Intro

01:26-01:40
Lucas McCurdy
Welcome to Bridge the Gap podcast, the senior living podcast with Josh and Lucas here at LA and Fort Lauderdale, South Florida. We've got a great guest on today. I want to welcome Bryce Robinson, regional VP at Agewell Solvere living. Welcome to the show.

01:40-01:41
Bryce Robinson
Thank you for having me.

01:41-02:03
Lucas McCurdy
Yes. You were recommended by our other good friend, Damon Thomas, a board member here at FSLA. Bridge the Gap ambassador, a good friend of ours. And, we're happy to meet with you. We were just discussing. We don't really get a lot of regional vice presidents on the show. I don't really know why that is, but it's a great time to talk about that topic.

02:03-02:25
Lucas McCurdy
Bridge the gap covers. So many different topics in senior housing, and this is a great opportunity to kind of talk about, to use, kind of a phrasing. You said off mic, which is kind of your one degree of separation between the community and the C-suite. And how do you bridge the gap, so to speak, there? And you were also on a panel today, talking about Medicaid, Medicare.

02:25-02:26
Bryce Robinson
Yeah, MCOs.

02:26-02:37
Lucas McCurdy
Yeah. Right. Right. Which is a complex topic. And we may dive into that too. But my first question is, why senior living? How'd you get started?

02:37-03:42
Bryce Robinson
So I got into it after visiting, like many of us, a relative in long-term care. So it was assisted living up in Ohio. It was my grandmother. I just remember loving it and filed that away in my long-term memory. Banks went to my undergraduate, took a career planning course at the University of Central Florida, and they said health care is definitely for you.

And I took one of those assessment tests, and it said, but management doesn't touch people. I was like, That's not my comfort zone. I'm not a hands-on care provider. So, coming out of college, I literally went to Tom Campbell's core training in Central Florida at West Chester. And I asked my core trainer, I said, Hey, where can I go to be an assisted living professional with no experience, fresh out of my undergraduate and a core training certificate, he said, Emeritus or Brookdale.

And he said it in that order. And I always make the joke that if he had said it as Brookdale or Emeritus, I would have ended up working for Brookdale my whole career because he said Emeritus first. That's where I started. I got hired and I haven't left. Actually, I'm one of the strange people because I got to it so early. I was 24 when I got into the industry as a community sales director.

03:42-03:55
Lucas McCurdy
Then what? You've obviously worked from there. That's a similar story to Josh. That's a bit of your own track record there. So you'll have a lot in common in that. Obviously, it sounds like you've done almost every job in the community.

03:55-04:12
Bryce Robinson
Yes. I've been, community sales director. I've been an executive director. I've been a sales specialist, multi-site. I've been a regional sales director. I've been a sales trainer. I've been everything under the sun. I've been an RDO/RDSM hybrid, and now I'm, regional vice president.

04:12-04:51
Josh Crisp
There are a lot of our listeners who have never experienced what it's like to be in a regional position. So I would love it if you could kind of explain, you know, what a day is like, and talk a little bit about that one degree of separation is kind of you because that's that's a unique opportunity, let's put it that way. And it presents a lot of difficulties where you're taking big picture vision and ideas and strategy, and you have to, you know, assemble the folks to execute on that. And, so what are some of the challenges that you face and opportunities that you see ahead?

04:51-06:48
Bryce Robinson
Yeah, I think, you know, to answer your first question, our day to day kind of in this role, at age, well, where where I work, it's it's we're very, we have a lot of breadth, so we're not like, regional vice president of operations or a regional vice president of sales. We're just kind of one of everything.

And we partner with our, we call them functional VPs in the sales and the marketing, as well as the community leadership. So, a typical day I spend, my number one thing is being accessible to the executive director and leadership of the communities. Typically, if they are in need of my services or they are in need of communication with me directly via phone or text, I look at it as my responsibility to rapidly respond, because something has gone on that they are not comfortable handling by themselves.

So, a typical day is spent on-site. I'd say 60 to 80% of my time is physically inside of the communities with the teams I interact with, every single staff member, few families, every once in a while, if they make it to my desk, it's again usually probably started with a phone call a few weeks before, I think, you know, talking to the one degree of separation you have, like you said, you have like the larger, like, theoretical or, philosophical direction of capital partners and, owners of operations.

And, you also have the day-to-day tasks and challenges of the executive director. And so I spend a lot of time taking more complex thoughts or complex strategies and breaking them down into bite-sized pieces or step-by-step pieces for a community team, then to take and then coming up with the individual tactics to drive it across the finish line to achieve the ultimate outcome.

Yeah, so I know that I didn't paint a awesome picture of what a day really looks like, because not every day is the same. I don't think I've had two days in my career in this role that have looked identical to any other day.

06:48-07:16
Josh Crisp
Well, you're exactly right. And I would say the executive directors and administrators probably feel the same way. Lucas and I have talked about it. I've been an executive director, and that's a job that, you know, I mean, it is a very difficult and oftentimes thankless job. So, the environment where you're most successful executive directors, what are some of those qualities that you're like, this is what it takes to be a really successful executive director?

07:16-08:15
Bryce Robinson
Actually, we had a company meeting here leading into the conference, and that was one of the questions posed by the executive directors. I think when I look for an executive director, I look for somebody who has a passion for the entirety of what we do. It's and I use the example of you can't hire an executive director and expect them to be amazing.

If they're not a food and beverage person. They have to have a familiarity and an understanding of that product. Same thing of of life engagement. Business office functions are crappy. That's the one position in the community that not only has direct, oversight, but has their hands and fingerprints in every single thing. So you're really looking for a jack of all trades tied up with an absolute, unwavering commitment to getting the job done and pushing things across the finish line.

You mean a lot of times you'll see somebody that's a subject matter expert? Maybe it's a sales and marketing aide. And that's what they're known for. But they don't have enough of an understanding in the other areas to be successful overall.

08:15-08:42
Josh Crisp
Well, and I think, there's not a whole lot of, I would say, systematic programs out there, curriculums that teach that. It's not like you can just come out of school and be like, oh, I'm ready to be an administrator of a community. So often I've seen I don't know if you've seen this where so many of the what or now great executive directors have come through the ranks, and maybe they've been an awesome life enrichment director and moved up and who knows, now they're like the best executive director you've ever seen.

08:42-10:06
Bryce Robinson
I can tell you, one of my absolute A+ player EDs that I would look for, and she completely changed my, the connotation of internal promotion into that role for me. She's in our one of our Melbourne, Florida, communities. She started off as a lifestyle director, and she was there for, I want to say was roughly about two years.

And in that she got a fundamental understanding of what it meant to engage somebody on that holistic approach. She also got an idea of what the department had directors go through and how we collaborate, how or lack thereof, or how they could collaborate better together. And then she made the jump from lifestyle director into the executive director role.

And I got to tell you, I have never met an executive director who works harder in my life. I've been in the industry for 15 years. I've never actually seen it before. She, if you follow her social media and things each, if you look at the pictures of it, she embodies her community and her residents are legitimately happy she became the executive director.

I'll tell you this. It's interesting. She became executive director. Her community was 70% occupied today. It just celebrated its 14th consecutive month of being 100% occupied, 14 consecutive months. And she did it from the ground up. So it changed my perspective. Moving forward to your point, I'm going to look for those subject matter experts internally that have the fire, the drive and the desire, and those are going to be our future leaders.

10:06-10:44
Josh Crisp
So, you know, we're here at Florida Senior Living. There's, everybody's coming in buzzing through this expo center about all the tech and AI and how that's impacting all this. So a lot of exciting topics. But I'm curious, how's that? Is any of the big changes in all the the tech that's coming into the space for the communities and platforms to use, as well as just the changing of the demographic? That's that wave that's coming, is, is that causing you to pivot or change your

strategy in how you lead or communicate or changing your daily work? How are you adapting to all that?

10:44-11:23
Bryce Robinson
the introduction of AI or any kind of technology advancements? For me, one of the core functions of my job is to be a somewhat of a gatekeeper because sometimes so much technology is pushing its way into a community or into our industry that's not vetted or collaborated or tied together. Our executive directors in the field, I always use this example.

They already have, you know, 15 usernames and 15 passwords. And we all get frustrated in our own personal life, all the different characters of our password, let alone how to use those 15 different systems. So I think that's one of the things as we see the new technologies come in, it's less about what can this one do or what can this one do.

But the gap for us is what can actually bring all of these technologies and systems together, what can actually tie, because everybody's racing to bring in all this information and all this technology, but we're not focusing yet on collaborating it. So an end comes to a conference like this. And I've asked my team, for example, I have nine executive directors that are here at the conference in attendance and our sister property.

So we have a total of 16. And they're all looking at we're here right now, right? We're sitting next to these vendors. They're looking at, sensor models. They're looking at AI, they're looking at analytics, and they're loving it. But then they're asking themselves, what do I do with all this data? When am I going to have time to actually open that platform and receive it? So I think it's exciting. It'll definitely change how we, we operate. But right now it's kind of like we're cautiously wading into that water. But we know it's here.

12:19-12:53
Josh Crisp
So there's a lot of big topics that have been circulating around our industry for the last several years. We've had someone earlier on our podcast talking about, value based care. You were doing, a discussion on. Yeah, reimbursement structures, Medicare, Medicaid, that sort of thing. And so how in the life of a regional VP, how is that radically changing, like your strategies? What are you having to position yourself to really be educated on to help navigate the teams.

12:53-14:27
Bryce Robinson
100%? I will say that payer diversification is going to be absolutely critical to us. The demographics are clear. Yes. We have more and more seniors every year entering our market. And yes, supply is low. Our new supply is low, which is great for us. But the demographics of the people coming in as it relates to their financials is is getting weaker and weaker.

And there's a lot of data on that. So one of the things that's changed for me is with the MCOs, we partner with, only one in the state of Florida currently. It's kind of we find one that works for you and you have a good track record with. We have made that decision to stay with it again.

It's also a simplification tactic of not having 4 or 5 different plans that you're billing on a monthly basis, but it's absolutely necessary. So, credentialing processes with them, I've taken that on for my organization as far as my specific geographic territory. The correlation between that and your change of ownership, because there are a lot of assets changing hands right now.

There's an absolute ton. I'm personally going through four of them right now simultaneously, on top of having eight stabilized assets. And with that, there's the whole application of a child for the Medicaid numbers and being able to get that reimbursement for the next owner coming in. So I'm quarterbacking that in a lot of ways from behind the line, relatively better term. And that's really a change. I didn't have as much of that, I'd say, 7 or 8 years ago. Very little of it, actually. But now it's, it's ramping up more and more, especially with acquisitions and dispositions. It's a lot,

14:27-14:33
Josh Crisp
So heavy lift for acquisitions right now. And your company is, did you say you were doing four?

14:33-15:35
Bryce Robinson
Right now? I'm

00;14;33;40 - 00;14;52;32
Bryce Robinson
Doing four right now. Yeah. So we have, we've done incredibly well in a lot of our assets, and actually all four of the assets that are in, kind of that change mode right now are because the capital partners that own the assets are ready to exit and take their returns on investment. And I'm very proud of those four buildings.

But it's like an operator, it's one of the sad truths that if you do your job incredibly well, which in these four instances we absolutely have that you have to go through this as kind of like a reward at the end of at the end of the line. And two of the four that are performing as well, we're retaining ownership.

So I have to act as both the seller and the buyer. It isn't as bad because you're just kind of sharing information with yourself, but the capital partners still need that information for their due diligence. Two of them are crushing it. Not going to lie. Very proud of them. It will likely not be under our management. Not because we didn't do a great job. We did a great job. But there's a preexisting relationship there. So it'll be a sad day when, clock strikes midnight.

15:35-16:14

Josh Crisp
Well, maybe in the last few minutes that we have of your time. I know it's very valuable here, and you're in high demand, but maybe talk to us. Something that Lucas could probably be more knowledgeable about than I, but in the market where there's a lot of M&A going on, not a lot of new development. So, you know, you're you're you're making the best of the assets you have, keeping them relevant, keeping them fresh, keeping units turned. What's your approach as a regional? What hand do you have in making sure that the communities and assets are ready and fresh so that those heads and sales teams have a great asset to market?

16:14-17:51
Bryce Robinson
Personally speaking, I handle the capital expenditures of all 12 of my buildings, the budgeting of it, submitting it to the capital partners, getting revisions, forecasting out to three, five years, depending on the partner. We are looking internally in a lot of ways, and a lot of that is pushed by census demands. We just celebrated that we have a five-pack of communities in South Florida.

We partner with Fortress Investment Group on them, and I've had those communities for nine years, through the ups and downs. Right. Just total remodels in the beginning, the pandemic absolutely crushed us. And now we're at the length of hold where we're reinvesting in them. Again, to your point, defining the scope, understanding the market, understanding the comps, seeing what other operators are doing to do that refinish space, those are all things that we are coordinating at the same time.

But yeah, it's a definite internal battle because they have to deploy the capital, and they want a return on that capital. But then at the same time, you have the demographics that I referenced earlier, which is, you know, you've got to be able to earn that back for them. It's an exciting time. We've been very, very fortunate.

And in that portfolio I was referencing, we just crossed the 91%. And for us, that's a post-pandemic high. And it's nearing an all-time high. And we're a mid-market. Those five buildings in particular are mid-market providers that are 25-year-old assets that have been re-infused with capital, into this is now the second time. So it's actually really exciting. And I think it's a case in point through the point you made earlier, which is, hey, there's not a lot of new supply going up. How are you looking? Internal.

17:51-18:58
Josh Crisp
Well, it's such a it's complex. Lucas, I know you talk a lot about how you can help make that an easier process. For folks who’ve got a million hats. You're wearing your shoes. Oh, yeah. A lot of teams. And just that activity alone of all that goes into what needs to be fresh and. And who's going to do it, and what are those budgets, and presenting that and all that? I mean it's amazing. And I don't think people understand the critical role that regionals play. Sort of like

some unsung heroes because, you know, a lot of the conferences are going, no, seriously, I've been there. And, it was the most challenging role I ever had, to be honest with you. You know, at the community level, you're there. The families. And so it's almost like the instant reward because you, you, you get to talk with the families, good, bad, or ugly. You're talking with the families and the residents. And then at the corporate level, you know, you're at a lot of the flashy shows and then the dog and pony show, but, you know, in the middle, you are in the middle and trying to make that vision a reality for your teams and support them. So kudos to what you're doing, man.

18:58-19:00
Bryce Robinson
I appreciate that. The most rewarding position I've ever had is because I ultimately, at the end of the day, if you boil down what my job is, I serve three customers. I serve the executive director, leadership teams in the field. I serve our agents, all their operational owners, and I serve the capital partners that we partner with, and it is a balancing act. It is juggling. But I wouldn't trade it for anything. And I'll probably be here for the next 25 years.

19:24-19:35
Josh Crisp
Lucas, what a fun time to sit down with a Regional VP. We don't get that opportunity much. And at a Florida senior living event, you're you're you're running around everywhere speaking. So, thank you for taking the time.

19:35-19:37
Bryce Robinson
Thank you for the invitation.

19:37-20:05
Lucas McCurdy
Final question. So, a lot of new people, young people, they're starting to get senior living on their radar. You were one of them. Probably had a hard time, you know, how did you even navigate that? No one could even really, you know, help you kind of, like, put that on your plate, right? You had to seek it out. That's starting to change. What would be your encouragement to that young professional that's starting to look at, you know what, this senior living thing? This might be a place for me.

20:05-22:03
Bryce Robinson
It absolutely can be a place for you. I'm a product of that. My advice is, is that you find a. And again, I've been very fortunate, a great set of leaders, operationally and clinically. I was just reminiscing with my very first RDO from back in 2011, when I was a community salesperson. A larger company afforded me the opportunity to have six different positions in about five years, six years.

So I got a chance to experience, I think you referenced earlier, kind of doing multiple positions within the community. Once you find what you're really good at and passionate about, stay in that lane and just stay committed. And the number one piece of advice I give to senior living newcomers is that they want to grow, and they want to advance their career, and they want to go from community-based to regional base or regional base to VP base or whatever.

It's about tenure. And I use this example when I'm speaking to my EDs, I've never seen somebody job hop every six months to a year and a half, trying to seek their promotion laterally. I've never seen anybody actually do that. What I see is that, like myself, I was my shortest tenure with the company is a little over five and a half years.

So in my current role, I've been here, and I just celebrated my ninth year anniversary. And I think that's the key is senior living is going to give you the opportunity to do a wide array of things, absolutely, and get the instant reward you mentioned. But if you're willing to put the time in, just know you're absorbing in every situation. Because we're so multifaceted, it's not like we're learning how to program or get it.

You know, we have to learn everything from food and beverage, physical plant, reporting, and owner relations. And on top of that, we have to learn how to manage and inspire, and lead others. And if you're a younger professional, you haven't yet walked that mile. You're probably haven't even been inspired or led properly yourself if you're in your mid to early 20s. So, you know, give it time, absorb, ask a ton of questions, and try every single position you can.

22:03-22:10
Lucas McCurdy
That's a great, great call to action for those professionals out there. And, really appreciate your time with us on the program today.

22:10-22:11
Bryce Robinson
Thank you.

22:11-22:25
Lucas McCurdy
And for those of you that want to learn more, we will definitely in the show notes, connect, with Agewell and their leaders there. And if you want to download this content, so much more, go to btgvoice.com. Thanks for listening to another great episode of Bridge the Gap.

Outro
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