

Bob Gilbert (00:01):

Welcome to tourism heads and their tales, a podcast series that explores with travel and tourism leaders, their take on key issues of the day. My name is Bob Gilbert, general manager for the tourism and destination marketing practice at the award-winning strategic marketing agency, Eddy Alexander, who are bringing you this podcast series. I've had the privilege to have worked with iconic global brands, including Disney choice, hotels, Yosemite and Shenandoah National Parks, Kennedy space center, visitor center, and best Western international plus served on the boards of the U.S Travel Association, National Tourist Association, and an elected commissioner for visit California looking forward. I will be chatting with those that are helping shape the travel and tourism industry, all with unique tales to share that I know you will find both interesting and educational. So without further ado let's get started, today's guest is very unique. Now, let, let me, let me explain why, how many DMOs do, you know, has a university degree in rocket science?

Bob Gilbert (01:15):

Yes, rocket science. And this has certainly helped shape his approach to marketing, tapping into both science and innovation. Coincidentally, we are both from the UK. Coincidence again, we are actually both born in the same town, but with, uh, quite a few years of separation, I has to a, both of us share a background in hospitality. We both married Americans and we both enjoy craft beer. So let's welcome. Stuart Butler, Chief Marketing Officer at Visit Myrtle beach, the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce and CVB and the official destination marketing organization for the grand strand with over 425 hotels and resorts, home to 90 golf courses, and of course, home of the shag. So <laugh>, I couldn't resist Stuart.Welcome. And, um, please introduce yourself and, and give our audience some, some background, uh, some added context to, uh, to my highlights.

Stuart Butler (02:22):

<laugh> Well, I mean, you touched a lot of the, the highlights Bob said, so thank you for having me on the show. Yeah. I'm fairly new to the DMO world, so it it's been great getting to know a lot of folks and how this crazy industry works, but I've been the CMO here at mottle beach for a little over a year now. And, uh, I said, when I took the job that I would either innovate and, and make a little dent in the DMO space or I'd get fired trying, and I didn't really mind which happened first. I'd prefer it was the former, but we we're trying to do some crazy innovative things here. We, we have a lot of folks that, that don't come from the DMO world, our CEO, Karen, my right hand, Diane and I all grew up really on the agency side of the world. We all have various different industries experience, but we've all had a large part of our career spent in the hospitality world. Mine for 20 years was on the hotel side of things, running a digital agency and software company for independent hotels. So I think we're just coming at at things with a slightly different perspective and, and it's creating some innovation and it's, it's creating some fun projects for us.

Bob Gilbert (03:25):

You know, you mentioned that you've been on board just over a year mm-hmm <affirmative> and you know, a, a difficult period and with the pandemic or the back end, hopefully of the pandemic, what kind of challenges did you immediately face when you took on the role?

Stuart Butler (03:42):

Yeah, I mean, there was a lot, I came in really drinking from a fire hose because we'd gone through such a transformational period. We were very fortunate in Myrtle Beach though, in that we were actually led

the nation in terms of recovery from a, a RevPAR perspective. If you look at SDR data for 2021 and compare it to 2019, we, we were the top. We led in terms of growth from 2019, you know, and a lot of, lot of beach destinations were fortunate in that regard, but we seemed to navigate the pandemic pretty well. And I will say too, I had a slight insider track and that I was sitting on the board of directors before I became a staff member. So I I'd been serving as our, what we call our marketing chair, which is essentially the chair of the CBD side of our board.

Stuart Butler (04:27):

I'd been serving in that capacity for a couple years. So I I'd had my hands sort of inside a little bit up until I became a staff member. So, so I, I knew enough to be dangerous <laugh> but you know, we are facing the same challenges, you know, how do you, how do you deal with unpredictable patterns in, in consumer behavior? How do we, you know, we had such a, a successful year, no, 2021 was the, the record year for mottle beach <laugh>, which was incidentally my, my first year. So it's like we set the bar really high, but this year is actually more of a challenge because we're still having a great year. It's actually the second greatest year we've ever had in terms of performance, but it's not quite up to 2021 levels for us. So, you know, obviously that, that's a little disappointing for, for some folks that we're expecting 2021 to be the norm. So, you know, we, we deal with the same political challenges. Uh, we deal with the same challenges about trying to find new markets and trying to just do a better job each and every day.

Bob Gilbert (05:19):

So you, you have, uh, I think an advantage and some of the other members on your team coming from an agency background. And I, to, to, to kind of clarify that, I think that within an agency environment, you have to be incredibly agile. Mm-hmm, <affirmative> something which a lot of DMO aren't necessarily known for. And the challenges that you face from that, you know, from that background with the agency world, uh, you know, must help you within today's environment. You know, how quickly are things changing within, within your area. And first of all, what is the, the real estate <laugh> that you oversee from a marketing standpoint?

Stuart Butler (06:06):

Right? So we're, we're a regional destination marketing organization. So we represent the entire grand strand, which is 14 communities is 60 miles of ocean front. And then a handful of those communities are inland too. So we like Conway is 20 minutes from, from Mele beach in it's qua little rustic town. Like it's like going back in time. It's not a little theater downtown, some neat little shop, coffee shops and anti stores in a beautiful riverfront. So we have this really eclectic group of communities over 2000 restaurants. You know, you already mentioned like 90 golf courses, so we have a lot of assets. Uh it's it's been interesting trying to figure out what's the best way to tell the story about those assets and tell it through the eyes of the consumer, not just talking about we have great golf courses, but talking about what kind of experience you can have in a place that has this many golf courses, this variety of amazing restaurants and live music and shows and all, all the other stuff we have to offer.

Stuart Butler (07:05):

So, you know, it's, it's funny Myrtle Beach has sort of, we fly under the radar a lot in terms of, we're not talked about in the same breath as some of the tier one markets, for sure, but we're, we're actually one of the largest leisure destinations in the country. We, we get about 20 million visitors a year, which puts us really on the east coast with it's most visited beach destination. I think the only beach destination

that gets more folks than us is San Diego and, and a large part of that is because they have a, a large amount of business traffic too, which we don't really get a ton of that cuz cuz our industry is tourism. We don't have a lot of diversity in economy. And so we're trying to work on that as a, a long term vision. How do we diversify our economy? But we're very, you know, in terms of assets here, we have a lot, it's a large geographic area with a lot of variety, but it also means because our tax base is pretty large. We, we have a decent budget and we can compete with the big guys. So it's, it's, it's a good position to be in.

Bob Gilbert (08:00):

So with that said, and you mentioned that you have a strategy that is focused on your customer mm-hmm <affirmative> um, and not necessarily the CVB members, although that's obviously who you represent. Yeah. What does that actually mean? How, how is that translated? And I know that I saw recently, I think this gets back to what I was saying about science and innovation, you know, with some, I think when I read it, the word that was used was cheeky, um, which is a great old English word, but you know, and this is your sports anchors on the beach. Can you explain, you know, a little bit about that focus and how that became part of your strategy mm-hmm <affirmative> to be fun, um, and engage and how that campaign is working.

Stuart Butler (08:49):

Yeah. Well first let me apologize. I don't know if you're picking this up on camera, but we have a wicked thunderstorm has just come through. I promise you Myrtle Beach is 99% of the time. Beautiful, sunny 83 degree weather, but we do okay. Right. <laugh> thunderstorms,

Bob Gilbert (09:00):

The typical chamber, the chamber of commerce day.

Stuart Butler (09:03):

Right. Um, but it it's, it's, it's usually that's the alarm clock telling people it's time to come off the beach and going to the restaurants and spend their money, but right.

Stuart Butler (09:12):

So, but yeah, we, we, to answer your question, I don't want to come across as sounding like I'm a new guy coming into the industry and I'm really critical of what people have done because I really understand why people have approached marketing in the DMO space, the way they have, there's a fundamental pressure to play it, safe, to do the things that you've always done because of the nature of our funding mechanism. And we've seen what can happen when you take risks with folks like visit Florida in the past, right? Where you can literally one campaign can get you defunded. So there there's immense pressure on people just to do the things that have been working for years and not to upset the apple cart and not to innovate too quickly through fear of leaving your, your stakeholders behind and, and having them question what you're doing.

Stuart Butler (09:56):

So I come at this in a, really with a solutions minded approach to say, well, well, what if we can, we can still mitigate risk, but we can also innovate at the same time. So that's what we're trying to do. So it started by doing the groundwork by really having deep conversations with our stakeholders and our funding sources and saying, this is, this is how it's being done. This is what we'd like to try. And this is how we're gonna do it in a way that is, you know, appropriate is mitigating risk and has the, the

maximum potential upside. So again, you mentioned my background being a scientist and a physicist. I, I try to apply scientific method to my thinking. And so, uh, you typically come up with a hypothesis and then come up with a test to, to prove or disprove that and then try to repeat it.

Stuart Butler ([10:38](#)):

So we have adopted a mindset of always be testing, testing, everything. Like don't assume that what's worked yesterday is gonna work tomorrow. And we believe that challenging the status quo, but being obsessed with the consumer is the right long term strategy. So how that manifests to get more, you know, to bring it down from the clouds and into something tangible is programming like we did with the beach, with the best campaign, which is what you're talking about, where we took the age old construct of a DMO commercial. Yeah. Which most of them follow the same exact formula, which is show pretty pictures of people enjoying your destination or pretty pictures of scenery within your destination, have some emotional captivating message either in audio or written word over the top of that, and then have some kind of inspirational music behind it and then finish with a clever tagline in the logo, right?

Stuart Butler ([11:28](#)):

That's the formula that we've all done. And they're very, unmemorable, they're very much homogenized. And typically when you create commercials like that, you, you end up having to pay someone to get that content in front of an audience, right? So whether that be a Facebook or Google or, or TV, you know, linear TV or connected TV, you're having to pay to put your message in front of someone. So we sort of went back to first principles and said, well, what are we really trying to do? We're trying to get certain messaging in front of people. What's the best way to do that in what we've said is, well, where are people paying attention to things and who's doing this right? And so we, we look hard at, at other sectors like the insurance companies that have done a really good job creating these formulaic commercials that are actually entertaining and people want to share and people want to talk about.

Stuart Butler ([12:14](#)):

And so we sort of applied that to this speech, with the best campaign and, and came up with, with that concept. But we, we want to take that a step further and start to say, well, how do we actually create content? People want to consume what we call branded entertainment. And so we're on this mission to create TV shows, children's books, YouTube channels. Mm-hmm, <affirmative> even a motion picture that Myrtle Beach is the backdrop, but it's, it's in its programming people. But the really the goal is to build an audience that we can begin to over time, communicate with them in a, in a way that builds a long term relationship. Another tangible example would be the website, the DMO website, which for the most part is built around the concept of, I want to serve my stakeholders, you know, and a lot of DMOs have funded heavily from their accommodations or attractions, right?

Stuart Butler ([13:03](#)):

And primarily accommodations. And so you build this and construct this. Typically it's not an inexpensive project. It's, you can sync a lot of money into a website and you build it to serve local hotels, but there's not a lot of utility or value to the consumer. And, and what I mean by that is if a consumer comes to a site and it has a list of 50 hotels and they all have the same size picture, and they're all about the same style of picture, and it just has a little name of the property. Maybe the, the address, maybe a link to a website. There's no way for a consumer to discern from that preference. You know, there's no information there that helps a consumer make a decision about which, which is gonna be right for them.

So how do we, as DMOs, sit down with our accommodations and say, I can serve you better by sending you more qualified traffic.

Stuart Butler ([13:51](#)):

I can send you more qualified traffic by helping the consumer make decisions to qualify or disqualify them from your property. Cuz if you're a family friendly property that have a lot of kids running around the kiddie pool and the person that's shopping on my website is a 70 year old couple. That's looking for a relaxing pool with no kids. It doesn't make sense for me to send that traffic to you. So let me try to qualify people first and then send 'em to you. So we're in the process of rebuilding our site now from the ground up, having had those conversations and gotten everyone to buy into the premise that we serve our investors and our stakeholders better by serving the consumer. So we're building this website from the ground up with the consumers in mind, we're trying to figure out how do we provide value? How do we create an enjoyable experience? Because travel is fun, but planning, travel is can kind of be burdensome and cumbersome. So how do we solve that?

Bob Gilbert ([14:44](#)):

And try to make that fun?

Stuart Butler ([14:46](#)):

Oh yeah. Like if we can't make travel fun, then what are we doing? You know, it's, it's one of the most fun things humans do. So we should, we should have that cheekiness and that fun that you talked about from our commercials, that should be part of our DNA. That should be in everything we do. So don't, don't take ourselves so seriously travel should, should be fun. Right?

Bob Gilbert ([15:04](#)):

So clearly you are data driven...

Stuart Butler ([15:08](#)):

Of course. Yeah.

Bob Gilbert ([15:08](#)):

And you know, that's guiding your strategy and content and product mm-hmm <affirmative>. So we live amidst a world of data. I mean, I've never seen so many data sources, either individually collected or aggregated. How do you determine the right data from the right source that's going to serve as, um, you know, is relevant in terms of how you, how you build out your strategy.

Stuart Butler ([15:39](#)):

Yeah. Well, and, and there's a couple of pieces to that. One is, and everything you look at shouldn't be looked at after the fact, right? So you, again, if you apply the scientific method, what you do is you have a hypothesis, you define how you're gonna measure success or failure, and then you run the test. And so the mistake a lot of people make is they'll look in the rearview mirror at what happened. And then they'll try to bend that data to suit their narrative, right? So it's, it's like this cognitive bias that we have where whatever your preferred outcome is, you're gonna look for that pattern. And so I think you've gotta start with the end of mind, say, what does success look like before you even begin? Whatever the

project is that you're doing. But then I think when we're looking at data and data collection, I think you've gotta make sure you understand the full context.

Stuart Butler ([16:25](#)):

Looking at one data point out of context can really send you in the wrong direction. Like the earliest example of that, that I remember having to deal with in my career with on a hotel side was, was bounce rate on a hotel website in isolation. That metric is somewhat meaning meaningless, but you could infer stuff from it that could be correct or incorrect. So bounce rate is went is the percentage of people that come to your website and leave without going to another page, right? You could apply the same logic to something like length of time spent on site too. Mm-hmm <affirmative> so bounce rate could mean that people came from say, organic search landed on your website and found exactly what they wanted. You solved their problem or answered their question. And then they left, right? That's the success, but it could mean the exact opposite.

Stuart Butler ([17:12](#)):

Yeah. It could mean that they came to your website. They couldn't find what they wanted. They were confused or overwhelmed and they left. Both of those outcomes are complete opposite, but they manifest in the same way from a data perspective. So you've gotta make sure that you're looking at con the data in context in looking at it from multiple levels. Like I think like attribute, if I go really on the other end of the spectrum to attribution media and advertising attribution, you know, a lot of people try to find the perfect attribution model. The reality is every model is flawed because it's a simplified version of reality by definition. That's what, what a model is we simplify reality to a point that we can digest and understand it. So a simplified model is gonna have biases. It's gonna have errors in it. It's just, is it at a tolerance point that you can live with without creating bigger problems?

Stuart Butler ([18:02](#)):

So a lot of people will create a model that might be like a time decay or, or something like that, which basically means I'm gonna value clicks and outcomes that happened more recently than further away. Right. And so that's great, but it creates a bias. It, it might, it might bias last click analytics, or it might bias first click analytics. So looking at multiple models of the same data, I think is really important when we're looking at things like performance mm-hmm <affirmative>. But again, you've gotta start with the, the end in mind and sort of define those subjectives early on to avoid getting caught up. And then I think the other piece of data that, that that's really important is consumer data, you know, and there's so much regulation coming out right now, you know, we've already had, you know, California Privacy Act, we've already had GDPR we've now got federal legislation that's rapidly going through government and will probably be in, in place if not this year, early next year, all of that privacy legislation is a direct result of us marketers, misusing, and mishandling consumer data and, and breaking that, that relationship because

Bob Gilbert ([19:09](#)):

Breaking, breaking that trust.

Stuart Butler ([19:10](#)):

Yeah. Breaking the trust because we look at it as our data. I think you gotta flip that and say, no, it's not our data. It's the consumer data. We just have been given the privilege and the permission to use that data in a way that helps that consumer. So I think approaching data from that perspective really helps

you avoid some of the major pitfalls. So we're investing heavily in how do we collect more relevant data? That's gonna help us have a better one-to-one conversation with the consumer in a way that helps them make decisions more effectively and more enjoyably. We spend a lot of time figuring that out right now.

Bob Gilbert (19:43):

So you have, I'll use this, uh, example. So you are the orchestra leader and, you know, you have different musicians on the team, either internal or external mm-hmm, <affirmative> now a lot of this, you wouldn't be able to manage from an internal perspective. Yeah. So you have to lean on external providers. So what I have seen is a very limited number of providers that a DMO will use to make it simple for them. Mm-hmm <affirmative> so that they kind of aggregate different data points from one provider. Is that your route, or are you looking at having a variety of subject matter experts that feed back to you as the orchestra leader to make sweet music?

Stuart Butler (20:30):

<laugh> right. Yeah. We definitely have the approach of, we want best in breed for every component of our entire ecosystem. So we work with a lot of different agencies. I haven't counted up recently, but it's, it's in the region of, it's probably 8 or 9, at least different external agencies that I would consider major partners of ours, wow, there's a few that we use sort of smaller. I've always been that kind of best in breed guy. I've built software for 20 years. That was a best in breed. And so I always appreciated when we partnered with other best in breed solutions versus us trying to provide the entire vertical tech stack for for hotels. So I think I've found over my career that that best in breed approach has worked for me. It doesn't work for everyone because it does create challenges. And I think one of the challenges is you can get, you know, competition within the group, within the team, especially with multiple agencies that compete with each other, maybe don't have the best rivalry.

Stuart Butler (21:26):

You know, they, they maybe aren't the best of working colleagues, but how we mitigate that one is we're really selected with our partners. We have a very rigorous RFP process. And one of the things we do, which I haven't seen many folks do. And, and I really got this because I knew what it was like on the agency side, pitching RFPs. But when we put out an RFP, what we say is the only people that can present in this presentation at the final stage of the RFP are people that are actively working on the account. And the presentation has to be led by the person that's gonna lead the account. And so what that does is it prevents agencies from doing that age old trick of they sell you on their best and brightest

Bob Gilbert (22:07):

<laugh> and you never see 'em again.

Stuart Butler (22:09):

And then you never see 'em and they give you their cheapest. Right? And so what you end up doing is selecting the agencies that are the best at presenting and selling. You're not necessarily picking the agency, that's the best at execution. And so we flip that by, by requiring the people that are gonna be executing, other people that we're having conversation with in the dating process. And so that helps us select and weed out some of the folks that wouldn't be a good fit, you know, from a culture standpoint and things like that. The second thing we do is I can be kind of direct and kind of stern sometimes. And I

don't have a problem being very candid with partners. And so the first conversation I have with them all is when you're working on our account, you're on team Myrtle Beach. You're not on team,

Bob Gilbert ([22:55](#)):

Right? Whoever X,

Stuart Butler ([22:57](#)):

Right? You put on your Myrtle Beach Jersey and you come to play as hard as you can and perform to the best of your ability for the job that we have assigned to you. And, and it's sort of like that, whether you use the conductor, an orchestra analogy or a soccer coach and, and player's analogy, it's really the same. It's like someone else is dictating your role, right? They're telling you what to do. You do it to the best of your ability. You can do it better than I can, but I'm gonna assign where your boundaries are. And then I say, if I even think that you're trying to undermine, or, you know, make another team member look bad because you want their business, you're off the team. I don't care if you're my star striker. I don't care if you are my lead violinist. It doesn't matter if you're not playing with the spirit of the team first, you're not on the team, but

Bob Gilbert ([23:43](#)):

You can, you can identify that because you've been in their shoes as well. So you can see if, of course, yeah, there are shenanigans.

Stuart Butler ([23:50](#)):

Yeah. And it's not perfect. And sometimes people will, will test those boundaries a little bit and we have a conversation straight out, but I will say this it's been really successful. It took a while because agencies aren't built to work the way we're asking them to work. Like, I'll give you an example. When we have a challenge, like trying to make a decision on our, our media mix, right? So we say, right, we'll start with say markets, where are we gonna target markets this spring or this summer campaign? And so we have an agency of record MMGY that does our media placement. And then we have an analytics agency, lucky company that does a lot of our data and insights and stuff like that. So what used to would've happened or in the old paradigm would, would be MMGY would come up with a list of markets and either we'd accept that or wouldn't, and then maybe separately, lucky would come up and then we'd be sort of the, the referee between the two.

Stuart Butler ([24:44](#)):

But what we say now is MMGY go figure out your markets and, and using your methodology. Lucky, go figure out the markets based on our data. You guys go have a conversation without us. I don't need to be in the middle of it. You're all grownups. You guys go have, have, duke that out, come to a consensus and then present that back to me. And that's, that's what we do. So I don't need to be no one from our team is on the phone call. When two of our agencies are having a conversation. Most of the time they've gotten a great relationship. They've gotten to know each other. They've, they've developed rapport, but most importantly, they know they're on the same team. So they're solving problems and they don't need someone from my team to referee that. And it's been really, really successful.

Bob Gilbert ([25:25](#)):

And that is very different to the normal, um, protocol, if you will, and process mm-hmm <affirmative>, but you're managing. So, you know, you said nine different providers. Mm-hmm <affirmative>, and

that's a lot of data. So once you've digested that data, mm-hmm <affirmative> how do you then share that information, at least at a higher level with the stakeholders. Yeah. And, you know, because, and, and understanding that you that's where you came from more recently that, you know, heading, you were a marketing chair for the CVB, right. So is there a, a hard lift in education or is that already been done? So folks are, yeah. Understanding the information that you are sharing.

Stuart Butler ([26:08](#)):

So it's not just our stakeholders, like our investors, it's, it's also the other agencies, right. Because one of the other challenges is when we're doing so much and we're innovating so quickly and we're trying to be so agile, we've gotta keep the whole team with the focus on the same goals. And so when we, we come up with a new campaign or a new project, how do we communicate that to everyone? So I would say we haven't figured out the perfect way to do that yet with all our agencies, it's something we're trying to improve. We do have a periodic old agency summit where we try to disseminate a lot of information too much is done by email, but we, we haven't figured out a better solution. So we we're trying to do that. But when it comes to internal stakeholders, the ones here, the businesses in mottle beach, there are investors we believe in radical transparency. We tell them not just what we're doing, but before we've done it, we tell them what our strategy is, why we're doing what we're doing, how it's going to work, and then what it is last, right. It's that sort of golden circle approach

Bob Gilbert ([27:07](#)):

And what your KPIs, what your measurement yeah.

Stuart Butler ([27:10](#)):

What, what the objectives are and how successful it is in, you know, it was interesting when I first took the job and we were meeting with, I think MMGY was on one of our marketing council calls. And we were presenting a bunch of rosy data that everything was successful and someone raised their hand and said, do you guys never fail? Is like, we'd like to see stuff that didn't work. And, and right, obviously when you're testing a lot, you certainly fail. You've gotta be unafraid of failure in, in, and take failure as a, a great opportunity to learn and improve and optimize. So we certainly have done things that didn't work as we had hoped they would, but the next time we do it better, it's a continual improvement. So we've started doing that. We've started sharing the things that are working as well as the things that aren't, and it builds trust.

Stuart Butler ([27:55](#)):

And I think that's, that's the other thing I would say, you know, I have a, an innate advantage because it came from the board. So there's a sense of, yeah, we, we were peers for a couple years and so they know, and trust me as an individual, but we also continue to foster that relationship between our organization and the board and make sure they feel comfortable, encourage questions, you know, don't dodge questions really try to be as radically transparent as we can so that they don't have concerns. I think a lot of times where you get sideways with a board is when distrust creeps in because of the unknown. Cuz when people in general, we, we are skeptical beings, right? And so when there's a gap of knowledge of any kind, you tend to fill that gap, that void with the worst case scenario, right.

Stuart Butler ([28:39](#)):

It tends to be conspiratorial in nature. And so this is why people try to drag down successful people because they don't believe, you know, if they don't see the whole picture, everything about it, they

assume that something negative was going on that you didn't know about. Like you can't believe that that person was just that successful by being just awesome. They had to achieve at the system somehow. So I think that's human nature. So the way you mitigate that is just don't, don't hide stuff from people be as open and transparent as you can. It creates problems. There's no question that it, it creates work, but I think that's better than the alternative.

Bob Gilbert ([29:14](#)):

No, I think that being honest and straightforward and transparent beats the alternative because you, you have to continually remember, you know, whatever the mistruths were that you shared, but you know, sticking with honesty, you know, it, it takes you above that situation.

Stuart Butler ([29:32](#)):

And I think too, with, with the members, and this is something I learned from the hotel side too. So a lot of my hotels, they were condo hotels, meaning that their individual units within their property were owned by individual homeowners. And I saw two distinct groups of hotelier and I could tell straight away within a day or so of knowing them or researching them, which one they were without even having a conversation about this. But there was, there were people that saw that one week, a year, they would get all their homeowners together for a big annual meeting. And they'd, you know, talk about the past year and talk about the future. And there was a group of hotels that would call that hell week or hell day and say, it's the worst part of their job. And they hated it. And it was like, they almost talked about their homeowners with this stain.

Stuart Butler ([30:16](#)):

And then there was another that approached it as these are the reason we're in business. Without these homeowners we'd have no product and without product we'd have no business. And so this is the most important opportunity for us to talk to our key constituents and learn from it and learn how we can serve them better because this is their product that we're selling. And so you can guarantee which one of those mentalities is gonna be more successful in the long run. You may be out in the short run, cut costs and do things to be successful for a year or two but long term without nurturing those relationships, you're not gonna be successful. And I think the DMO world is exactly the same as that. If you treat your board with this stain or distrust, or you try to hide things from them, or you treat them as somehow not sophisticated enough to understand what you are doing, you know, you somehow treat them as other, long term, that's gonna get you in trouble. What you need to do is embrace them and realize you are serving those people you serve at their pleasure, the money you're spending, isn't your money, it's the community's money, which is contributed by these people here, you know, through the consumers that are visiting the destinations. So, right. I think if you approach the, the board the right way through the right lens, it, it prevents you from doing some of the behaviors that, that may get you in trouble,

Bob Gilbert ([31:31](#)):

Which I guess the, um, transformational change within DMO is, you know, waking up every morning and understanding or trying to demonstrate value mm-hmm <affirmative> on a daily basis, which is something that is for some DMOs, new. Yeah, I think it started pre pandemic. I think the pandemic accelerated the need to demonstrate value mm-hmm <affirmative> and you know, clearly that's what you've been doing.,Stuart. It's, it's been a refreshing conversation and I appreciate your candor. And we haven't met, I look forward to meeting and chatting about micro breweries and sharing a craft beer with

you, hopefully on the grand strand one of these days. So that would be great. Thank you. So we'd love to hope. Well, I'd love to get back. It's been a while.

Stuart Butler ([32:19](#)):

Thank You for having me on.

Bob Gilbert ([32:20](#)):

Thank you very much and really appreciate it. It's it's been fun. We hope you enjoyed today's episode, please like thumbs up, subscribe and leave a review. You can also visit Eddyalexander.com to learn more about our tourism marketing and destination management services and read some of our recent case studies. Finally, if you'd like to suggest future guests or podcast discussion topics, or to sign up, to get an email alert, when we drop new episodes, please do so at eddyalexander.com/THATT