



**Next Move Group**  
We Are Jobs Podcast  
with Special Guest: Kay Brockwell

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**Chad Chancellor:** Hello. Welcome to this week's episode of the Next Move Group We Are Jobs podcast. This is Chad Chancellor, co-founder of Next Move Group. Today, we've got Kay Brockwell with us and Kay is the owner of Future Focus Development Solutions up in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Kay does a lot of work with our company and she does a whole lot of work helping economic developers be more successful. So, Kay, thank you for being with us today.

**Kay Brockwell:** My pleasure, Chad. Glad to be here.

**Chad Chancellor:** Tell these folks a little bit about what Future Focus does.

**Kay Brockwell:** Well, we do general economic development services. I have gone in and served as essentially a part-time economic developer in some communities that don't have the budget for a full-time person. I have gone in and helped with special projects, RFIs, preparing for site visits, what have you. I've done things like target industry studies, labor studies. I do some grant writing, just pretty much anything that your economic development department might need done, but since you are most likely a one-person shop, you don't have the time to do it yourself.

**Chad Chancellor:** And I know we partner with you to do some labor studies and some target and industry studies and so, talk about really what gave you this idea because you used to be an economic developer. You were a successful economic developer. So, when you retired from that life, what made you think that these were services that folks needed especially in some of these rural communities?

**Kay Brockwell:** Well, for 12 years, I was a one-person shop in Marion, Arkansas, just across the road from Memphis, Tennessee and we saw a good bit of economic development activity and it kept me pretty dawg on busy. I was fortunate that I had some great allies I could call on. Every, the state, AEDC was a huge help to me. The state, AEDC was a huge help, but there were a lot of times that I needed more than one of me and economic development is not something you can go down to your local Champ agency and hire someone to come in and help for six weeks or two months because they don't know what they need to be doing.

So, when I left Hot Springs, which was my last position with the community in economic development, I thought you know I believe that there is room for some business and offering this kind of services particularly to small communities.

**Chad Chancellor:** Well, we get asked a lot of times can you come help be our economic developer and we tell folks no, we can't do that because we represent multiple people, but we can introduce them to folks like you that can handle a special project, or be an interim or do reports or whatever. So, I do think it's a demand and I think you're serving a good market there especially right now the economy is hot. So, a lot of our rural towns are probably seeing opportunities that maybe they didn't see a while back and they may not get but one or two opportunities every ten years. So, it's very important that they work it properly.

**Kay Brockwell:** That's exactly right and I'm getting ready to work on a project right now of helping a community get ready for some of those opportunities. I'm going to go in and do an industrial site assessment for them. I'm going to do a labor study for them and I'm going to present them with an economic development or an industrial development plan that is going to address what some of their potential areas they ought to be exploring actually are.

**Chad Chancellor:** Talk about your background. I know you came out of the newspaper business and I've seen-- like I said, we work with you firsthand on labor studies, so I've seen you've got a real thorough understanding of those and I've seen how smart you are and how well those are done. So, does that come out of a newspaper curiosity or what makes you tick? How did you get from the newspaper business into doing this type of stuff?

**Kay Brockwell:** Well, it was sheer accident. I was working for the newspaper in West Memphis, Arkansas and they had a woman that was serving as kind of a part-time economic developer in Marion on a contract basis and I knew the mayor up there fairly well and had covered Marion for a good while. I said you know Frank, if Nancy ever decides she wants to move on to something else, I'd be interested in talking to you about this job.

One day, he called me and he said okay, Nancy is leaving. We need to talk. He hired me and said here it is. Do it and I said oh! So, I spent about a year trying to figure out kind of what it was I was supposed to be doing and two more years learning how to do it and then two years after that we were runner-up for a Toyota motor assembly plant.

**Chad Chancellor:** Wow! So, you got to the finalist in Marion, Arkansas for a Toyota plant?

**Kay Brockwell:** Twice.

**Chad Chancellor:** Is that the one that went to Tupelo or?

**Kay Brockwell:** The first one was the one that went to San Antonio and we never were-- we were a contender for that, but that one was pretty well cut and dry. It was always going to go to San Antonio because that ran by pickup trucks and where are you going to buy pickup trucks? You've got to make them where they drive more of them than they do anywhere else in the country. Then two years or three years later, they came back with the plant that eventually went to Tupelo. They

announced that plant in February and down to-- end of November early part of December I think that we were ahead in the race for that plant and Mississippi beat us at the last minute.

**Chad Chancellor:** Is that site in Marion still available or have they located?

**Kay Brockwell:** It is still available.

**Chad Chancellor:** Okay. We've got a big project right now looking up the river so.

**Kay Brockwell:** It is pretty a sight as you could ever hope to see.

**Chad Chancellor:** All right. Talk about your background. I know you are from Tennessee. We were actually talking offline. So, we're recording this the morning of March 3<sup>rd</sup> and there's just been some terrible tornados close to Nashville and I think that's where you're from. So, talk about kind of your upbringing in that area and I'm going to make you tell your story about Pat Summit because as my staff knows, I use a lot of Pat Summit quotes when I'm trying to motivate them.

**Kay Brockwell:** Well, I'm from Camden, Tennessee which is right up on the Tennessee River in west Tennessee and in fact, some of the early and the west end of the Salina tornadoes came through Benton County. I talked to some friends up there this morning and it sounds like it went through within three-quarters of a mile of the house where I grew up.

So, I've been calling around checking on the friends and the kinfolks and the home folks and everybody seems to be okay. There's been a little damage. I think there was one person killed in Benton County and then I've got kids in Nashville or out south of Nashville in College Grove so, I've been on phone to them checking on them this morning and I'm just grateful-- awfully grateful that all my people are okay, but I did.

I grew up in Camden, Tennessee, went to school at Memphis State, majored in journalism, was convinced from the time I was in about the 7<sup>th</sup> grade that I wanted to be a newspaper reporter and that's what I went out and did for about 20 years and fortunately, I got out of it before the bottom fell out in the news business. The Summit story since I've got to tell it--

**Chad Chancellor:** Yes, I'm going to make you tell it.

**Kay Brockwell:** I played basketball in high school and Pat Summit grew up in Cheatham County, Tennessee, which is just across the river from where I grew up and we played them one year in a tournament. Pat was a senior and I was a freshman. So, we're playing over in-- I think the tournament was in Arlington, Tennessee and we're over there and I'm sitting on the bench down at the end of the bench just huddled up trying to make myself as small as I could be and unnoticeable as I could be and I'm here to tell you all folks I was praying please Lord, don't let them put me in this ball game against this woman because she is going to kill me. The woman liked to have scared me to death. I had never seen a ballplayer like that.

**Chad Chancellor:** Well, I saw her speak in Nashville. They had some sort of a leadership speech. She was one of five or six people that gave a talk and she was the most intense person I think I've ever met and afterwards the folks I was with kind of knew her and so we went out and talked a little bit. She was intense just in giving that speech. So, I can just imagine playing ball against her.

**Kay Brockwell:** It scared me to death. They finally put me in the game. She'd already scored her 45 points and sat down by that point.

**Chad Chancellor:** So, you didn't have to try to guard her.

**Kay Brockwell:** Lord, no, but I saw her several, several years later. The SEC women's tournament was in Littlerock and I went over and volunteered to help with it and it just fascinated me to sit down there on the baseline and watch her because you're right. Intense doesn't get close to it.

**Chad Chancellor:** No, no. It's the honest truth, but I use her as quotes. She wrote a book I can't remember now if it was the top 10 or 12 leadership skills, but I use it all the time in different stuff. So, my staff probably get tired of me talking about it, but she's the type once you met her you wouldn't forget.

**Kay Brockwell:** You would not.

**Chad Chancellor:** You would remember. Thank you, Kay. We're going to take a quick break for a message for our listeners and we'll be back with a lot more with Kay Brockwell right after this message.

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**Chad Chancellor:** If you want to join our movement which is to create economic growth for small to mid-sized companies, communities, and non-profit organizations, please go to our website at [thenextmovegroup.com](http://thenextmovegroup.com). Browse around and you can see the different services we offer all designed to create that economic growth for the small to mid-sized companies, communities, and non-profit organizations. Most of our leads and growth has come from word of mouth referral. So, even if you don't need a service, we want you to know what we do so when friends and contacts of yours might need something, you know what we do and you can refer us. So, again, go to [thenextmovegroup.com](http://thenextmovegroup.com) to learn more about the Next Move Group.

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**Chad Chancellor:** What advice do you give to folks? We have a lot of people that listen who are in rural communities and what have you learned kind of is the key to getting yourself on the map and making a difference? What advice would you give the rural folks out there who might be listening for some inspiration?

**Kay Brockwell:** We were just talking about intensity and focus and that's really what you've got to do. It's real, real easy when you're a one-person show in a small town to just start shot-gunning. There are so many things out there you could be working on and if you try to get around and work on all of them, you're not going to do any good on any of them. So, what you have to do is pick the three or four things that if you can move that needle, you'll make the most impact on your community and focus on those things and when you get one of those done, then go on to the next one, but I think it's really more critical in a small community than it is in a big one to have a strategic plan and stick to it.

**Chad Chancellor:** And one of the things that we work with Kay on actually in West Plains, Missouri is we did a labor study. West Plains is kind of close to that Jonesboro, Arkansas area. We did an executive search for West Plains and then we did a labor study and Kay led that charge. We were sort of sitting in second base on that one watching her and one of the things that really impressed me was what you did and I think a lot of small towns can relate to this.

A lot of plant managers or HR folks in small towns say we can't find any labor. We can't find any labor and Kay was able by asking the right questions and looking at data to figure out in that town there was a wage threshold and folks who paid over it and I can't remember what it was without it

sitting in front of me, but let's say it was \$14 an hour and that's not what it was, but it was somewhere around--

**Kay Brockwell:** It was about \$11 as best I recall.

**Chad Chancellor:** Yes, she was able to show that the people that paid over that were able to attract labor. It still wasn't easy. It's not easy anywhere to get labor right now. I don't care if you're in downtown Memphis or Nashville, but she was actually able to show that if you pay over this threshold, you're going to be able to attract labor whereas if you pay under it, it's going to be a hard time.

I think that's something that economic developers ought to be armed with because when their local plants start scrapping at them and telling folks we can't attract any labor, I think it would be good to know if maybe they're just not paying enough; supply and demand. They may not want to hear that, but the world revolves around supply and demand. So, it would be good to know if you're paying less than what it's going to take you or if you're paying more and still can't get it, maybe there's some other problem. So, talk a little bit about how you learned to do that.

**Kay Brockwell:** The first thing that I think you have to do if you're in a small community, there are not going to be-- there's not going to be any data out there that you can access on the web that's going to speak to the wages in your immediate labor shed.

Now, I do a lot of work in Forrest City, Arkansas. I can't get a wage profile for Forrest City, Arkansas with any of the statistics that are online. I can get one for the eight-county region of which Forrest City is a part, but that's skewed because it's got Memphis in it and it's got Jonesboro, Arkansas in it and those two are both going to pay significantly more than you're going to have to pay in Forrest City.

So, we are-- when I say we, Cody Slater, my friend that's the economic developer in Cross County, Arkansas which is immediately to the north of Forrest City in Saint Francis County, we are working on a joint wage and benefits survey. It will be the employers in our two counties and when we get through with that, we will have a good picture of what the wages and benefits are in our county and then we can show that to people and say look, you're trying to hire welders for \$12 an hour and the average starting pay in this two-county area is \$15. You're not going to do any good.

Since you were talking about in West Plain. There was a company we talked to that did the change mechanisms for vending machines and they started out at \$9 an hour and had a terrible time hiring people and keeping people. Then up the road, we went to a company that rebuilt automobile engines and they hired at about \$12 an hour, said they had a great workforce and had just a very minimal turnover. Well, that right there-- and that's just anecdotal. That will tell you that you've got a labor problem at \$9 an hour that you don't have at \$12 an hour.

**Chad Chancellor:** Right and they were basically right across the street from each other. I remember the light bulb went off in my mind watching you do that. I said I've looked at a lot of labor studies during our site selection work and others and there's not any that breaks down kind of what is that threshold you need to get over.

I think it's really smart and I think too a lot of rural counties in their labor studies that they do and a lot of times they get EDA money or development district money to do it. So, they'll group them together to look bigger which is-- I understand, but you're exactly right. If in the case of rural Arkansas or Mississippi or Tennessee, if you pull in Memphis or Nashville, while that is going to make you look bigger, it's also going to give you unrealistic wage expectations. So, you got to be real careful.

And I see economic developers a lot of the time will just link to some labor study that somebody has done and maybe they didn't have the money to pay for it, so they just need whatever they get. I'll read that labor study and it will almost make me wonder if their labor is any good because I didn't think we're going to have to pay too much or what? So, I think what you're offering there is very smart.

**Kay Brockwell:** The other thing that's a key when you're doing labor studies is you can't depend just on the demographics and the numbers. If you remember, we went out and we did interviews with what? 20-25 employers and we did that labor study up at West Plains and that's where-- the numbers wouldn't have told us about that \$9-\$12 an hour differential and the problem in it. It was the anecdotal evidence from the employers themselves that gave us that and you've got to have that to have an effective labor study.

**Chad Chancellor:** I totally agree and if you're recruiting a new company, you probably don't want to recruit a company that's going to pay below that. a) It's not really going to help accomplish



much. You're just going to be moving the same folks around and b) they are going to get there and not be happy with what they found.

**Kay Brockwell:** Absolutely.

**Chad Chancellor:** I think that is a critical piece. Kay, give these folks your contact information; your website. We've got you linked as a partner on our website, but in case they've heard something here and maybe they want a labor study like this, they will know how to get a hold of you.

**Kay Brockwell:** Okay. You can reach me at [kbrockwell@futurefocusds.com](mailto:kbrockwell@futurefocusds.com) and my website is [www.futurefocusds.com](http://www.futurefocusds.com). If you want to jot down my phone number, that's 501-762-5091.

**Chad Chancellor:** And also, we work with Kay all the time and so if you've heard anything in here that interests you, let us know and we'll be glad to bring her in. Kay, is there anything that you want to share with the folks I didn't ask you?

**Kay Brockwell:** Just that the more information and the more knowledge you've got about your community and you've got about your state and you've got about the target industries that you are recruiting, the closer you are going to come to success.

**Chad Chancellor:** And labor is getting more-- I started this business, Kay, in 2004. I used to be the young guy, but I'm into it now 16 years. I think you were one of the first people I met through SEDC, but I mean labor now is so much more important than it used to be and so, I would also say once you get one of these labor studies, you probably need to update it every year or two, don't you? How long do you think one is good before its shelf life runs out?

**Kay Brockwell:** Ideally, you would update one every two years. You can stretch it to every three, but if you're having much change at all in your community, you really need to go every two.

**Chad Chancellor:** Right. All right. Well, Kay, thank you for spending a few minutes with us today. We appreciate it. I always enjoy working with you and I think your Memphis Tigers are going to have to win a game or two in their tournament to make the NCAAs, aren't they?

**Kay Brockwell:** Oh Lord, we're going to pull them on through. We're going to pull them through.

**Chad Chancellor:** Mississippi State is squarely on the bubble. So, we got to probably win three more ball games to get in.

**Kay Brockwell:** I'm still pulling that DJ Jeffries will come back from that hurt leg and we'll have him for the tournament-- maybe the last couple of games in the year in the tournament.

**Chad Chancellor:** All right. Well, good luck to you all. I appreciate it.

**Kay Brockwell:** All right. Take care.

**Chad Chancellor:** Okay. Bye-bye.

**Kay Brockwell:** Bye.

[Music]