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James Robert Lay:

Greetings and hello. I am James Robert Lay and welcome to the 68th episode of the Banking on Digital Growth podcast. Today's episode is part of the exponential insight series, and I'm excited to welcome Jeffrey Ward to the show.

James Robert Lay:

Jeffrey is an enterprise executive at TurnKey Lender and a host of TurnKey Lenders LinkedIn Live video series titled 15 minutes. Where he has these great 15 minute conversations with so many different, interesting and insightful people.

James Robert Lay:

He's interviewed dozens of financial brand marketing sales and leadership team members, FinTech leadership team members over the past few months. I'm looking forward to learning a little bit from those conversations today. Welcome to the show, Jeffrey.

Jeffrey Ward:

Thank you very much, James Robert Lay. It's an honor, and a privilege to be here.

James Robert Lay:

To start off. I want to focus on what inspired you to launch this video interview series, because I'm grateful that you did. I really have learned so much from the good questions that you've been asking others.

Jeffrey Ward:

I greatly appreciate that. What was inspirational in doing so was that, about a year ago, at this time we were having a QBR meeting with our marketing team, quarterly business review. I wanted to present myself as a thought leader in the FinTech space.

Jeffrey Ward:

I did so because we throw around these words, digital transformation and they are momentous. What does that mean? How does that impact an organization? I wanted to present myself from a thought leadership perspective, being able to better define what digital transformation could mean for my prospects, for my clients, for TurnKey Lender.

James Robert Lay:

I want to actually go down that path for a moment. This is more of just a personal aside for you and really how does this play into TurnKey Lenders strategy? One of the predictions that I made this year, my top 12 insights or top 12 opportunities for growth, is the idea of empowering the team member, empowering the employee. Because I'm predicting, going forward to the employee brand, has the potential to be even far greater than that of say, the corporate brand and that can make a lot of people feel uncomfortable.

James Robert Lay:

I had a really good conversation about this with Kerry-Ann Betton Stimpson, who's the chief marketing officer at the JMMB Group down in Jamaica. She's working with her team as the CMO to empower their sales team, to really build these personal brands. Should they even had a day to where they were highlighting the side hustles, the side businesses of some of their team members with the communities that they're serving.

James Robert Lay:

How is this idea of personal brand, your perspective thought leadership pLaying into... How are you reconciling this because it can make some people feel uncomfortable?

Jeffrey Ward:

That's a great question. What I've enjoyed about developing my personal brand is, its just giving me the ability to broaden my network across the country. I think it's given me the ability to broaden my network. I think it's given me the ability to broaden my understanding of the importance of FinTech. It's given me the ability to expand my understanding of how technology is transforming banking and transforming lending and it's fun to be the face of TurnKey Lender on LinkedIn Live and on LinkedIn.

James Robert Lay:

Yeah. If I'm in your position, but I work at a financial brand and I see some of those opportunities, but something's holding me back. Maybe I'm a little scared to put myself out there.

James Robert Lay:

There are so many others who are doing great work like this. I think of Alec Hanson over at LoanDepot and so many other good people. How can I overcome some of those fears that are probably just... It's the false evidence appearing real that I'm holding myself back. What advice could you give to me to put myself out there?

Jeffrey Ward:

That's funny, that's a great question. I had the experience to interview Jill Kostia, who is CEO of Edmonds bank or Citizens bank and that's in Oklahoma. It brought me back to the first time I pLayed football starting on the varsity football team.

Jeffrey Ward:

I had huge butterflies. I knew exactly what I was going to talk to her about. I'd already sent her the questions, but, I was like, "Would I have this deer in the headlights moment." And I was able to power through it.

Jeffrey Ward:

My advice would be is yes, it's going to be scary. Yes, you're going to nervous, but it's an experience you got to have because it's an adrenaline rush more than anything.

James Robert Lay:

I'm thinking of two conversations that I've had. Episode number 46 with James Carberry, who I mentioned to you before we hit record. He wrote the book Content-Based Networking, which I'm

seeing such a tremendous opportunity as a financial brand lender, or even someone who might be a branch manager.

James Robert Lay:

Because this idea of connecting with people in the digital world to build relationships in the digital world, I think you said it best before we hit record was, "You can literally go across the country now and not have to worry about where you're going to stay because of the good connections and relationships that you're building just from these conversations that you're having."

James Robert Lay:

On the flip side of the spectrum, had a conversation with Jay Palter, episode number 51. Where he was discussing that more of the practicality of this, I could take, three, four or five hours and go play a round of golf with three other people, or I could take to your point those 15 minutes and make an impact of hundreds, if not thousands of other people through this lens of digital context. Kudos to you for leading in this direction.

Jeffrey Ward:

I appreciate that. The other thing that has come out of this and really what I want my clients to get and my connections to get is that for me, it's about the ability to serve. I think every single person that's been on my show has been passionate and I think that they all have purpose. They all have passion, they all have intention.

Jeffrey Ward:

I'm hopeful that the audience, the participants may have a question, may have a thought, may have a need that somehow I'm able to serve that in the opportunity to present these people to our audience.

Jeffrey Ward:

I think it's really important for me... I love sales. I love closing business. I love the excitement, the thrill of the kill, but it's really about the opportunity to serve more than anything.

James Robert Lay:

That right there, if people followed you and they watched, they listened. They could learn so much just on this journey that you've taken yourself, but it does come back to this, it's a bigger purpose and we'll come back to this idea of purpose here in a moment, but it is about servant leadership.

James Robert Lay:

It's about putting other people before yourself and thinking about all that you've learned through these 15 minute conversations that you've had. You shared five points, five patterns from these discussions. These points and patterns, I believe can inspire the dear listener to continue to move forward and make progress along their own digital growth journey and I want to frame these points, these lessons, these insights into what we'll just call for today's conversation, the five P's.

Jeffrey Ward:

Fantastic.

James Robert Lay:

The first observation that you shared with me, and you mentioned this before, it's passion. That passion will run from the CEO all the way down to the solution engineer. Why is passion important for this idea of digital growth, digital transformation. How does passion really drive the customer experience in future success?

Jeffrey Ward:

Great question. I think, passions what gets us out of bed in the morning. Passion what makes me stand up and potentially compare myself to somebody else and how I'm going to do it better.

Jeffrey Ward:

I've been in college and I've been in seminars and I've been in experiences where I've sat at the C table with individuals and you could think about, "How do I separate myself from the CEO? How do I separate myself from the CFO? How do I separate myself from another sales executive?"

Jeffrey Ward:

The only way I can do that is through my passion and that passion can touch everything that I can do. It can touch my skillset, it can touch my education, it can touch my communication, it can touch my approach. I think passion is a very important key to success for any type of role that you do.

James Robert Lay:

Hearing you talk through that, this idea of passion and how to deliver passion through the context of digital. There's no better way to do that than through the work that you're doing with these 15 minute conversations, because you're getting to see not only your passion but the passion of the person that you're having this conversation with come out. You can see it, it can be of the podcast. You can hear it and it's hard to convey that passion a lot of times through writing alone, but writing can then inform those conversations.

James Robert Lay:

I'm at a hundred percent agreement about this idea of passion. Which is really closely connected with the second P that you shared with me, which is purpose. What role does purpose play in regards to digital growth? Why do you believe that purpose is now more important than ever before, to have meaningful connections within the banking vertical?

Jeffrey Ward:

Another great question. Purpose, you've got to have intention, you got to have purpose. You got to have a reason to be at the table. You got to have a value proposition. I think understanding my network and understanding the value that they bring to the world, to digital transformation, is their purpose.

Jeffrey Ward:

What I get the opportunity to do is peel back the layers of the onion and show that purpose. I think it's more important than ever as a financial institution, as a traditional institution or a non-traditional institution, to have purpose around how you treat your customers. We all know it takes a certain amount of energy to get a client. It takes even less energy to keep a client, but you got to be purposeful about how you spend that energy.

James Robert Lay:

You talk about purpose and you talk about spending energy. I can't help but think about the writings of Napoleon Hill, Think and Grow Rich and purpose is always at the center of his writing and his thinking. Purpose is at the center of our digital growth blueprint and purpose really does help to create that intent and elevate the thinking within a financial brand.

James Robert Lay:

Whether it's on the marketing sales, leadership side, to elevate the thinking beyond the promotion of commoditized products, dollars and cents, to really putting the focus. Coming back to what you were sharing before, framing that around people, their pain points, their problems, and then offering prescriptions and solutions to those problems which brings us to the third point of performance.

James Robert Lay:

Performance, One of the things that we're hearing over and over again, and we're living it. It's change and it's so easy when we think about change to get wrapped up in all of the small things. What is the best way to bring performance and the idea of performance up to a higher level, to focus on the goal, the cause, the purpose and really staying focused on expectations?

Jeffrey Ward:

I think, myself personally, that performance is extremely important. I think that performance is something that I have to get out of bed within intention to provide peak performance each day.

Jeffrey Ward:

I think performance is easier when I know my goal, when I know where I need to focus and I know my expectations. I think purpose and performance is easier with leadership. If you have great leadership within the organization, they're telling you, "These are my expectations. These are how we're going to perform, and this is what we're going to do." Clearly, what would get you outside the guardrail.

Jeffrey Ward:

I think performance is key in, "If I was a lender, how many loans I'm going to do?" Performance is critical and my enterprise role in the number that I have to hit on an annual basis. Performance is critical in how I approach my clients in their evaluation. I have to be professional. I have to be prepared. I have to know and perform in a manner that adds value to the organization because we all have more competition than we've ever had before.

James Robert Lay:

When you're talking about performance, I can't help but think about clarity. Clarity into what are the expectations, specifically. I think here about digital transformation and the introduction of

new technology, new systems, new processes, and how many times they just get thrown into the lap, for example, of lenders.

James Robert Lay:

There's no clear expectation of number one, what are we trying to achieve with this new technology, but really the bigger one is what's the purpose. What's the bigger goal that the problem that this new technology is going to solve. Not only internally but externally. When there's a lack of clarity, that leads to confusion, that leads to conflict, that leads to chaos and that's a big reason why I think, upwards of 80% of digital transformation projects fail. It's not because the technology. Technology could care less.

James Robert Lay:

The technology is just the tool. Digital transformation fails because we have failed to address the needs of the people or set the proper expectations and therefore the people lack the clarity that they need to perform. Any thoughts from you on just, seeing, talking through, hearing of digital transformation failures and what can be done to overcome some of those failures?

Jeffrey Ward:

Yes. 100%. I think in my role at TurnKey Lender outside of being able to do these 15 minute podcasts is taking a client, and these can be enterprise clients, through an evaluation. Really on the successful projects that I've seen from the top of the house down, from the CEO down, there has been a strategic decision made to execute a strategy that will deploy a digital transformation.

Jeffrey Ward:

In that perspective, when I have those type of clients present themselves to me, the sales process is very easy. There's a qualification step, there's a discovery step. There's a summary of finding step. There's a demonstration step and then, by that timeframe, they should have made the emotional decision to buy.

Jeffrey Ward:

As a seller, the technology to your point, it doesn't care. As a seller, what I think is very important is that when you can challenge your client to the reason, why are you buying this? What are you going to get out of this? Who is going to be impacted? How are they going to be impacted? What will you ultimately measure ROI against?

Jeffrey Ward:

I think when you can ask those type of questions very quickly, you understand an organization that knows exactly where it wants to go. If you ask those questions and you get a deer in the headlights reaction, they're not ready yet. I've loved commission checks, they're big and I can spend them on my family and I've got a long list of things that I can spend them on. A lot of times, if they can't answer those questions and you get into implementation, they get lost.

James Robert Lay:

Yes.

Jeffrey Ward:

The project manager's really good about defining expectations, getting that stuff, aligning it up, defining the functionary requirements document, you name it. Once the development starts, the client sees it and they think, "Well, Oh, I should have this." Or, "Oh, I should have that." And the wheels come off the project. Really knowing why you're doing what you're doing and how you're doing is critical for project success.

James Robert Lay:

This comes back to a model that I've been doing some recent teaching around. If we're wanting to maximize digital growth or achieve digital transformation, it requires us to act. That is where we have awareness plus courage will ultimately lead to transformation.

James Robert Lay:

If you're lacking the awareness, but have the courage you won't move forward. If you have the courage, but lack the awareness, you'll probably move forward, but most likely in the wrong direction and could potentially end up back where you start to begin with in the first place.

James Robert Lay:

There's a very specific, almost a step-by-step process needed of, we'll just call it clarity first, courage, second. Commitment, third, so forth and so on. When you think about this idea and the conversations that you're having, and really seeing and experiencing and guiding others through. You've seen through a lot of different organizations over the years, how can financial brand leaders overcome their past, where I feel many are stuck, to deal with the changes that are happening in the present moment and really eliminate the fears that might be holding them back from the future that they have yet to create?

Jeffrey Ward:

I would answer, you've got to fail fast. I would say you've got to fail as fast as possible. What I mean by that is growth is not an easy process. You stub your toe, you have growing pains. My kids to me on a regular basis and say, "Oh, my hip hurts." "Oh, my knee hurts." If I gave aspirin out for every single time they came to me, I would be broke.

Jeffrey Ward:

What is important in that perspective is, if I'm going to change my organization, I need to make a decision. I need to be confident in my decision and I need to say, This is how we're going to perform against that decision.

Jeffrey Ward:

If gosh forbid, we make a mistake, if we break something. Let's look at how it broke. Let's look at why it broke and let's use that. Let's learn from that to continue forward. You can't make a cake and you can't make an omelet without breaking an egg. You got to go out there. You've got to experience and you got to do it boldly.

James Robert Lay:

Yeah. I was just having this conversation in episode 67 with Chris Skinner. We were talking about where some of the most massive changes that we have experienced either A, personally

or B, professionally. They always have come in the uncomfortable moments, the painful moments of growth for that matter.

James Robert Lay:

I love the analogy of your kids. If you gave them an aspirin every time they were hurting, you'd be broke. For me, it's band-aids. My kids are always coming to me saying, "Dad, can I have a band-aid?" I'm like, "It's not even bleeding." But you're right, growth comes through pain. Change is painful and that's where I want to focus on the fourth P here, which you shared, is patience.

James Robert Lay:

Patience for me has been a big personal lesson coming out of COVID. Really, patience is critical for growth. It's never fun. It's never easy. It does require change. Change is painful, but it also requires humility. How can we all gain a bit more patience in a world that seems to demand anything but patience for that matter?

Jeffrey Ward:

Wow. I don't know if I have enough time to answer that question right now.

James Robert Lay:

I'll be patient.

Jeffrey Ward:

I appreciate that. Hard for me to answer that question. What I would say is, I got to speak from the heart. Patience for me is, I have my intentions, I have my goals. I have my desires each and every day that I get out of bed.

Jeffrey Ward:

I have to be patient sometimes because I've got a demonstration coming tomorrow, it's the biggest deal I've done this year and I've got to execute at this level. I'm not taking into the fact that my brother, who is a solution engineer, has just had a kid. Has a brand new baby boy that's not even six months old and probably last night is cleaning up baby poop until three o'clock in the morning. I'm sorry if that's not supposed to be on your show, but I think patience for me-

James Robert Lay:

That's real life right there. With four kids, I've cleaned up plenty of poop at three and four in the morning.

Jeffrey Ward:

Yeah. I mean, patience is taking a moment to appreciate our fellow brothers and sisters. We're all trying to do this. We're all going in the same direction and we may not all share or have the same tolerance for the direction that we're going. If you can have a little bit of patience, it just seems to make things a lot easier for us all.

James Robert Lay:

Yeah, I think that's a great, we'll call it a definition of patience from your perspective. If I was to synthesize that a little bit and I can apply that to what I call the four digital growth operating



environments. You can be learning, you can be thinking, you can be doing, or you can be reviewing. Growth requires all four, but it is so easy to get stuck doing digital. Whatever that might be from a marketing side, a sell side, a leadership side.

James Robert Lay:

If I was to distill this down. Patience to your point, is taking a moment to stop. To break free from the doing. To pause, to reflect, to review where we've been, what's worked well. What can be made even better and to really be grateful for the progress that we've made on our own personal journeys of growth, of our organizational journeys of growth, which that brings us to the fifth P and we'll round this out, this is persistence.

James Robert Lay:

I like what you noted here, coming from the great Pixar film, Finding Nemo with Dory. Persistence is Dory, shared over and over again to Nemo's father. Just keep swimming. We'll call it in the sea of COVID, post-COVID chaos that we're all still swimming through.

James Robert Lay:

What is the best way for marketing sales and leadership teams to do just that? To just keep swimming, to be persistent, to run the good race, because digital growth is a journey. Digital growth is a marathon and it is something that does require persistence. How can we apply that thinking?

Jeffrey Ward:

I think persistence is continuous message, continuous content, continuous outreach, and continuous support of your clients. They may not all need me today. They may not all need me tomorrow, but sooner or later they're going to need me. If I am not persistent, I may miss an opportunity. That can be from the largest financial institutions in the world, all the way down to the smallest startups.

Jeffrey Ward:

You got to be persistent. You got to get up every day. You got to put your messaging out there. You got to put your content out there. You got to put your out there and sooner or later they're going to be ready for you. You got to be patient and persistent for that moment.

James Robert Lay:

I can't help but think here. A lot of financial brands, they'll throw up excuses to digital growth of transformation, whether it be regulatory, asset size, "We don't have the capital." But hearing you talk through this, I guarantee every single person has the cash that they need to maximize their own personal growth. Potential, number one. Their team's potential, number two and their organizations digital growth, potential number three.

James Robert Lay:

Cash is this. It is knowledge. It is attitude. It is systems and to this point right here, persistence. It is habits and what are habits? Habits come from your thoughts, which inform your actions and your repeatable actions then become the habits and the habits create the predictable future.

James Robert Lay:

If we're wanting to transform our organizations, we might have to come back and have some conversations about the habits that we have today. Are they the right habits that we need to get us to where we're going tomorrow.

James Robert Lay:

Speaking about tomorrow, what is one thing, if you could just make one recommendation to marketing sales, leadership teams, one commitment that you could recommend. One habit, if you will, that they could commit to, to move forward with courage and confidence on their digital growth journey. What would that habit or that commitment be?

Jeffrey Ward:

Oh, that commitment would be, make as much noise as you possibly can with rich content each and every day possible.

James Robert Lay:

Content that helps. Content that guides. Content that inspires. Jeffrey, this has been such a great conversation and I'm grateful for the knowledge and the insight that you've shared just through the conversations that you've had through the discussions on your own LinkedIn Live. If anyone's listening, they have questions they'd like to connect with you, continue the conversation. What is the best way for them to reach out and say hello to you?

Jeffrey Ward:

You can reach me on LinkedIn. You can reach me, I think my cell numbers on my LinkedIn profile as well. If not it's (512) 586-6564. Feel free to text me. I'm happy to be a resource anytime.

James Robert Lay:

Jeffrey, thank you so much for the knowledge. Thank you for the insights and thank you for joining me on another episode of Banking on Digital Growth.

Jeffrey Ward:

Thank you, James. It's an honor and a privilege to be here, my brother.

James Robert Lay:

As always. Until next time, be well, do good and wash your hands.