

Transcript

Krystal Hobbs 0:04

Welcome to Beyond the Tools, the podcast that helps contractors attract more leads, grow their business, and finally get off the tools. In each episode, you'll discover marketing tactics that work. You'll get actionable insights from other successful contractors, and connect with experts to help you grow. I'm your host Krystal Hobbs, owner of a social media agency that helps contractors attract and convert more leads. Get ready to take your business to the next level so you can finally enjoy the fruits of your hard labor. Ready, let's go.

Hello and welcome back to Beyond the Tools. Today's episode features an interview with Lesa Lacey of Lacey Construction. Lesa is a business development manager in the construction industry, and she and her husband Eric have effectively grown the company from a two-person operation to one with up to 50 employees. They are one of the fastest-growing companies and have won numerous awards. They did up to \$15 million in sales last year, and they're on track to grow again; they've seen such fantastic growth in the last 22 years of running their business. Lesa, in particular, is an expert on company culture, giving back to the community, and dealing with the labor shortage that is affecting the entire industry. These topics couldn't be more important. Lesa talks about how this culture of families Working for Families helps to attract and retain talent, and how giving back to the community and really just caring about other people is something that is so ingrained in the company that it really does help them to attract and retain talent, it helps them to attract and retain clients. And it obviously has a significant impact on the environment in which they live. So, if you've been struggling with the labor shortage, or even if you're thinking about the big picture, things like creating a company that you're excited about and proud of, this interview is not to be missed. So take a look at it. Lesa Lacey is here. Hello and welcome back to Beyond the Tools. I am delighted to welcome today's guest, Lesa Lacey of Lacey Construction. Lesa, welcome to the show.

Lesa Lacey 2:46

Thank you so much for having me, Krystal. I'm thrilled to be here today. And I'm really enjoying what you're doing with the show. So, thank you very much for the opportunity.

Krystal Hobbs 2:53

Awesome. Well, yes, I'm really excited to have you here because our previous guest,

Curtis Mercer, told me I needed to talk to Lesa. So I'm thrilled to have you on the show.

Lesa Lacey 3:04

Yes, I adore Curtis and everyone I've met through Canadian home builders in Newfoundland, and I can't wait to see everyone again soon.

Krystal Hobbs 3:12

I'm hoping so. Without a doubt. So Lacey Construction, like many other home builders, began in a similar manner. So Eric founded the company on his own, bootstrapping everything. You jumped on board right away. And now, 22 years later, you're one of the fastest-growing companies, with up to 50 employees and a lot of community involvement. You have so many amazing things going on. So I guess I'm interested in how you did that. Do you believe there was one or a few things that really shifted the dial in terms of the company's growth?

Lesa Lacey 3:54

Yeah, it's difficult to say. I mean, we started out what feels like a lifetime ago. When I met Eric, we were living in the basement of a townhouse and making around \$100,000 per year. It's been an exciting ride. And I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that Eric and I approach the business from two completely different perspectives. We don't step on each other's toes, either. And we take a very different approach to things. As a result, it enables us to integrate into the industry community in a variety of ways.

Krystal Hobbs 4:37

Yes, I bet and I guess for you guys, I know that at the core of the business is, you know, this concept of families Working for Families, maybe you could tell us a little bit more about how you kind of integrate that and how that helps you run the business.

Lesa Lacey 4:55

Without a doubt. I believe, but I'm not sure if this is a unique point of view. But consider that our clients are making some of the largest investments they will ever make in their lives, whether it's a \$20,000 bathroom renovation or a \$3 million home. And I tell people that when they're looking for a builder, pick someone they'd still want to go out for a beer with at the end of the week because you're going to be living with these people for months on end. And if you don't feel good about it right away, it won't get better. So I say to you, like, how do they treat your dog? How do they treat your kids and you're going to go through bumps, and we just want to approach everyone the same way, whether it's a small job, a large job, just approach them with that care and respect and kind of

honoring the investment they're making in their home. And, after all, home is where the heart is, so we just want to put positive energy into those spaces.

Krystal Hobbs 5:48

Yes, that makes perfect sense. And I know for you, this has also translated into how you treat your team, so I guess going from a team of two to up to 50 is a big step. How do you infuse that into your culture at certain points?

Lesa Lacey 6:05

We do, indeed. We see our team as an extension of our family. And one of the nicest things about looking back on 20 years is that we now have five employees who are either past clients or family members of past clients. So, out of a team of 50, we have 17 percent women on our site, which is higher than the national average of 3%. And we simply try to remind everyone that family comes first. So, if you need to leave early for a Christmas concert, or your daughter's dental surgery, or anything else, we work hard and play hard; Eric just went out last night to our final golf night of the year. So, and I believe we make a point of getting together as a family. So for our staff Christmas events, we have up to 70 people in our home, and I prepare a full-fledged pole Christmas dinner. So, if we want to recreate that feeling and just have that family feeling, we must empower our team to bring that feeling into the homes of our clients as well.

Krystal Hobbs 7:04

That's incredible. And in this industry, I feel quite radical in some ways. Yes, I believe that the average of 3% for women working in the field is absurd. But I also think it's incredible that you have 17% of your staff. So tell me all about it. So, how did that all begin? Is that something you've held dear since the beginning? Or is it also due to the fact that everyone is experiencing a labor shortage, and this is an untapped market?

Lesa Lacey 7:41

It was very deliberate. So, for a while, half of our workforce was Australians, and one of them came over with his girlfriend and started painting for us, and she hasn't left since, so Claire's an invaluable team member. And we're looking at Claire and the rest of our team and wondering how we can get more Claire on our team, so I started going to events. So, in British Columbia, there are strong women in trades and the Technology Group. I began attending events primarily because I wanted to hire someone who was already present. And it snowballed from there. So, we'd like to be very visible in terms of supporting women in trades, as well as indigenous people and trades; this is very

deliberate. And it's become a hobby of mine. And I believe it is often echoed by my experience in boardrooms, committees, and municipal events, where I am often the only woman in the room at some of these board meetings. So it's all snowballed since then. I'm, I'm a little too loud at a board meeting. Because I'm aggressive and get noticed, I'm often asked to serve on other boards. And I believe it's partly because I'm the only woman in the room. But you're stuck with me once I'm there. So it's been a win-win situation. And it's given us a lot of exposure. However, having more women on our team was an intentional decision. So we actively promote it on social media, and we're currently conducting two interviews with really strong women who are candidates for roles on our team, including a carpenter and project coordinator. I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity. And I think part of that, too, is just providing a safe work site for all of our employees. So men and women providing a safe worksite emotionally and physically are really important.

Krystal Hobbs 9:25

Yes, that is correct. And, I suppose, for other contractors who are dealing with the difficulties and challenges that come with the industry's labor shortage. Based on your experience today, what advice would you give them in terms of being able to combat that?

Lesa Lacey 9:48

We are, indeed, in the same boat. I believe Eric told me last night that if we could, we could hire 20 people today. So the interesting thing about that statistic about women is that if the 3 percent increased to 9 percent, we would not have a labor shortage on trade sites in British Columbia. So, that's massive. So I think it's too late for the industry to sit around and complain about it. Get involved, go to your local trade school, get in front of the classes, we took our grade, six students, out to our provincial skills competition, get in front of the elementary school kids, talk to guidance counselors, don't waste your time complaining about it, get out there and make a difference.

Krystal Hobbs 10:27

That's fantastic. Yes. And I've seen some companies, particularly in the United States, develop like training schools, and they're getting young people early so that they can develop that interest in the trades that they otherwise wouldn't be able to develop. So I really like the idea of getting involved in schools and trying to cultivate that interest.

Lesa Lacey 10:55

Yes, it could be because of where we live. We're based in Roche, and we have more

cows than people. So we're approaching 1000 people and a lot more dairy cows. As a result of having such a small base, I am able to become more involved in the schools and be more visible. And part of that is the community outreach we do by providing extra food to kids on weekends. So it's something we've been doing for a long time, and the visibility, it all kind of blends together. And, once again, it's possible that this was not on purpose, but the payoff has been enormous.

Krystal Hobbs 11:27

Yeah. So being super involved in the community. What kind of stuff are you guys up to? And how do you have that ingrained in the company?

Lesa Lacey 11:39

Yes, at the heart of my day, I'm, essentially, a mom. So I drive my kids to and from school, and I drive the dogs to and from work, which is a little ridiculous, but that's all there is to it. And when I first started taking my son to our local school, I was just looking at how many kids were there for breakfast club, how many kids were there for lunch support, and my entire devoted program blessings in a backpack and just asked if I could start it. That was the year 2012. So this will be our tenth year of supporting local mission schools and dropping off extra food on weekends to help those kids and their families. And it's not much, but one principal described it to me as if that's the difference between them, being able to take your kids to the movies or get ice cream, as if it doesn't have to be a big deal, but it's really grown into a big deal again because our clients hear what we're doing. And now I have entire groups of clients who sponsor families during the holidays for communities that come out. And they're volunteering, dropping off food, and making local schools more like community schools. So food security, for me is a huge thing, especially for children. So, but that was just the tip of the iceberg, and it snowballed from there. So it's something I enjoy doing; the kids, on the other hand, don't, but it gets me in front of the school every week.

Krystal Hobbs 13:02

So what inspired you to get involved with this?

Lesa Lacey 13:08

To be completely honest, I struggle a lot with anxiety and depression. And one way I like to work it out is to go out and do something nice for someone else if I'm feeling sorry for myself. And that really helps me get out of that frame of mind. And then I'm, I'm relentless in it, hopefully in a good way. So when I commit, I commit wholeheartedly. So this is something I will continue to do. This is something we will continue to do as a

family. And I believe Eric spends a significant amount of time looking at and seeing what our competitors are doing. And I believe it is absolutely necessary. And, to be honest, I don't do any of it. So I'm kind of blazing my own trail. And I'm grateful that Eric gives me the freedom to do so, whether it's sponsoring a slew of sports teams or getting involved in the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in terms of attending and anything else. And the most important aspect in terms of how it relates to our business is giving back where we work. As a result, every fall, we assist in the organization of a First Nations Fraser Valley housing forum. But for me, it's Yeah, it's a little delegated. So if I see something that needs to be done, I'll jump in and do it.

Krystal Hobbs 14:25

That's incredible. I love that. And have you found that your team has gotten involved in some of these initiatives and stuff as well?

Lesa Lacey 14:34

They are, indeed, extremely supportive. I couldn't have done any of this without the help of our incredible team. And, to be honest, that includes our clients. When the pandemic hit, and the kids were struggling with more food insecurity, cash just started showing up at my door, and I was more like, what am I going to do with all of this, and we were kind of handing out 1000s of dollars of food and kind of that that last part of the school year when the pandemic first hit, and that's Our team, that's our clients, that's their families. And it was a real eye-opener. I mean, when the wildfires in British Columbia were so bad years ago, we were taking full truckloads of donations up to help those people, and our shop was so full that work came to a halt. We were just shipping something, and the same thing happened this year, when the lit nation was ravaged by wildfires and essentially burned down. We've been bringing a lot of donations to Cisco Nation, which has taken in those families and given them food in backpacks. We have these incredible clients, Buddhist nuns, who have donated so much food that I'm not sure how we fit it all on the track. However, it is more about building community than it is about building individual homes or doing individual renovations that touch someone's family, heart, or community.

Krystal Hobbs 15:51

That's incredible. So fellow builders hear this and think, "Ah, why would I put all this time, energy, and money into the community?" What would you say to something like that?

Lesa Lacey 16:07

I firmly believe that if it's not coming from your heart, don't do it just to get your name on a banner or something like that. If there's something you're passionate about, whether it's SBCA or Women in Trades or any of those things like being intentional about it, bring your team along for the ride. And we've had some really fun fundraisers in the past where my team is running the 50/50, and often I find it's the women on our team who are heavily involved on that front, so but really, it has to come from the heart, so it has to be based in gratitude, don't fake it until you make it, and pick something you really love, no matter how random it is.

Krystal Hobbs 16:50

Yes, that is correct. And I know that with labor shortages and the challenges that the industry is facing, you obviously want to keep the employees that you have, the great people that you have managed to attract. What have you discovered that has really worked to retain more of your team?

Lesa Lacey 17:11

Yes, we're fortunate to have many long-term employees, but we're seeing massive shifts in the labor market and a decrease in loyalty across the industry. So we're doing everything we can, and I'm grateful to Donna, our controller, who came on board a few years ago, because with her in that role and, frankly, taking over for me, things have gotten a lot better. So we can have a benefits program RSP, but those things are minor in terms of maintaining that culture and retaining the people we want on our team. So there have been a lot of social events, such as a baby shower two weeks ago and a secret Santa coming up. Everything we can do, even with COVID, lots of clothing and just kind of supporting those individuals - and it really touches my heart when we get invited to something like a wedding shower or a wedding and the person is just having a baby it's just really exciting like it all kind of maintaining that family feeling is where we find the most success.

Krystal Hobbs 18:14

Yes, that is correct. And I think it's incredible what you've done to build a culture like this team culture company culture around, essentially, caring about other people. And it's clear that this has greatly aided you in terms of becoming well-known in your community, keeping your employees happy, and attracting clients to work for you. That's insane, I mean.

Lesa Lacey 18:40

Yeah, we love it, and a big focus for us recently over the last few years has been our safety program, which is massive, and our joint health and safety committee, and really showing employees that we care, and I think a big part of that is also empowering them and asking for their opinions. Every new employee represents an opportunity for us to move forward and change rather than remain stagnant. We want to strive for continuous improvement, and we won't always have answers, so it's fantastic that people are on board; we're listening, we're collaborating; it's not top-down. It's all of us working together.

Krystal Hobbs 19:22

That's incredible, to be sure. So, what exactly are you looking for when you hire? Are you looking for people who share your company's values?

Lesa Lacey 19:32

I believe the last thought I sent out concluded, "must love dogs because our mastiffs are in the office every day." It's also a little tricky if you don't like dogs. We most emphatically do. More than experience, we hire for attitude. So it's very important, and it pays off when those people go into someone's home, right? So we need someone who will truly honor and respect the homes in which they live and recognize those people as families rather than just paychecks. So, especially on our Renault team, that's critical, and our renovation manager Simon does a great job of it, as does the caring concern he shows to our clients, and we should all be emulating that as leaders within our company.

Krystal Hobbs 20:15

Yes. I love the idea of hiring for attitude; we tend to do the same at reflective in that, it's great to have people with experience sometimes if there is a bit of a shortage in your area for that skill set just being able to identify that this person has the right work ethic the right values and now I can train them up and mold them to be what they need to be to fit the role but you can't change someone's mindset or perspective on life or how they show up every day.

Lesa Lacey 20:53

Yes, absolutely, and it's something you've struggled with in the past, and you're absolutely correct. We're not going to change some of these value systems, so it's going to be difficult right away. So it's much better to know going in that there's plenty of opportunity in our company to move up and directly speak with Eric. That's something

we're working on right now - to where that orientation really brings in the manager touching base with that new hire right away with their touching base with that new hire right away and that's something intentional that Eric does every week is connecting with one to two employees every single week directly so and it's just been more important to like now that's essentially 25 weeks to reach out to 50 employees so it's always something that has to be done.

Krystal Hobbs 21:42

Yes, incredible. So what's next for Lacey construction?

Lesa Lacey 21:49

Oh, hell, I'm not as involved in the day-to-day, so it's like a slew of board meetings and committee meetings for me. I recently became the BC Construction Safety Alliance's first female Chair. For our company, those positions are not as frequently in the office, so I'm not as involved in the day-to-day operations. But we're crazy busy, so we're booked out until 2023 building homes near the ski hill, we've expanded our region that we can't provide services to, and we're hiring like crazy, so if anyone wants a job, send them our way. And I'm just trying to enjoy working hard to keep that company culture alive. It's award season, so we're hoping to go out and party with the Newfoundland crew at the nationals. Everything is very exciting, and if we can just get the municipalities to agree on processing times, everything will be fine.

Krystal Hobbs 22:42

That's fair. All right. I'll conclude with a final question. If you could tell the Builders and Contractors that are listening to this podcast one thing about their business or one piece of advice what would you leave them with?

Lesa Lacey 23:00

Stop whining and get out there and make a difference. So, get in front of the students, get in front of everyone in your community, and truly promote trades as the wonderful career that they are.

Krystal Hobbs 23:10

Yeah. Love that. All right, Lesa. So how can our listeners learn more about you?

Lesa Lacey 23:21

Yes, we have a website called Lacey Developments, and you can find me on LinkedIn. Lesa with an E is a little obnoxious, and then we're all over social media. We've even made it onto TikTok, which is very exciting. As a result, we had to hire someone new just for that. So you can find us on any of these platforms. And, of course, if there's

anything I can do to help other contractors, Women in Trades, or people in the pipeline, please don't hesitate to contact me. I'd be delighted to speak with any of you.

Krystal Hobbs 23:53

Amazing. Thank you very much, Lesa. It's been a pleasure speaking with you, and I appreciate your presence on the show.

Lesia Lacey 24:00

Thank you so much, Krystal, and it was a true honor. I sincerely appreciate it. Thank you very much.

Krystal Hobbs 24:10

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Beyond the Tools. If you liked what you heard, please subscribe, rate, and review wherever you get your podcast. I'd love it if you could also share this episode with a fellow contractor who is ready to get off the tools and grow their business. And if you want more leads, sign up for our email list at reflectivemarketing.com where we share weekly marketing insights that you can't get anywhere else. I'm Krystal Hobbs and I hope you'll join me on the next episode of Beyond the Tools. See you next time.