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Lucas McCurdy

Bridge the gap in three two. Welcome to Bridge the Gap podcast, the senior Living podcast with Josh and Lucas. A very great episode today with a guest. We have Justin Ladd and he is from Arrow Senior Living Management. Welcome, Justin.

Justin Ladd

Yeah, thanks for having me, guys.

Lucas McCurdy

Well, it's, it's really cool. So, the backstory here. I reached out to Justin because I was going to make a trip up to the Midwest, and I noticed that Justin had some connections there, and he was so nice to connect with me.

I just asked on LinkedIn. Hey, can I connect with you? And he's like, yes, let's do. We had a great phone call and I was fascinated by your background, your passion. And, I've known of Arrow for a long time, but we have never interviewed anybody from Arrow. So today is a great day to do that.

Justin Ladd

Yeah, well, thanks for having me. Excited to be here.

Well, we're excited to talk to you. So, there's a lot going on in the industry, and this is a great moment to kind of say, what are the strategies for Arrow in 2026? What are the things that y'all are focused on right now?

Justin Ladd

I think there's there's really three components to it. And number one really is our culture. Like making sure we have the right culture, we have the right, engagement with our with our folks and, and not just our employees, but our residents and making sure that they have, they have purpose. Right? That's that's all you keep hearing right now in our industry. And the buzz is finding the purpose. Our residents are looking for.

And so, we're looking for that operational, discipline, I think is huge right now. And then the big elephant in the room is technology, right? So technology and trying to make sure that we're on the forefront of the technology, challenges that we're facing in our industry right now. And specifically for us, I think right now is trying to find like, we've got all this data coming into us from all these technology, partners that we have and we're utilizing.

But we it's still requiring us, right now to, like, develop that action plan. And so, one of the things I'm really inspired about and really looking forward to how we take the next step in utilizing, like, AI and other tools to start to build out those action plans that start to really formulate, like, hey, this is where we got this is where we have to go, in order to in order to, you know, see the results we're looking to achieve.

Lucas McCurdy

That's a lot, you know, and so as a part of that, I noticed that y'all even have like a hashtag campaign around building some culture. Talk to us about that.

Justin Ladd

Culture is so important. In everything that we do, we're constantly thinking we have, we have our tradition. So it's it's part of what we have developed to really highlight the different parts of our communities and the life that happens within our communities.

And so every month we have a tradition, a calendar that has multiple events. And so we're just really trying to to make sure that we create a space that is inclusive of all folks and, and gives them opportunity to learn about new and different things and the things that really that maybe in their, you know, in their previous life and living in their homes, they didn't really they didn't really take the chance.

They didn't take the time to learn about. And so we have guest speakers coming in. We're doing some virtual events. And so just really trying to, to promote this lifestyle that goes beyond just taking care of the resident and providing the mils, you know, like really highlighting that there is a whole nother world out there. And there's still opportunities to learn new things, grow, engage with the communities that our communities are within.

And so that hashtag is, #whatseniorlivinglookslike. So and it's really just a show. Bring in senior living to life and make it less, scary. I, you know, I don't know, like, just bring it up, make it look real and make it make it feel real and, applicable to what, you're used to doing in your everyday lives.

04:49 - 08:06

Justin Ladd

You know, going out and doing things and just showing. Hey, we're this is fun. We're just normal people just doing normal things.

Josh Crisp

So you mentioned operational discipline, I think is how you phrase that. What does that mean for you guys? What do you mean by that?

Justin Ladd

Yeah, I think it really it's it's paying attention to the whole picture. So you know, obviously, we're wanting to grow revenue. Right. We're wanting to we're wanting to look for new opportunities to bring revenue in the door. But I really think the, the other side of that is we get lots of pressure, right rate push, push rate, push rate. You probably heard that from multiple people. But there's that operational discipline.

I think it really is where we're taking the opportunity to like, peel back the layers of the onion and say, hey, what's what? What is what is an expense here? We can we can shave back on or is there an opportunity that we can, you know, potentially partner with this partner and be able to eliminate 2 or 3 additional expenses that that are out there.

So we're we're constantly evaluating and looking at that and, and trying to make decisions utilizing that philosophy. So and then I think on top of it is is also operational discipline is doing what we know how to do, like making sure we're, we're, you know, staying true to our, our it cost of living adjustments. Those all those pieces that we're, we're expecting to do making sure we're in the right market.

We have the right market rates. Like it's easy to get distracted, like our industry. It's very, very busy. There's lots of noise, there's lots of distractions. And I think being disciplined as an operator, it goes beyond just checking the boxes like it really is requiring you to dig deeper, understand what's going on, ask those questions. And to me, that's what operational discipline really is.

Josh Crisp

So growth goals for you all. Our industry has a huge opportunity to grow because of the demographic. Where's your growth focused for Arrow?

Justin Ladd

We really we've had a few opportunities here with growth. And it's with we've recently been doing quite a few acquisitions, in, in that area. We've also been really busy with new developments.

So we've got a new development opening up here in just a short amount of time. And Zion's building, Indiana. So, really, I think for Arrow, it's as a whole in our growth, it will continue to be our new development opportunities, along with acquisitions as they present themselves. So what type of, housing and services on the new development side?

Our sweet spot is our campus-style community. So that's our independent living, assisted living memory care communities. And so those typically, you know, are in the 120 to 140 range, units. And we try to make sure that we, you know, build a nice, nice independent living that's going to feed our assisted living and our memory care.

We have more recently added some villa units, like active adult style, like, so to our portfolio and you know, it's, it's, but that's, that's our typical that's our sweet spot. That's what we really enjoy, enjoy working in.

Josh Crisp

From a geographic standpoint, is there a focus areas for you all or types of markets that you're looking for?

Justin Ladd

Currently we we're in seven states. So we go from Ohio, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana is a new market for us. I think I mentioned Missouri and then Arkansas. And so we're kind of staying in that corridor of, of, of currently, I do think like we, we consider open talking to people on other areas and exploring opportunities and deciding if it's the right fit for us or not.

08:06 - 12:38

Justin Ladd

But it's definitely, you know, we definitely have the middle Midwest is is our current territory.

Josh Crisp

So challenges through growth. We know that's exciting times. But what do you guys foresee is some of the challenges that you'll face or are facing. And how are you overcoming those.

Justin Ladd

Yeah. You know, I recently was I heard a speaker share and talk about preparing for growth in or as organizations. It's one of those things you have to you have to prepare for. And so I do think Arrow has over the last few years there's been quite, Arrow has historically hired talent from outside of our industry. I'm one of the unicorns in our company. That's that's come from within the industry. A majority of our folks have.

I mean, there's there's a gentleman that I work with that they, we they, recruited him from the Starbucks drive-thru. So, and he's on our team, so, there's, there's a variety of folks on our team. I think the, the part that, that I think Arrow is, has done well and, and continues to do well is continues to work to grow our leaders internally.

It's part of our goals this year is really building out, that pathway for folks and, you know, people that are engaged, both residents and, and, team members, when they're engaged, they're they're not going anywhere. Right? They feel that they feel there's a purpose. There's a they're engaged. They have they have a, that there's a vision that's kind of laid out for them.

And so Arrow has done a really nice job. We have a lot of team members that are on our home office team that have just grown through the ranks at and at the company. And, I love that because that's, that's, you know, there's a lot of folks, a lot of companies that you'll hear them say they do that.

They they talk about that. And you may have a handful of folks that have done that, but I majority of my coworkers are all folks that have grown, from the organization, have started a sales directors. Aides are culinary directors, and now they're at the home office, you know, creating some awesome programs for our residents and our team members.

Josh Crisp

So your trajectory, you know, you you come from the business, but what's what's your career been like? And did you ever think you'd be, doing what you're doing now?

Justin Ladd

No, no, not really. So I started, out as a nursing home trader and, was fresh out of college, probably had no business being an administrator of a building.

You know what, 22 or 23 years old. So, and, you know, it was a CCRC. And in that moment, I, I really fell in love with this, a still living part of it. I it's where I started my first job out of college was an assisted living, supervisor, basically. And so, I knew that one of these days I wanted to I wanted to invest more of my time into that.

I love I love the long term care aspect. I love seeing people rehabilitate in either return home or, or, you know, or just return to a lower level of care. But I knew, like the assisted living part to me, that independent living, assisted living, there was just something about the connections that you got, you had to make with your with the folks.

And so, I, I transitioned into the ED role outside of, the skilled nursing world and just have not looked back. Really. I mean, it just it I took the opportunity and ran with it, worked in the Nashville, Tennessee market for quite a while. And then, my path crossed with Arrow, joined Arrow as a regional director of operations, worked as a VP of operations.

And then I currently, working as a portfolio director, which is a nice bridge between our operations team and those that are on the community. So really developing those relationships and making sure that, you know, everyone's goals are the same and that we are achieving those goals and exceeding those goals every single day. So and then when we're not trying to help navigate us back over it, so, hey, how can we get there and what's the path look like that?

So, yeah, I am I very grateful for the work that I get to do. I think this is this is the work that, I was inspired to get into this industry because of my grandmother. She was going into a nursing home when I was graduating high school, and so it was just a, horrific experience, right?

Like she was leaving her home that she had lived in for many years. And just basically, it felt like from my seat as an 18 year old kid, that it was just being stripped away from her. Right. And there wasn't there was not a lot of compassion about that. I mean, obviously from our family, of course we were there and we were we were we were sad for her.

But the industry or the the at that time, for sure, I felt like there was just a piece missing of compassion, of of dignity and of just empathy, of, hey, this is this is a big change for her. And so I that's that's what I've strived to be able to bring to the table is try to help folks like, let's, let's, let's be let's be realistic that this is a, this is an industry.

12:38 - 16:35

Justin Ladd

That is, this is these are big decisions and they tough decisions. And we really need to show up with the mindset that we're here to, to help. And we're here to to find solutions together and not, not forcing something at you. But this is something we're doing with you.

Josh Crisp

What an exciting trajectory you've had. And you said you were you were you were administrator when you were 22.

Justin Ladd

Yeah. So I 22, 23 I think I opened

Josh Crisp

I could share that I, I think I opened my first community at 25 and, and I remember just thinking, what in the world are they letting me do right now? So at 22, that's impressive. What an exciting career. I think back to how Lucas was telling me how you guys connected on LinkedIn and had a great conversation.

That's how I met Lucas ten years ago. And next thing you know, we had a podcast together, so you better watch out what this guy gets you into. It's all I know.

Lucas McCurdy

So okay, so rounding out the conversation. So if you knowing what you know today look back and could talk to that 22 year old or maybe the 22 year old that's listening into this podcast or finds it somewhere, what would you say?

As a word of advice, or, something encouraging to get into the industry.

Justin Ladd

Be open minded. Right. Like this. This is not, at all like, I, I remember being in that, in a college classroom. There was me and probably 24 or 25 other people, and it was a long term care introduction to long term care.

I think every person in that program at Western Kentucky University thought they were all going to be hospital CEOs. Right? Like that's where we're going. And, that's what they wanted to do. And I sitting in that room, I remember the teacher said, a professor said he's like other is there anyone here that sees a path going into senior living or long term care nursing home and myself and one other person raised their hand.

And this is a room of 24, 25 people. And so I just think like there's a there's a world of opportunity out there, right? There's my my career. If I can compare my career to some of the folks that did choose to to try to go down that cute pathway, two very different paths and, you know, they're I'm sure they love what they're doing and they're very happy.

But, I have been challenged always from day one in this career. So you have to be receptive to to being challenged. I have been, you know, forced to be out of my comfort zone, and really, like, embrace things that and ideas that that are sometimes hard to embrace, right. And sometimes hard to to face. And so I really think if you're looking for if someone that's graduating

right now is looking for a career that's going to be rewarding, it's going to be something different every single day.

There's no, no, no, two days are the same. And if you just want to have fun, like there is a lot of of what we do that's just fun. And I think that's, that's the part that often gets overlooked. But you know, what's the hashtag, what senior living looks like. Like you take a look at that. Look at that on our Instagram.

On, any of our social media platforms, you're going to see people just having the time of their life. And that is that is ultimately what, you get to help create. And the role like an executive director in senior living operations is just building a community. And a space that's safe and that's fun. And, people just get to, to live life and, and challenge themselves.

Like, I, I still get amazed to this day, like when a resident lets you, you know, be in a community and then you hear a resident be like, well, I never thought I could learn to do that. Like, yeah, you're 80 something years old, but you're learning something new. And I think that's that's the part that's that's so for some for someone that's in in college right now thinking about graduate, you know, thinking about what their path looks like, like this is a great opportunity for you to try something that, you know, if it doesn't work out, there's plenty of other opportunities out there, but I'm pretty certain that most if you give it a try, you're going to love it.

Lucas McCurdy

That's so great. Well, we really appreciate you giving your, your knowledge to our audience and some great encouragement to those that are looking at this industry as a great path forward. So thank you for your time today.

Justin Ladd

Thank you guys for having me. Appreciate it.

And so we'll connect with Justin in our show notes. And you can go to btgvoice.com and download this content and so much more. Thanks for listening to another great episode of Bridge the Gap.