



Next Move Group

We Are Jobs Podcast

with Special Guest: Mark Manning

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As far as I'm concerned, they are absolutely the best lead generation firm in the business for economic development organizations. Call them now. They can help you create real prospects.

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Welcome to today's episode of the Next Move Group We Are Jobs podcast. I'm Chad Chancellor, co-founder of Next Move Group and I'm pleased today to have Mark Manning with us today. Mark is from Murray, Kentucky. Well, I'm from Murray, Kentucky. He's a Mississippi boy like me, Mississippi state boy.

Mark Manning: Indeed I am.

Chad Chancellor: Been the economic developer Murray, Kentucky for 10 or 15 years which is a legend in this business.

Mark Manning: Actually, you're underestimating it. It's 19 years.

Chad Chancellor: Really? 19 years and just done a tremendous job in Murray, Kentucky and one of the economic developers I absolutely have the most respect for in the country. I'm so glad he's here with us today and Mark, I just want to start out by asking you why do you really have an interest in rural small to mid-size economic development? What makes you tick?

Mark Manning: It goes back honestly, Chad, to my childhood, my family. As you might tell from my accent, I'm proudly southern. I grew up in Jackson, which I guess in some people's mind is a small town. To me, it was a big city, but my grandparents were all from places like Bolton and Edwards and Terry and still had farms.

I just have always felt like rural communities are getting the short end of the stick and it's harder and harder for rural communities to survive much less prosper. And that's what this country has been founded on; family, church, high school football and that's just who I am. I've never wanted to work in a big city and I don't anticipate that I ever would.

Chad Chancellor: Talk about some of the deals you've landed there in Murray. I know it's a long list, but just so people can understand.

Mark Manning: Well, I'll kind of start most recently and then try to work backward a little bit. Right now, we have a Korean company that's under construction. It's a company called DAE-IL and they make drivetrain parts, gears, things like that for Hyundai and Kia.

I think they are getting a contract with General Motors and they've got a contract with Tesla, which I find kind of interesting. It's about 300,000 square feet, highly, highly automated with forging and grinding and things like that and it's-- we're very proud of it.

Then going backwards from there, we have a German company named Iwis. It's spelled like I-W-I-S but it's pronounced Ivis and they came into a building that we have a couple of years ago. They make timing systems. They do every BMW in the world and they're also now doing General Motors. So, we've had some success with foreign companies.

Probably the biggest deal in Murray was a long time ago when I first got there. Mattel had their last plant in the U.S. was in Murray, Kentucky. Huge facility, 700,000 square feet of manufacturing and about eight or nine hundred thousand square feet of warehousing space and they made this big plastic ride-on toys, the power wheels or whatever you call them.

They would make those things all year long and put them in the warehouse and then six weeks before Christmas, they'd empty that warehouse. They decided that they could do it cheaper in Mexico and China, so they decided to leave and that was why I went to Murray in the first place.

We were very fortunate to get Pella windows in there and they started out a vinyl window plant was going to employ about 500 people. They were moving equipment in one end while Mattel was moving it out the other. It was really pretty cool.

So, then about two weeks later, Pella calls me up and says, "You know, we got something we need to talk to you about." I thought oh gosh. Here we go, but instead, they put a second manufacturing facility in the building. So, now they do lots of fiberglass windows. Now it's about 1200 people, so that was probably the biggest deal.

Chad Chancellor: Interesting a Mississippi boy from Mississippi State can connect with these foreign investment companies that you've been able to connect with.

Mark Manning: I just find that it's-- some boys are different and in other ways they're just like us. They just want to be somewhere a) where they are wanted and b) where they are going to be treated right and c) where they can make money.

Chad Chancellor: Well, given the success you've had, if you were giving advice to small communities, what would be the most important starter for a community to realize before even working towards success?

Mark Manning: There's one thing that every small community in America needs to understand. The federal government is not going to save you. The state government is not going to save you. Nobody is going to save you. You have to do it yourself. Once you come to that realization, you get your act together and then yes, you can call on other people to help you.

You can call on people to guide you, but understand everything in this country is very much slanted towards big urban developments. So, if you want to save your community and have that quality of life, you just have to pull your pants' legs up and strap on your boots and go.

Chad Chancellor: So, if a community realizes that, we want to do it ourselves, how would you advise them to get started once they know we're going to do it? How does that look to you?

Mark Manning: Each community is different and in some communities, if you analyze it carefully it may be that the highest and best purpose for your community might be a bedroom community. There's nothing wrong with that. If you're 20, 25 miles from a larger city and you can make it as a bedroom community and have nice housing and your schools are good and you've got strong churches, hey there's nothing wrong with that.

Other communities it might mean more entrepreneurial type things; getting somebody to reopen the cafe and things like that and then in other communities recruiting industry is a major part of it, but I think what you really need to do is you have to establish a good, small, core leadership group.

It doesn't need to be everybody in town and it needs to be people that can get things done. And then quite frankly, they need to look for somebody that they can trust to come in and help them figure out where they are and where they need to go.

Chad Chancellor: And how have you been able to rise above competition? These projects you've won in Murray you've had to compete with people. How do you handle competition and how would you advise communities to embrace competition and win?

Mark Manning: Well, I think that's the first thing you do. You have to embrace the competition. You want to compete hard, you want to compete ethically, but you want to win. To do that what I have found is every company has a hot point. For some companies, it might be labor. For another company, it might be utilities. For another company it might be something as silly as free land.

People get hung up about giving away land, not me because I'll tell you land is usually the smallest part of the whole deal. We don't have trouble selling our community because Murray has an extremely high quality of life. We've got Murray State University, we've got good schools, and we've got low crime, all of those things.

The challenge for us is getting the companies there to look in the first place. Once they come look, our success rate is probably 80%, but not being on an interstate, not being close to a major urban area, we have to fight tooth and claw to get the companies there to look in the first place.

Chad Chancellor: I am certain with the success you've had, you've had opportunities to move to major urban areas. So obviously, your heart's really in this.

Mark Manning: I'm not one of these people. First of all, I don't know that you can really learn a community in less than five years. Secondly, when I see people moving around a whole lot, there are usually one of two things. They are either climbing the ladder very quickly or they are running from something and most of the time, they are running from something.

So, if I'm in a community and I know all the players and I can get things done by calling on people, I just don't see any great reason to run to a bigger city.

Chad Chancellor: If you were a small-town mayor or economic development board member thinking of starting a program or getting your act together in economic development, how would you feel about hiring a consultant or finding mentors or folks that can help guide you?

Mark Manning: I think you have to. You have to have a mentor especially if you've either not done it or if you've done it wrong for many years. And I see both kinds of communities. You see some communities that are like a blank sheet of paper. I think that's fabulous because you don't have to go in and make the mistakes that everybody else has made, but you got to have somebody help, guide you through that.

Then I see other communities that make the same mistakes over and over and over and I'm not going to say which one I'm talking about, but you know who I'm talking about and it's like they are their own worst enemies. What we do is not rocket science, but it is an art. You have to pull together the right people to do the right things and then when you have the product, you'll find somebody wants to buy.

Chad Chancellor: At what point do you think a community will hire a full-time economic development person?

Mark Manning: Oh wow! Not only at what point should they, but what kind of person should they. First of all, if you just don't have enough money to do anything but pay somebody a little salary and then there's nothing left over to do any kind of product development, don't hire anybody. That's when you might want to bring in a firm that deals with small towns and maybe two or three towns get together and share resources to do something. But if you can't afford it, don't do it.

Then if you are in a position where you have a steady stream of income and you can afford to do it, be very, very careful about how you hire someone and who you hire because a bad salesman can't sell diamonds and a good salesman can't sell coal. So, you have to find somebody that can come in and understand what you've really got, not feed you a line about how I've got 40 prospects and so forth and so on. Get somebody that you trust and then build a relationship with them.

Chad Chancellor: I got one last question I got to ask you. I can't let you out of here. So, Mark is a Mississippi State guy like I am and our baseball teams hitting up off to a good start, our basketball teams look like they'll make the NCAA Tournament. How does it feel to be a Mississippi State fan now compared to 30 years ago or 20 years ago?

Mark Manning: Well, I'm convinced that God created Mississippi State to cause me misery. I have been up to the mountain top and fallen down to the gutter with Mississippi State many times but I love them. I think we've got a basketball team, but one game we do, one game we don't. I love their baseball and you and I are going to have to get up there real soon for a weekend.

Chad Chancellor: I hear the new stadium is really nice and they've started like 5-1 or 6-1 or something.

Mark Manning: I hate the left field lounge is gone.

Chad Chancellor: I do too.

Mark Manning: You do what you got to do.

Chad Chancellor: Well, I could talk to you about this all day. Is there anything that you wish I would have asked you that I didn't?

Mark Manning: Not really. I do want to say one thing I think is really important though is I am really thrilled to see your group doing conferences like you're doing. The lineup, the schedule is

so much better than most anything I've seen. People like me I'm not going to a conference just to have a good meal and a good time. We want to learn and this is an opportunity to do that and I appreciate what you're doing and I appreciate what you all are doing with small towns.

Chad Chancellor: Thank you very much for being with us, Mark.

Mark Manning: I appreciate it.

Chad Chancellor: I want to thank the University of Southern Mississippi's Masters of Economic Development program for sponsoring today's podcast. We work with Southern Miss a lot and they do tremendous research for us whether we're working with a site selection project and we need Southern Miss's help to understand labor and the market around that area, transportation they do a lot of research in or whether we need talent from the University of Southern Mississippi.

We have hired-- their students actually work for us as both interns and full-time employees. So, you can get a Master's degree in Economic Development from the university. They have two options to do that. One is mostly an online option where you go in a few weekends and one is the more traditional classroom option.

So, whether you run an organization and need talent or whether you run an organization and need research, you should really consider the University of Southern Mississippi's Masters of Economic Development program.

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