passionately about it so we've convinced everyone to really put some money behind our mouths on this. And I think we're slowly making progress, it's just not as fast as I think any of us would like, and to be honest we just haven't figured out the silver bullet. So I'll say if any of your listeners know, please feel free to reach out because this is something that- it's not that we don't want them in business school, we actually desperately want them and so frankly do the business schools. I think the challenge that we run into, number one is a little bit of marketing to them, which like you said I think it starts with just marketing to women in general, and I think it gets a little bit more specific. But the other thing is, as I talk to a lot of LBTQ women and say, 'Hey have you ever considered business school?' the responses are pretty much, 'No that's not something that's really top of mind,' and ultimately when you kind of keep pushing it comes down to they're not

seeing a community like themselves so they feel like it's not a place for them to be. And so it's a little bit of chicken or egg, but we've got to tell them that, 'This is a place where you're wanted,' and frankly if we start talking about the trans community it gets even harder. I had a conversation with the Executive Director of Campus Pride probably about a month ago now, and he was saying when he talks to his trans students- so these are all undergrad students, he says, 'What do you want to do in the future?' He said it's maybe one in a hundred that's saying some form of business, and the rest of it is something that might be more in the social justice space, or arts space, or even legal, and the fact that this really isn't on their radar and they don't see it as a place for them is a big problem.

Jenn T Grace:

Yeah and I think it's more of a systemic issue that is much broader than LGBTQ. It really kind of stems from what children are exposed to, and what classes they are exposed to in their elementary schools for example, and just kind of going through and in Connecticut we have a lot of STEM type of schools that are popping up. So if either of my children who are in third and fourth grade, if they were interested or showed any inclination toward that stuff, then we could absolutely kind of push them in that direction. But I feel like school is so watered down now that there's just- it's focused on like the bare necessities and not really exposing children, and middle or high school to all of the things that they could be. And I feel like- and Lord knows that is going to be a fight that is not going to be won anytime soon. But I feel like it really- there's just such a systemic issue at play, and the LGBTQ community is really just a microcosm of a bigger- of the community of everyone. So I think we just see the issues because we are such a concentrated microcosm of the larger kind of landscape that we're all operating in.

Matt Kidd:

I agree. Totally agree.

Jenn T Grace:

Well it's already- we've already been chatting for 45 minutes which seems crazy at this point. But I would love to kind of ask you a final question and then just give you kind of free reign to tell everyone how to go about finding you.

Matt Kidd: Sure.

Jenn T Grace: But my question would be if we're thinking about people who are listening to this, who may be business owners, maybe they're in a professional sphere, they're LGBTQ, they're trying to kind of make a first step, or a first foray into identifying and really kind of honing in on what's meaningful to them, and how that might translate into their own personal brand, or the positioning of what they're doing. Do you have anything that maybe you've learned through your career that might be helpful that could kind of shortcut that process for them?

Matt Kidd: Yeah I think what I have found kind of throughout my career is that- and I know this sounds kind of cliché, particularly for kind of any LGBTQ folks, but authenticity sells. By talking about stories that I've really gone through, and that's why I'll use something like my experience around the day when Matthew Shepard died makes it more relatable and it makes people kind of understand you and what you're doing a little bit better. And so I'll say from kind of a personal brand point of view, I'm one of these people that for the most part I'm a pretty open book and keep it that way. I think even about like social media. If a student wants to add me on Facebook, go for it because frankly at this point I live pretty authentically and intentionally so because it makes me more human and it makes me more real and it makes people more willing to collaborate and to connect with you. And so I think don't be afraid of that, don't try to hide that because I think the reality is it probably opens more doors than it closes at this point. So never forget that, and always just kind of go back to your roots and kind of what you care about. At the end of the day, that is what it's all about, and if you don't care about something you probably shouldn't be doing it.

Jenn T Grace: I feel like that's such good wisdom. Really being mindful of what you stand for and just being transparent from the onset. It certainly will save you a lot of headache later.

Matt Kidd: Absolutely.

Jenn T Grace: So for anyone who was inspired by this conversation and interested in connecting with you, how would you go about directing them to do that?

Matt Kidd: Yeah please. So Reaching Out is online at www.ReachingOutMBA.org. Please visit our website. If you're an MBA yourself, we do have an online community that you can join. It's on that website and it's called Reaching Out Connect, so it's our individual member platform, so we certainly encourage you to do that. If you're part of the LGBTQ community, we certainly would welcome and love to have you with us at the Out Women in Business Conference in New York which will be March 31st of 2017. So certainly join us because like I said, we do want to bring that community together, and that is open to non-MBAs so you don't need an MBA to be there, and I would say less than half of the folks who are there have an MBA, so you're certainly welcome for that. And then people can always find me online, LinkedIn, Twitter and if you search very carefully you can find me on Facebook. I'm usually pretty open to adding people on any of the platforms so you can hear what I have to say about things, because like I said I am my authentic self out there.

Jenn T Grace: That's awesome. Well thank you so much for spending some time today, and I feel like there's a lot that can be gained for the listeners from our conversation, so thank you for that.

Matt Kidd: Absolutely, thank you Jenn.

Jenn T Grace: Thank you for listening to today's podcast. If there are any links from today's show that you are interested in finding, save yourself a step and head on over to www.JennTGrace.com/theodcast. And there you will find a backlog of all of the past podcast episodes including transcripts, links to articles, reviews, books, you name it. It is all there on the website for your convenience. Additionally if

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