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SPEAKERS

Matt Hunckler



Matt Hunckler 00:13

Howdy Powderkeg fans. This is Episode 112 of powder keg igniting startups, the show for entrepreneurs, innovators and builders that are creating remarkable tech companies in areas decidedly outside of Silicon Valley. I'm your host, Matt Hunckler. And for today's episode of igniting startups, we're going to be finishing up sort of a series that we've been doing on the show here. This is the third and final panel discussion from a live event that we did in North Carolina called the future of tech in the triangle and beyond. If you're just tuning in for this episode, you don't really need the context of the other two panels in order to enjoy this particular one. But I do want to encourage you to go back and check out episodes 109 and 111 if you like what you hear on this episode today because we get into some really interesting time particularly around talent and how to attract the right talent which we talked about through the lens of in the Raleigh Durham Research Triangle, but it's very similar to other markets. So lots to be learned here, even if you're not doing business currently in Raleigh Durham. But, but if you aren't doing business in Raleigh Durham, you might want to because it is just exploding with opportunity right now. In this short highlight, we're going to talk about attracting training and retaining the best talent for your tech company. You're gonna hear from technical leaders with years of experience sharing their take on growing, growing their pipeline talent pipeline, but also growing their team. So our panelists include Jessica Mitch, the CEO and co founder of momentum learning Derek miner, the manager of team development at K for Connect, and other fellow guests. joining them include the senior vice president of pure cloud development at Genesis a giant tech company based out of the valley but with one of the

largest hubs in In the Raleigh Durham area, and joining us as their SVP, Robert Ritchie, and finally Carl reck. Tanis, co founder and CEO of learn platform, let's get started talent. This seems to be like the biggest pain point for scaling tech companies. Robert, you've seen it from startup to scale up to enterprise now. Can you talk to me a little bit about what you've seen



02:22

just change in the triangle region? Yeah,



02:26

sure. With your own journey?



02:27

Yeah. So the beginning of that startup was about seven years ago. And there's a CEO of a public company that wanted to do a startup. And so he hired me as his first chief architect. And so he was asking me about, you know, we're sure you're considering several locations where it's about being, you know, most of the companies I've worked for my background have been based out of Silicon Valley area to go back to my background, all who have been, and yeah, I mean, the million dollar apartment, two hour drives to our commutes in earthquakes, overcrowded estimates but it is the bar for innovation and technology. We Silicon Valley is a great place for that. But in North Carolina You can drive to the beach in two hours, you can drive the mountain in two hours. And then the culture here and the way of life is just it's a big benefit for that. And the talent is here. You know, you look at, you know, it's not just the three big schools in this area, you go all the way to, you know, Upstate and UNCC, and AMT, and, you know, he's Carolina, those are a lot of talent that's here all around. So the talent is here, you know, they just need the opportunity. So that was a very easy start up, it was a great place to start.



Matt Hunckler 03:27

What and Jessica, you are on the ground floor of iron er, which serve many, many tech companies here. And now, with what you're doing with momentum. Can you talk a little bit about how you're trying to meet the gap that maybe is being missed by the big educators? Yeah. And



03:41

to your point and talking about the ecosystem. I think there's so many of us in the startup community that started at a place like red hat or like bronto, or one of these companies that's had a lot of success and, and one of my first jobs at Red Hat when I started at the company, and I was only there for about three and a half years, when I started at that company, there are 3000 people worldwide. When I left about three years later, there were 10,000 people worldwide. And we all know kind of where the story LED. And I was on the talent acquisition team. So I really understood, I think that was my first big awakening into what is going to be required for us as a global society to get through what is happening in this technology revolution. And one of the projects I was on I was actually living up in DC, they sent me up to DC we had to hire 45 people for a very specific technology to serve the public sector office up in DC. And it took us an entire year to find the story five people and then out of the way that we had to be competitive to find that was the awakening moment of like, okay, there's a massive opportunity here, and how do we fill that gap and the first place as we start with the existing workforce, and the job that I had at The iron yard in the job that I have now did not exist when I was in college boot camps did not exist, the the coding boot camp programs did not exist. And I think we have to really think about how are all of our careers are going to evolve and change as technology changes, and that we have to get people prepared. And we've done work within the existing workforce. There are people that whose jobs there are kind of going away or becoming automated and there's opportunity and talent. So that's kind of where my passion became, let's let's solve that problem. Let's work with with the talent that we have and make sure they've got the right skills, and they've got the opportunity for continued education.



Matt Hunckler 05:37

I love that there's more and more programs like this in the triangle region, and just nationally, they're pumping out talent. But I also know, Carl and beric. The gap is still there, right? We're not meeting the needs of how fast tech is growing. Carl, can you talk a little bit about your own experience in hiring your founding team?



05:57

Sure.



05:59

So we weren't We're five years old. We're a mission driven research organization that offers a software as a service to education. We help schools figure out of all the technology they're using, if it actually helps kids learn, and that is a mission that a lot of our team feels very deeply about and can get behind and we've used that in recruiting. Last year at this time, we were 14 people. We're now 38 people. Are those anybody is looking for a job. I am still hiring. But we are also of those. We have hired from momentum. We have hired from Red Hat. We have hired from SAS, we have hired from the Bay. We have hired from Boston, DC we're about 70% here 30% distributed. And I think the critical opportunity that we have here is what Chris was talking about. When you walk in here. How many of you are From here, from here, how many of you are not from here? How many of you love working, living and playing here? Exactly. Right. And the reality is, if you come ask any of us right after this and say, Hey, I need x, we will help you connect to x. That's the case. That's what Chris was talking about earlier. But we, it's time to take that to the next level. Mike, I probably have seen Mike at 6am, you know, at RDU going to San Francisco when I was going to Boston. I've seen Derek at the airport, we need to start talking outside of this region, about how fantastic it is here and using one voice because I might not be hiring what Mike needs, but I might meet them and I'll gladly bring them back. So groups like innovate Raleigh, CD, American underground and others who are helping build that collective Voice, I think are really critical opportunities for us to take advantage of our collective voice and share that take that sort of the pro level. I love



Matt Hunckler 08:09

it. Derek, how about you? I know you started here just on the ground floor on the community building and government side. But now with what you're doing with K four connect and growing and scaling team, what are you seeing on the ground in terms of talent in the triangle?



08:24

The we certainly in the engineering side, there's there's somewhat of a shortage or it's obviously a tight market.



08:33

Oh, here too. But, uh, the, you know, it's interesting because don't talk



08:38

to my people.



08:44

Similar to Carl from a purpose driven or mission based perspective, we developed enterprise technology for the senior living industry. So it's a company that has that that purpose to it, that that really, really resonates with people, right? Kind of this whole tech for good thing. But in a model where we're venture funded, I mean, we have revenue, right? And we have to, but it's extremely complicated. So at this stage, I mean, we're roughly 50 people. Even though we've been around for five and a half years, we're still fairly young and kind of that because for the first two years, I was trying to figure out what, you know what we even needed to do, because we were starting to sell into an industry, the senior living industry that that didn't even know it had a problem existed. So it was something where it was just long cycles from that perspective. So when I came in, the biggest thing I knew that we needed, that was a challenge from the past is we need people that have that entrepreneurial mindset, right at this particular stage, with the types of things that we're trying to build out. We don't just need you know, someone that's not going to be toxic to the culture and so on that can, you know, it's capable to do the work but we really need someone to take a different view of it. And then Be explicitly told them like in advance. So it's like that transparency thing of this is what it's like, you know, day to day. And here's some challenges we face. Typically people with the entrepreneurial kind of mindset and spirit, they love that stuff, right? And that attracts them even more. So it's really painting the picture of this is what we're doing, we'd love for you to come on board. So we've been able to find, you know, a lot of different folks but hiring is hard, right? It's not just finding the people but it's is it a fit, I mean, we've had to pass on people that were absolutely fantastic, but it just wasn't the right time or whatever the case may be. But for us building that relationship and then keeping it is like a as we grow and love to keep that dialogue open. So it's a but it's, it's a great place. I mean, everyone hears, said lots of people still move in the market. I used to talk to at least one to two a week when I was at the city, recruiting companies and recruiting talent here that we're moving in from from these major areas. And the best thing is that they have the ability to contribute. And that's the thing that's holding You can come from anywhere, regardless of race, gender, or anything else. The only requirement is that you have to contribute or that you desire contribute to the community in one way or another. Doesn't mean money can mean time. It just means paying it forward. I know I've heard that thrown around tonight and that's just super important.



Matt Hunckler 11:18

Absolutely. One a couple things that both of you mentioned this is the ability to have kind of a distributed team part partially distributed team grind treaded technology and Robert, I know, Genesis as a global company, how are you leveraging the fact that you have a Raleigh Durham presence to grow that team and really feel innovation for a global company with a global presence? You have



11:42

the this is gonna sound so pretentious, I apologize ahead of time but like, you know, rally has become the center of the universe with the company. So that sort of, you know, it's a group of about 500 people in the company with 6000 people big and you know, and they send every customer prospect our way in every big exact company stopped rally. So it's their serve the universe right now, you know, part of that was because, you know, we, you know, we right off the bat we hired you know, like the two rock stars, we don't want to hire 50, mediocre people, we started with two rock stars because they could outperform 15 mediocre people at day. And then we built on that so that obviously have the culture, we have the beer kegs, we have all these things, you know, table tennis tournament, there's a big one today. So we have that culture. And it's that sort of culture that's maintained throughout. And, you know, a little story. We've got a new CEO a few months ago, you know, big shots. He was the CEO of GoPro and Skype. And he was supposed to be the CEO of Microsoft, and they turned him over for another guy the last second. So he became our CEO, and he was here a few months ago. And, you know, on his way out the door, and I'll quote him, he says, I want to move to LA. And so this is a an entrenched Silicon Valley guy. And so we have that I think that's building here, which is, you know, you have that center of excellence, and everyone's be a part of that. And so you maintain that culture. So, you know, we're trying to spread it around for the rest of the world, but we like Raleigh, so we're trying to get them all here and why People, I have a few people in the audience here, a couple from Indianapolis, came out to be there. And so we're trying really hard to get that kind of culture. So they come to us Don't talk



Matt Hunckler 13:08

to me, my team is here.



13:12

Jessica, you might talk a little bit about what you coach



13:15

your



Matt Hunckler 13:16

graduates at how to engage with these tech companies. What's the right approach? Where should they go? Is there a database they can go to as shown up at certain events?



13:25

Yeah, the first thing we remind them of is we we provide them with a lot of exposure to what is going on in technology. So every one of our students does five site visits to accompany throughout their their time with us. And those site visits include software agency, they include a startup, they also include larger firms. And we remind people that technology is now in every type of business and what ever they brought to the table. Again, we're working with existing workforce. So we're working with folks that were former marketers or paralegals or worked at In food and beverage or did something before that, that knowledge can get carried over into that next job. And so don't forget that there are Life Sciences companies that need technology, there are lots of kind of companies that you can bring your value you bring value to, and it's about finding the right fit for you. And that means something different for everybody. So we try to provide them with enough exposure, that in this world where there's a lot of different possibilities, they know which direction to go in, when they're coming out and how to focus. But we also really hammer home on you've got to build connections. And we also we have a six week, start our full programs 12 weeks and the latter six weeks, we start talking about the soft skills of simple things in basic leadership and development, how to give feedback, how to communicate, how to manage up, those kind of skills are really important so that when they are starting to make those connections with companies, they know how to have an authentic conversation somebody and how to be themselves and show off, you know, this is what I care about. And I am curious. So we always make sure to go into questions, be curious. And that's how you develop those meaningful relationships.



Matt Hunckler 15:08

I love the emphasis on soft skills. Carl, are there any soft skills in particular that you look for in team members? Are you bringing on? Sounds like you might have some



15:19

parallel parking



15:22

around us? I mean, I think you're right. I think all this boils down to 80% of relationships is timing. You know, so I joke that, you know, don't talk to her folks. But I actually talked to our folks, like if there's a better situation for them, I want them to know about it, but our situation is pretty good. And I want them to know that that's the case. It's not only 80% of it is relationships. All those relationships are long term. So understanding right up front, I wish somebody had told me you know, coming out of high school that, you know, all those relationships in high school, all those relationships thereafter are going to our long term relationships, whether you want them to be or not. It just happens to be that our banker and I played soccer together, not because that's not why I chose him as a banker, it just we're gonna, you're gonna run into these folks again. You know, so don't be an angle. So that soft skills are pretty important as what it boils down to, we have a set of five core values that that we you know, have on the wall that we talked about that we live about being honest about setting expectations and meeting or exceeding them having a bias towards action, which is entrepreneurship that you talked about learning continuously and living with empathy and those like me, but like, that's what I talked to our folks by the time they're talking to me. Our team has already screened them for those files. things, but it comes out. And if they're living that, and those I think, reflect having the benefit, like many of you, for the record, if you weren't counting, it was like 25%. From here 75% from away and 100% liked it here. But I've lived worked in a dozen different countries have had that benefit. There's a reason we're growing here. I think those five core values really capture what I see in the triangle all the time. Folks are straightforward. They want to help, they want you to win, and they want to learn something new. And if you can help them help you, they will. So I'm super excited about where, you know, we've sort of, I think Chris intimated sort of zero to 60 miles per hour like we did that and other people are trying to get to 60 we got a chance, you know, to go Mach one. If we can work together, collectively. in a meaningful way,



Matt Hunckler 18:01

I'm gonna take a flip side of that, which is, Derek, I know you've been a super connector in this community for a long time now leading talent, attraction acquisition, at K four Connect, you kind of have to be competitive too. So there's they're working together, but there's also how do you be competitive in a world where you've got such an explosion in

the number of tech companies and options that talent has? What are some of the things that that you've seen tech companies, whether it's cable Connect, or others do really well?



18:27

Um,



18:30

it's a good question. I think every every company has their has their thing that they do, right? Whether it's, you know, people wear an orange when they go to conferences in the last couple days or, you know, change dinosaurs like they have attended. I mean, there's a lot of you know, fun things like that. I think the biggest thing especially from a retention perspective is just being being real like with your people. You know, the that's the one thing I've always loved about k four is that you know, Scott or co founder and CEO is I mean, his door is always open. Right? So no matter who within the company can come and ask him questions, I mean, he's not a, you know, a distant, you know, CEO by any means. And, you know, just that regular interaction with just the team, and like a real environment, I think is huge. And, you know, I'm a pretty authentic guy. So I think, you know, for me, I mean, I've hired 18 people, I believe, in the last 10 months and very strategic, you know, positions and a variety of things. But, like, for me, it's like a Come, let's build this thing together. And when you're kind of being refined, you know, by the fire as a team, and it helps people come together in that way. So that's been something that's worked for us.



Matt Hunckler 19:47

That's great. Nice. Robert, last last question for you, which is, what are some of the things that you're doing? You know, you mentioned those big 6000 person organization, but you're still



19:55

operating



Matt Hunckler 19:56

like a startup. But I imagine there's there's still some challenging and competing for talent

just like everyone else, what are some of the things that you do at Genesis that are unique to what you do and attracting that all star talent to your r&d team?



20:10

Yeah, so we, you know, despite how pretentious I am, you know, that we are very open, warm, and everyone has placed there. So like, you know, we have a great internship program, and, you know, day one, they're committing code during the first week, they're participating in a very major project, and they're presenting to the CEO and things like that. And so, you know, we have, so we have startups that we, you know, we host as well. So we really want to be a part of the community. And, you know, we try to sponsor senior projects with the universities. And so we really try to get that that field going. And there's a lot of there is a network around the world with people who are like, you know, you're doing the same sort of thing I am. And so there's a lot of coordination and we don't care where you could live in Taiwan, you can work for your cloud, so we'll take them anywhere. But, you know, it's just it's just that culture of bringing in people and there's a part of it immediately, and that we would like to, you know, in the broader community of Raleigh, be a part of that as well. Come in, there's something you know, somebody wants to learn about the things that we've done where everyone's ready to teach and be a part of that. And so that session, you know, and I liked the video, Chris said something earlier today, you know, that mentality Do you have this big shot CEO from MapQuest founder. And he says, You know, I want to be, I want to get into accelerators. And the first thing you did is often the person that I want to be, and you went to that person and that's the way Yes, that is the right mentality. And so that's how we live and that's a great place. So



Matt Hunckler 21:29

there you go, my have an opportunity, Chris. Can we give it up for our amazing speakers