

**Kirt Jacobs:** Welcome to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This is an archived edition when our program was called Leadership Landscape TV.

(music)

**Kirt Jacobs:** Welcome to another installment of Leadership Landscape where we go inside the minds of local community leaders and sometimes legends and allow them a chance to offer some keen insights into how they see themselves but most importantly just what makes them tick. I'm host Kirt Jacobs of Leadership Landscape where previous guests have included former mayors, state politicians, former Miss Americas, sports legends, and heads of major business concerns, community activists and developers. Today our guest is Tyler N Allen better known as Tyler Allen. He is the president of USA Image Technologies Incorporated and co-founder of 8664.org Tyler's a native Louisvillian. His history is rich and eclectic to say the least. Listen to this he attended Atherton High School along with yours truly and he graduated in 1990 from Northwestern University with an honors thesis on the ethical and worship life of immigrant Muslims with a B.A. in compared religion. Well that's a mouthful. In 1990 he was a member of the charter core of Teach for America a national teacher corps founded that same year to recruit recent grads to devote two years to teaching in under resourced school districts. Then long before Hurricane Katrina from 1990-1992 he taught the fourth grade in the French Quarter of New Orleans or Noleans they like to say. In 1992 he returned to Louisville and joined the Paragon Group And in 1994 he once again left Louisville in turn for the low income housing tax credit specialist in St Louis, Missouri. He returned to Louisville in the summer of '94. In the fall of that same year Tyler co-founded USA Image Technologies Incorporated. Now you may not be familiar with the company but you may be familiar with some of the products he's produced.

He's a national supplier of super large format printing including billboards, bus wraps, trade show graphics, theatrical set back-

drops, etc. Some of their notable works have included the now very recognizable large murals that you see around town. One is of Diane Sawyer, there is one of Muhammad Ali where the Arena site will be going, subsequently Pee Wee Reece. I think there's a Colonel Sanders. In 2000 he was named to the Louisville Business First's 40 under 40 class. In 2001 USA Image Technologies was named as a Louisville Business First Fast 50 company. He's a member of the 2003 Leadership Louisville class. He is the local chapter American Red Cross board of directors chair for 2005-2007. On the foundation board of directors of the Healing Place, which is for homeless substance abuse shelter. He's on the Louisville board of directors for the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary board of trustees excuse me. He's the chair of the mayor's public art committee.

He's the Kentucky Center for African-American history board of directors as well. But it was in the November of 2005 Tyler Allen and J.C. Stites, founder and CEO of Also demo LLC created a grassroots web page and movement now known as 8664.org. 8664.org's mission is to advocate for the revitalization of Louisville through the removal of Interstate 64 along the riverfront and the adoption of a transportation plan that will provide long term benefits to the region's citizens, neighborhoods, environment, and economy. Now before we go any further Leadership Landscape does not endorse, promote, or offer a vehicle for this movement. Let me be very clear. Simply this movement at its core is a prime example of grassroots leadership and our discussion will focus with Tyler to explore leadership on those terms and merits only. I make that perfectly clear. Tyler is married to Chenoweth Stites Allen. She's a graduate of Williams College and has three children daughter Harcourt, don't know if I said that correctly, Elijah and son Stites all under the age of ten. Needless to say you co-founded a company you start a grassroots movement and you have three children under the age of ten. You're a busy guy.

**Tyler Allen:** Although on most of those I have a tremendous amount of help and on some of those I don't provide much help at all including raising the kids sometimes.

**Kirt Jacobs:** What drives you to do all this Tyler? I mean they're residents and then there are citizens. I consider you a citizen.

**Tyler Allen:** I think I was always raised with the notion to whom much is given much is expected. And I feel like I have been given a lot and given a lot of advantages. I know I was raised in a great family. I've got great sisters and parents. Got a great foundation and so therefore I think it's incumbent upon me to do something for the broader community. I believe that's where I would look at it.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Whom do you credit most influential in your life? Could be more than one person.

**Tyler Allen:** Well obviously with regard to what I just described that would be that would be my parents. My mother, Mandy? Allen, and my father, Nolan Allen. Nolan is a business person here.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Cotton & Allen

**Tyler Allen:** Cotton & Allen. He was a venture capital investor for many many years. I think had's a great hand. Often told by people who work with him had a tremendous hand in a lot of exciting parts of growth in this community. But but once again between the two of them their example for me and what they taught me was that there is a broader world outside oneself and one's family that includes not only... I went and I went into business quite frankly. That was the example that I had from my father and being around lots of different businesses as an investor. And basically knowing that was job creation and people having work and therefore being able pay for a life. And and and so basically that sort of my idealism coming out of college was exactly that. I assumed that I would want to go into business because you create a company that would be creating jobs and so basically USA Image Technology we've been in business for 12 years about 30 employee company. Bluegrass Industrial Park. I feel like we my business partner George Guttermuth and I have created....

**Kirt Jacobs:** I'm just curious on a little tangent here. Who thought up those murals? I think it's a beautiful idea. Is that something that has

been tried in other cities and it was brought here? Was that something that was thought of in the boardroom so to speak.

**Tyler Allen:** You know the idea of wall murals themselves are all over usually used for advertising elsewhere. But in this town a group of folks that I believe in the begin actually Steve Higdon was one of the folks and then a committee that we put together. Folks like Mike Shehee and Stan Curtis,

**Kirt Jacobs:** I know Stan. We've had him on the show.

**Tyler Allen:** Mike Shehee, Stan Curtis and several others Tom Hoblob, Rich McCarty. I don't know if you know Rich and Mike Gilligan. Basically a small group of folks said hey what if we were to put up on the size of these buildings some way to highlight Louisvillians. Folks who may have left here as lots of them have to go do great things elsewhere. Just to kind of highlight people we should be proud of. And so we started that with Ali almost five five or six years. Ali's been up a long time.

**Kirt Jacobs:** It was the first one.

**Tyler Allen:** Yeah exactly.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Any more that you want to share with us?

**Tyler Allen:** Well

**Kirt Jacobs:** In the future?

**Tyler Allen:** Well you know I think we've got 11 of them up. We've got 11 of them up.

**Kirt Jacobs:** That many of them now.

**Tyler Allen:** Yeah yeah

**Kirt Jacobs:** Those are the top of of mine ones that I'd mentioned in the bio.

**Tyler Allen:** Yeah exactly. Well you know Diane Sawyer was featured on Good Morning America as you know. There's been some magazine coverage. Industry amazing coverage around the country.

**Kirt Jacobs:** What do you consider to be the most defining moment of your life? It can be personal or professional.

**Tyler Allen:** Most defining moment of my life. That's an excellent question. I that because I don't know if there is a defining moment.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Well you're young and may not have happened yet.

**Tyler Allen:** Exactly. There's not been a lot of crises. Everything's pretty much come in order and it seems like time to be.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Like your saying to much is giving. Which certainly you have acted on it.

**Tyler Allen:** Exactly exactly. You know you come out of high school. You go to college. Come out of college get your first job. I was fortunate enough coming out of college to be part of the Charter Corps of Teach for America which is still going strong. Woman named Wendy Cobb from Princeton and a senior thesis at Princeton came up the idea. Or came up with the idea for Teach for America to get people coming as a little tricky to say someone who participated but the concept was to get the best the brightest coming out of college and try to get them to give two years of their life to get back in the classroom as a teacher in places where they have trouble recruiting teachers. I got a lucky placement New Orleans had a great time. And actually was just back down there last week with the Red Cross.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Really. Different world down there now isn't it.

**Tyler Allen:** Well is it. I mean parts of that that are the main tourist parts are still very much the same. If you drive down the street you see something happen but...

**Kirt Jacobs:** Do you bring any of your leadership instincts that maybe you do at USA Image or even 8664 to what you do for the Red Cross down there. Anything you have implemented?

**Tyler Allen:** Well not..

**Kirt Jacobs:** Is it more of a volunteer

**Tyler Allen:** Well it's not from a business basis it's more from a governance basis. Because in the in a well run a nonprofit like the Red Cross where we have a tremendous CEO Brian Coyle. I don't know if Brian has been on this show or not.

**Kirt Jacobs:** No no but I'll put him on the list.

**Tyler Allen:** He is indeed a very sharp dude a long background United Way but comes at this job very much as a as a tenacious diligent executive manager. So we have that in an organization the scale the Red Cross

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK.

**Tyler Allen:** The one of the big issues today with nonprofits is just making sure that volunteer board leaders understand that there is a lot resting in their hands as involves the governance of these organizations. You know. Not the micromanaging of how things happen day-to-day. But obviously the hiring of the CEO and the kind of long term focus on the mission and that still takes a whole lot of. diligent focusing. And I think is something that more and more today I think we kind of need to get sometimes it feels like in the nonprofit world. We need to because we're so much as laid it so much as put on volunteers to raise money and all of the sorts of things it's really important we keep in mind our responsibility for governance. So that really does come out of business. You know and that's the overall reason why you're doing things. So I bring that to it but don't try to necessarily put business management touch in it.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Got you. If there is one Tyler or do you have any professional regrets at this point in your life? Can be more than one. I'll even go so far as it can be personal or professional you know. Maybe looking back you something you might ..a fork in the road you could go left to but you went right.

**Tyler Allen:** Well once again a lot of those lot of the forks I might have missed. Yeah they weren't..

**Kirt Jacobs:** They weren't there.

**Tyler Allen:** Uh if it was a professional regret I wish that little bit going into business as young as I did..

**Kirt Jacobs:** How young were you when you started?

**Tyler Allen:** 25 or 26. that I didn't have... I knew a lot of people who were in business but didn't have a lot of mentoring specifically in the industry that I went into. And out of and therefore in general didn't have a whole lot of mentoring with regard to the specifics of business. And so that allowed me sort of get into sort of a channel of the way I like to do things and perhaps it would have been better if I had had a little a little background out of which then to jump in and say well this is how to rather do it than the way it was done before.

**Kirt Jacobs:** I'm just curious does you because you have a very unique degree. Does your degree in religion does it do you ever pull from that from any of your decision making? I'm just curious. Does it ever impact or is it...

**Tyler Allen:** Well certainly not from an issue of the issue of ethics and other things that is not derived from my study of the various religions and that may be more of my own personal upbringing, my own personal community which includes a religious community. So with regard to that sort of stuff influencing my business I do feel fairly strongly grounded in that. But the study of religion mostly I think in fact it impacts me on the each day saying that we absolutely have to make sure that we as individuals and as community

are open to other people and other people's expression. In that case religion the deepest expression of of a pretty deep expression of who they are. But that is basically instructive about how we need to be open to everything else about other people you know being understanding, being engaged, to being accepting you know those are well beyond tolerance.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Right

**Tyler Allen:** they are. And so that actually does in fact deeply define kind of the way I look at the world.

**Kirt Jacobs:** On the flip side of the regret regret question what is your biggest professional triumph? If you can name one? Can be personal too.

**Tyler Allen:** Well. In the personal I guess each day I am reminded of how tremendously lucky I am to be married. Chenoweth and you know that's if you know me and date it's in enormously impactful and helping me learn about the world and you know to do different things. And obviously that brought with it my my cool kids and that gets more exciting every day. On the professional side you know there are lots of places you know early on when you start a company that's a whole lot of fun. You know it's giddy each day something new. There is a whole bunch of it's kind of fun in business like that. There's a whole bunch of buck stops here kind of stuff. Which..

**Kirt Jacobs:** Which you like or..

**Tyler Allen:** Which I did well I do. I actually like that you know it's. There's a whole lot of to use the phrase sometimes when people Oh I've had an executive decision. You're going not if you don't have to live the consequences you didn't make an executive decision. So and so therefore that's exciting although sometimes the decisions are so daunting that you don't really want to make them. And therefore..

**Kirt Jacobs:** ..or share the responsibility and the accountability with

someone you know.

**Tyler Allen:** Yeah you know exactly know I'm a have and that's part of happy with that's why sometimes you drag your feet about and want to make a decision because you know you are going to feel the consequence.

**Kirt Jacobs:** What do you find exciting about all this? I mean I started this grassroots organization. You started your own company. You've done a lot of unique things for a young man.

**Tyler Allen:** What I... Most of my experiences is recently you know I'm. When you start a wall for my business life a little better. And luckily we've got a great crew out there who handles things very well. I it every day what I do now with regard to a 8664 It's a it's just a whole lot of fun because you meet different people. You hear while I'm sort of telling about a particular vision but it's still you're engaged. So there's a whole lot of me saying this is something. But when you get past that part of saying then you do actually get a conversation going and you hear from different people. I am different places all the time. I mean every single day for almost the past two years I've been a different part of this region. You know whether it be you know in the middle of downtown on the street corners.

**Kirt Jacobs:** I'm just curious how many groups and or individuals you think you've spoken to on that subject?

**Tyler Allen:** You know I used to quote a statistic in the first six months because that was what was kind of most fun for me because one day I went to my office almost two years ago and since I'm in the printing business. I had my guys download a bunch of satellite and aerial photography of the city.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Right

**Tyler Allen:** Now I rolled them up and it's got on the telephone to start calling people because. I know you're in business and you're you have some connections that way. Started calling business

people, civic leaders. You know I tried to make it as wide as far far across the community and Clark and Floyd counties Jefferson County and even elsewhere. And so basically during the first six months before there was any kind of press about this whatsoever. In groups of one two or three I feel like I spoke to maybe 300 people that were just just that way like that's like the pre-campaign and then all of a sudden because of that it started to get a little bit of press coverage. And then I have no earthly clue.

**Kirt Jacobs:** You know I'm just curious if you're willing to share what was 8664 was it an epiphany? Was it a moment? Was it a cup of coffee in a conversation with an individual? curious how the genesis or the seed of that idea came about.

**Tyler Allen:** Well the good news is the good news it's not an idea I came up with. I guess that's instructive quite frankly with regard to a leadership model or otherwise. And it is an idea that I was told about. Matter of fact remember vividly. I don't remember what year it was but maybe '89 or '99 Doug Cobb -- speaking of leaders.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Try to get him on the show too.

**Tyler Allen:** Very significant leader in the community. You know founded one of our great you know West Coast kind of companies and you know and has had a good spin off of a lot of great staff members there. I remember visiting Doug before I moved back to Louisville and just being amazed by his his work out there. Well you know founded GLI and and then you know worked with a group of community folks to put GLI together. He he suggested in the late '90s that maybe a solution to our transportation problems was reclaiming our city by tearing down the waterfront expressway. He took the glide trip, these trips that each year the chamber takes. He took us all to Portland, Oregon to see a city that in 1974 had ripped down a highway on their waterfront next to the Pearl district. But here's what I remember about that is that I guess it was during the merger conversations a lot of conversations and I remember I remember the conversation on the airplane about all that stuff but he did want to see a city that was progressive and forward looking and trying to deal with the transportation issues.

And I remember sitting with him on that plane talking with him and when he's telling me about the idea of me twenty nine-years-old which i'm kind of ashamed of quite frankly saying well you know geez Doug I mean my golly it's awfully expensive and you know we've already built the park underneath the expressway. You know you know it's no big deal you know why don't we just sure there's other things we can do. Literally me saying that since you know why would we do that? You know and I'm sure that I'm still a shame by this and to me it is kind of reflective of certain things about the community in which I live. And it was based on this so I guess this fundamental presupposition sometimes is a both a and that all things remain the same always you know. And so I did that at 29. And the epiphany came standing in David Karum's office. The fall of 2003 and looking up at the mall and seeing the original line drawings of the the expansion of the highway downtown in there fairly preliminary stages. I'm like what in the world is was that? What are all those lines across the waterfront park? That's the proposed expansion of the highway. That's when I had the epiphany. I thought back to what I had poo-pooed and then realized what was coming and realized right then and there all things cannot remain the same always. And nor should they you know and because if they don't change to the positive. They can change to the negative. And I was seeing vividly in front of me what I consider to this day the proposal that. So that was sort of the Epiphany there. It's got a history. If it is not history it was my idea but it just clicked me into gear about the way things are I want them..

**Kirt Jacobs:** Appreciate you sharing that. I've always been intrigued and interested by you know. You know that in that moment where that came from which gave you the passion and then when it arrived to create a grassroots organization.

**Tyler Allen:** What's been exciting about this also is the degree to which wasn't my idea wasn't my idea. The degree to which other people. I mean particularly obviously J.C. Stites another business person and great another great he started a company and he lived in Portland, Oregon this great West Coast company they do. Web demonstrations got great clients like Google and and Amazon and Microsoft. And he basically also got fired up about this idea and

possess it as his as have lots of other people in it realizing that matter where the idea came from it is an idea that must be talked about.

**Kirt Jacobs:** OK

**Tyler Allen:** And voiced and a conversation to be had and so that's also been a whole lot of fun. Seeing when people you know basically just own it on it for themselves because they realize perhaps in the end that the only way we can really generate the conversation is when everybody assumes it's theirs to talk about.

**Kirt Jacobs:** This show is called Leadership Landscape. Can you define leadership in one word in the great English lexicon? Can be more than one word.

**Tyler Allen:** How about leadership?

**Kirt Jacobs:** That's fine.

**Tyler Allen:** Leadership would be leadership. I can't define I can't find anything in one word.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Maybe a statement.

**Tyler Allen:** Responsibility responsibility. Now I have to explain that.

**Kirt Jacobs:** You knew what I was going..

**Tyler Allen:** That's good. I like to elaborate. Actually is kind of funny. Yes sometimes I laugh about management consultants and all that kind of stuff. And I remember a phrasing for a management style a few years ago which was you know sort of getting people to go if it's going to be it's up to me. And if it's going to be it's up to me and I fundamentally believe that. That goes back that discussion about you know responsibility in business or otherwise the buck stops here. The the you know that sort of pet peeve about the executive decisions you don't have to deal with the consequences. You know it's not really. And so basically responsibility.

Understanding that if you see something that needs to be talked about dealt with the presumption usually cannot be made that someone else is going to get it done. Now when you work with somebody and somebody sort of assigned to do something then you let them have some sort of trouble with that but basically it is the feeling that if it is going to be done. You better be there in line to sign up to help get it done. I think and I would say that.

**Kirt Jacobs:** All right here's another one for you if you can change one thing be it in your own life or in general you know what would it be?

**Tyler Allen:** Oh man golly.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Should be Jeopardy music coming

**Tyler Allen:** I know that I might get a little..

**Kirt Jacobs:** Can be personal, professional, community. Can be global. You can interpret any way you want Tyler

**Tyler Allen:** Well I mean I spend a great deal of time being fairly self critical self-absorbed you know and so therefore the natural answer that question would be something that I might attempt to change myself but that might get a little personal so.

**Kirt Jacobs:** That's OK, It's up to you. It's up to you.

**Tyler Allen:** I think I would change about myself that they were now is it now since I'm delaying on that is beginning to say like well geez I don't think there's anything I should have to change about myself. And I guess there's a great deal of introspection so often-times I think there's a lot that I would like to change about myself. And so sometimes I wish I were a little more...

**Kirt Jacobs:** I think it's been the most honest answer we've ever had.

**Tyler Allen:** So therefore the answer might be sometimes I wish

that I was a little more comfortable and not quite so...

**Kirt Jacobs:** Self critical?

**Tyler Allen:** Questioning. Questioning. You know kind of you know I guess you. Sometimes you wouldn't think I was self-critical given the amount of talking etc. that I do. However maybe maybe that would be one of those things that I would I would feel a little more comfortable.

**Kirt Jacobs:** Alright we'll throw you a soft one you be able to throw yourself.

**Tyler Allen:** Thank you a nice little follow-up.

**Kirt Jacobs:** If you were granted two weeks today. It's just say the board of USA Image or what have you I guess you are the head cheese there but two weeks today mini-vacation from life. You put the Blackberry away. No email. No access to T.V., computer one of the could even say no access to your family can go anywhere you want two weeks. What would you do with those two weeks? Can be anything you want.

**Tyler Allen:** Maybe that's what I should change about myself because I typically in a position to do that to do something like that because being a business person and controlling my own destiny to a certain extent to the degree to which I can feel I can get away. Therefore the problem is 8664 happens to be that almost. I have all my other lined up

**Kirt Jacobs:** Fair enough

**Tyler Allen:** all my other lot of responsibilities in life and you know. My civic commitment through the various places which I feel deeply grateful to be to be part of. My business life. My whole life yet I've inserted in there. This 8664 thing that basically fills whatever gap that there is and it usually is the first thing I think about when I wake up. So therefore if you were to tell me tomorrow it would look very little different than yesterday morning. When I

said what do I do to advance the conversation that I'm quite confident and I would be giddy about doing that it wouldn't be a vacation or anything like that because that's that for a long while they come I suspect that will be the focus.

**Kirt Jacobs:** I like that. You know it's an honest answer. You know we ask this question to all our guests young or old. You're young obviously. When the great day comes Tyler how do you want to be remembered? You know God forbid you walk away or something terrible happens. How would you like to be remembered? The best could be yet to come. Still got a lot of life to live.

**Tyler Allen:** Well I hope I hope there's a lot of hope there's a lot still to come. I think it's probably the same way like I would like to be thought of that each time is that you know that I diligently working towards something for the community. Diligently working for something for the community and so I would hope. That that would be an appraisal that I had had done that constructively in my life and then I suspect though I suspect though since that's really my fixation at 38. I suspect there are a lot of things that by the time I come to that point presuming I don't walk out in the streets right here that I suspect there's a lot of much deeper things with regard to my my family that that in the end all probably want to get with regard to my relationships and the very significant personal relationships and. Probably more readily want to be remembered and I said how I participated as a person there

**Kirt Jacobs:** Good answer. Tyler it was quite a pleasure having you on Leadership Landscape.

**Tyler Allen:** Thanks for having me I appreciate it.

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**Kirt Jacobs:** Thank you for listening to MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs. This episode was archival audio from when we were known as Leadership Landscape TV. If you have any feedback, general comments, or a recommendation for a suitable guest feel free to

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