

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 Leadership Landscape where we go inside the minds of local community leaders and now legends allow them a chance to offer some keen insights into how they see themselves and most importantly explore just what makes them tick. I'm Kirt Jacobs host of Leadership Landscape where previous interviews have included former mayors, state politicians, nationally renowned sports writers, heads of major business concerns, community activists, and developers. Today our guest is Rowan Claypool. He is the founder of Bulldogs in the Bluegrass and Teach Kentucky. Rowan is a late bloomer as a leader in Louisville. He completed his undergraduate degree at Yale University in 1980 earning a graduate degree as a Rotary International Graduate Fellow in New Zealand. He started a real estate career in Houston, Texas. Followed by work in Mississippi and North Carolina before moving back to Louisville, his childhood home, in 1987. He then settled into a career working on the rejuvenation of our waterfront including the Presbyterian headquarters and the renovation of what is now called the Humana waterside building. Ultimately he migrated into commercial real estate brokerage before creating what has become a passionately engaged civic career. Again he is the founder of two innovative programs that address what is often called, maybe overly used at times, the brain drain. But is really better viewed as a universal problem of all heartland communities, which simply has to retain and attract the types of well educated, knowledge workers everyone believes will propel the economy in the future. Now the two programs in detail are Bulldogs in the Bluegrass, often referred to as BITB, a summer internship program for Yale students. Sponsored by Yale alumni of course it is introduced 262 students from 43 states and 11 foreign countries to the benefits of life in Louisville through a 10-week summer internship.

When he became president of his local Yale club a few years ago, Rowan Claypool noticed something missing -- young people. We didn't have a single member who graduated from Yale after 1985 he commented. Claypool worried that his hometown of Louisville would fall prey to brain drain as the city's 20-something population continued to drop. Quote "Our brightest high school graduates who are going to national universities and simply not coming back to Louisville" he said." We were losing our most ambitious young people."

This observation echoed an emerging civic awareness as well. Therefore Claypool and his fellow Yale club members created Bulldogs in the Bluegrass, an innovative internship program designed to lure, excuse me, lure young Yalies to Louisville and keep them there. Now the participants have worked for a total of 120 non-profit agencies and for profit entities in those eight years. Of the 190 Bulldogs who have graduated, 22 including three from this summer have settled in Louisville after graduation. However none of them. None of them had previous Kentucky ties or reasons to be here beyond their conviction born of their summer experience that this is a great place to seek their own opportunities. But Claypool is not resting on his laurels.

His newest program Teach Kentucky brings Ivy Leaguers to Louisville schools a multi-institutional program to attract well qualified new teachers to teach in our local public schools. Teach Kentucky, sponsored by a consortium of alumni associations, attracts recent college graduates to teach in local public schools. In its initial five years, Teach Kentucky has brought 32 teachers from over 20 highly selective national colleges and universities. Virtually all of them serve in middle schools. The majority teaching and hard to feel math and science positions. This concentration means that Teach Kentucky teachers instruct roughly 15 percent of Jefferson County Public School's middle school population 11 Title One schools. It is also of note that Teach Kentucky has an 86% retention rate. Amazing. Significantly better than the national average. Both programs are excellent examples of what Rowan Claypool called social entrepreneurship or so he says.

So Rowan, why don't we start there. What is a social entrepreneur and how does it differ between the types of guests we typically get here on the show? Usually leaders in business or politics and frankly what drives the civic engagement as you call it? And that's our first question what drives you to do all of this?

Rowan Claypool: Well great. I really appreciate the opportunity to be on the show today and talk a little bit about what I do think is a different take on the playing field if you will for leadership. And I never intended or set out to be a social entrepreneur. And I'm not really sure there's even a definition of it in the current Webster dictionary but what I sense it is is taking the same talents, energy, and focus that we apply for entrepreneurship in the business round and applying that to issues in our social fabric. In the society, in our civic world and see if we can't get improvements in that area. And I would distinguish it from what are typical community service or service delivery type activities which fundamentally are delivering things to people in need sort of the same way. What a social entrepreneur attempts to do is step out of that. Revision it. Look at it in a different way and see if we can create some models. Though that they might not be fully self-sustaining they take for less energy to produce their results. and in kind of a cliché might be you know fishing for someone and teaching them to fish. The fishing for someone is sort of the traditional method in which services are delivered and they're all outgoing so any earlier than you know year in year out we see resources going out. The social entrepreneurship is really trying to step back and say you know how can we take these things and really teach people in a way so that that loop can be closed. I mean of course it doesn't generate an economic profit. But it uses resources I think in a more prudent way when there are limited resources.

Kirt Jacobs: Whom do you credit most influential in your life? What has inspired this social entrepreneur within?

Rowan Claypool: Well I think Hillary Clinton is right it takes a whole village to raise an individual. So you know there have been you know hundreds and hundreds of folks that have had influence but I would like to focus on a couple just rattle off a few. Well certainly my parents. You know that's the basics. My father was a very renowned

theologian. Great minister, a wonderful preacher. And so I think I gained a sense that the prophetic that you know we are called in life to try to do something that actually changes the world. So I think that calling was important. For my mother, I get the foster family side of sort of tenaciousness and willfulness to make sure that you know things are done the right way. Mother taught me always to try to figure out what the right thing to do is in a situation and then have the courage to do it. Had a great opportunity to work for David Jones Sr. Worked in his real estate firm on the redevelopment of the waterfront

Kirt Jacobs: Main Street Realty?

Rowan Claypool: Yes Main Street Realty. It was there at the very beginning when the Presbyterians and had just agreed to come to town.

Kirt Jacobs: Before the Internet..

Rowan Claypool: That's right long before the Internet. Al Gore hadn't even thought of it.

Kirt Jacobs: yeah exactly.

Rowan Claypool: But for Mr Jones I was able to you know see how you could have a vision in a clear and a bullishness that could propel things. I mean I think that's one of his great gifts. The other thing I learned from him in his whole career. If you would imagine a basketball court he would step in at a place where everyone would say oh that's out of bounds. And then when they looked more carefully at the line, in fact the line had moved. I think that his career was a great way and that was, you know through what I've done I've stepped out of bounds many times. I always felt like the line was in a different place than others did. His son David Jones Jr is my closest friend and I have learned from a peer-to-peer relationship a tremendous amount from him and so he's been a great colleague as I've struggled along in this entrepreneur

Kirt Jacobs: He has a bright future ahead of him as well.

Rowan Claypool: Right. Exactly. His investment in, through Chrysalis Ventures into for-profit ventures has also been yet another millstone that I grind my ideas. The one I want to focus on is...

Kirt Jacobs: There is more?

Rowan Claypool: ..for the longest is the unexpected. You know you ask what are some of the things that motivate me. The unexpected is one and I had the, I don't know if it's opportunity or challenge which is the right word, to work under a gentleman when I was in young in my real estate career. His name was Earl Martin. We did not have a fast friendship. And he and I temperamentally were very different. He required of me that I really do the hard work. I was very young. I was 24. I don't want to do it. Quite frankly I'd wanted to use my charm and other things to get through. Earl forced me over and over again to think through issues at a deeper level. To plan more extensively. To articulate a position. To think about what the other opposition might be. What the other points that other people would have incorporated into my thinking. I found it difficult and tedious. Ultimately I wound up running a project in the mountains of North Carolina and Earl and I were given the task of turning that project around. He was in Mississippi. I was in North Carolina. And we could only talk by phone and fax and that you know.

Kirt Jacobs: Yes. Back before the internet again. Seem to keep cropping up.

Rowan Claypool: So here are two people that really didn't have a strong friendship. And yet we found a way to work together successfully. And I learned so much from Earl. His values. His approach. Again feeling it was very tedious it was going through that education. Interesting, he taught me how to do really good staff work. He taught me how to plan. and I used all of those skills. Ten years later I felt like I really needed to get in touch with Earl. He had long since last left the company. He was in Cleveland, Ohio where I've started another Bulldog program, Bulldogs on the Cuyahoga. So I called him up out of the blue and said Earl this is

Rowan Claypool and I want to thank you for what you taught me. And we went you know I described how I had used all the lessons that he had ingrained in me to build these things and it was so much fun. Because then immediately he goes to the internet. He sees what I've done. His fingerprints are all over it. You know every piece of it is been influenced by that education that I received at his hand. And so we've now got a great relationship going. So I offer that up as you know, we talk about mentorship but it often gets confused with friendship.

Kirt Jacobs: The common answer is parents. We found on the show

Rowan Claypool: Right.

Kirt Jacobs: Most Influential So it's pretty eclectic.

Rowan Claypool: It is but it's also a mentor for the people that teach you and that is often an uncomfortable, unpleasant experience. In fact the harsher the teacher, often the better the education.

Kirt Jacobs: What was the most defining moment of your life Rowan? If you could name just one. You're allowed more than one.

Rowan Claypool: I'm going to talk about two.

Kirt Jacobs: I figured. I couldn't get one for the entrance, you're most influential in life.

Rowan Claypool: I want to talk about let's talk first in the professional realm.

Kirt Jacobs: Sure

Rowan Claypool: I think you're right to describe me as a late bloomer. It took me a while to me till nearly 40 to gather the courage to break out on my own. And the break to go away from the mothership and begin an independent commercial brokerage prac-

tice with the Remax Company. Where you are you know you're not tethered you are up to your own wits to develop all your own revenue. You have to pay rent whether you earn any money or not. That was a huge step for me and it was. It was that moment when I stepped out and said you know I actually have the skills and ability to be on my own and that I can make this. So professionally I would say that was part of the single most profound step.

Kirt Jacobs: Professionally. Right.

Rowan Claypool: Sort of subsequent to that was the choice to grab the brass ring of Bulldogs. And there's a, there's a, there a Thursday night you know I was sitting on my couch and I could see literally all the pieces to the Bulldogs program. The mentoring piece. The arrangement of jobs. The recruitment of the students. The connection with the local community. The using a city like Louisville which had such an open atmosphere to get civic leaders to talk to these students about you know this is what it is to be an engaged citizen. This is what it is to be a part of a community you know this is how you plant your energy to be successful. And that Thursday evening the realization was no one else could execute this plan but me. There was no other option. It was mine. It was my idea, was my focus. I had the resources. Though they weren't really tangible resources. They were just the ability to call others.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Rowan Claypool: And so I sat on that Thursday night and said You know I can let this pass and one more good idea would go over the dam and down the river. Or I can take the risk. And it was that Thursday night and I said I will do this.

Kirt Jacobs: So clear it up for me. You are sitting there all alone...

Rowan Claypool: I'm sitting there all alone..

Rowan Claypool: And this epiphany...

Rowan Claypool: It's an epiphany. it's it is absolutely an epiphany.

And it was the moment when I made the commitment to myself. There was no one else in the room. The commitment to myself that I would undertake this and I would take the risk. Whether succeeds or fails and so you know that has been the great jumping off point. You know after that you know then everything else became obvious. You just do the next.

Kirt Jacobs: Right, right

Rowan Claypool: But that was a very significant one.

Kirt Jacobs: Well we are going to go from ephiphany to...

Rowan Claypool: Can I, can I interject?

Kirt Jacobs: Absolutely. Somehow I knew Rowan that we wouldn't be moving along just yet..

Rowan Claypool: I just want to add on a personal note...

Kirt Jacobs: Sure

Rowan Claypool: ...that my divorce was probably the most profound personal experience. And that was...

Kirt Jacobs: I appreciate you sharing that.

Rowan Claypool: ... the training ground literally for adulthood. That was when I had to go back at middle age with a very significant failure and retool. And I encourage people who hear the show and are going through that experience that this is a tremendous opportunity in mid- life to reorganize your life. And I believe at the end of the day outside of the conceiving of my son that I am the things that I will be remembered for we're all after my divorce. And so there's great reason to be optimistic in that tragedy...

Kirt Jacobs: One door closes, another opens.

Rowan Claypool: That's right and you have to do some things that are hard to do. You have to do some work on oneself. You have to

ask some very tough questions.

Kirt Jacobs: Right.

Rowan Claypool: But if you do it. It's a point of tremendous growth and really becomes a springboard for a much better and much richer life.

Kirt Jacobs: We really appreciate you sharing that because you know you don't have to do that. That's a form of leadership as well. Now from ephiphany..

Rowan Claypool: OK

Kirt Jacobs: ... to personal...

Rowan Claypool: OK

Kirt Jacobs: ..to regret. If there is one what is your biggest professional regret? In other words is there something you would have done differently.

Rowan Claypool: You know...

Kirt Jacobs: ... kind of armchair quarterback in your life? ...football we're going to have those guys..

Rowan Claypool: Sure. Let's go back to epiphany. There were several other junctures earlier in my life where I didn't grab the brass ring. And whether those would have worked I don't know. But that Thursday night was shaped in large part because I had not taken that risk before. So that was you know it's hard to know. But a regret was that earlier in my life I might have taken more professional risks or more personal risk. The other would be that I think I made a mistake by not getting an advanced degree. And commercial real estate brokerage was a sort of an interesting prism for that. You know I had to come into the room and be smarter than the lawyer, Be smarter than the architects. Smarter than the contractor. Know what both sides needed in the economics of the deal and I had

to figure all that out. And yet I was the person that wasn't getting paid. Unless everyone else was happy. And I had to earn that respect in every single transaction. So I confused when I was young I actually confused an MBA with business. And it's not. It's learning skills. Developing an understanding of how people make decisions team leadership and others.

Kirt Jacobs: So do you believe that people have the opportunity to get an MBA, excuse me, an MBA they should?

Rowan Claypool: That or an advanced degree. I mean I don't have all the law school or an MBA degree probably would have been the two that would have suited me well. I think that would have got me a lot of credibility in the room. And you know where as I've had to earn that credibility over and over again.

Kirt Jacobs: Do you think they have the relevance that they once had? MBAs and advanced degrees as are more common now? Not to get off on a tangent..

Rowan Claypool: No, no, no. I think it's it's a good question. Would I have learned much from them? I would have learned not as much as they are credited right now being worth.

Kirt Jacobs: I got you. So all right now what is your biggest professional triumph? I'm not going to say the epiphany but I'm going to leave this to you. On the flipside of regret.

Rowan Claypool: On the flipside a regret is absolutely the 54r young people that we've brought to town through Bulldogs and Teach Kentucky. You know I talk about it in terms of changing the course of the river. None of these people would be here right now out of that would have come otherwise

Kirt Jacobs: You are changing lives.

Rowan Claypool: That's right and it's its but it's changing the course of that river. It's trying to take that energy and move it in a different different direction and in a direction that it doesn't nat-

usually want to go. Sort of the interesting thing about the summer experience for the Bulldogs is they come down and they have what just is a perfect summer. They are in great jobs. Meaningful jobs. It's part of our expectation. They're connected with adult mentors. They develop their first true peer-to-peer relationships with another adult the kind of help. Not a parent. Not a parent's friend but someone volunteering to take an interest in them. They're connected to the community. They have a great peer experience because they all live together and they all think well you know this is exactly what summer ought to be.

Kirt Jacobs: Right

Rowan Claypool: and the sweat and blood that it takes to create that environment so that it's so effortless. And so I think the you know creating the programs that systematically and annually can produce a result. You know they're not ad hoc activities. They actually are the ones that are replicated year in year out.

Kirt Jacobs: And I believe it's been replicated in another city recently.

Rowan Claypool: Well it's actually three others.

Kirt Jacobs: Wow, you want to name them?

Rowan Claypool: I'd be happy to. I work part-time for Yale University. Took them a little while to get on the, we started the Bulldogs program without their knowledge and without their input. We just did it and then informed them. They were quite surprised that you know Louisville, Kentucky could pull this off. But I now work part-time for Yale replicating the program. We've done it four years successfully in Cleveland. Started just Bulldogs on the Cuyahoga and then it's expanded to a multi-institutional model. There are actually six alumni groups that run what's now called Summer on the Cuyahoga. I have done it two years in San Francisco and one year in Denver.

Kirt Jacobs: If you can just franchise it.

Rowan Claypool: Well I'm working with Minneapolis and Houston It's a lot of hard work. It's a lot of hard work.

Kirt Jacobs: I can only imagine but it's rewarding.

Rowan Claypool: Absolutely

Kirt Jacobs: Back to the social entrepreneurship.

Rowan Claypool: No, no. it's absolutely. If can add one more quickly.

Kirt Jacobs: Go ahead

Rowan Claypool: In terms of external recognition..

Kirt Jacobs: Imagine that.

Rowan Claypool: That's right why stop now.. In terms of external recognition, I was tremendously honored to receive what's called Yale medal last fall. And this is the recognition of the university of my work.

Kirt Jacobs: It's the Nobel Peace Prize of Yale if you will.

Rowan Claypool: Yes it is. It is the highest honor and they give to those that have given service to the university. I mean that's different than an honorary degree where they're recognizing someone's professional contribution, vocational contribution. This is the kind of inside the club if you will and so these are the people that have really given extraordinary service back to university.

Kirt Jacobs: What do you find exciting about all this? You kind of touched upon it but. do you want to elaborate on it a little bit?

Rowan Claypool: Well absolutely. Every morning I am energized. Thrilled to get up and try to see how I can make these experiments work better. And you know the ultimate result is again changing

the course of the river for a young person and they're seeing their opportunity in this community. And you know I can't explain it. I experience it every morning. No matter what happened the night before and how frustrated I become. The resistance I had encountered I get up thinking you know I can do this or I can do this.

Kirt Jacobs: So do you learn something new every time you do the summer internship. something different?

Rowan Claypool: Yes.

Kirt Jacobs: Is every class different?

Rowan Claypool: Every class is different.

Kirt Jacobs: Different dynamic, a different vibe?

Rowan Claypool: We talk about this all the time. It's a human endeavor.

Kirt Jacobs: Right.

Rowan Claypool: And therefore it is dynamic and imperfect.

Kirt Jacobs: And could work.

Rowan Claypool: Yeah and the dynamic is that every year you get a different group. Two years ago we had a group that really struggled to find their bonds with each other. This year we had a group that was so compatible it was wonderful. We've had runaway train individuals with unbelievable charisma and we've had other individuals that are very quiet in effect a voice have done some really significant work for their employers.

Kirt Jacobs: Can you define leadership in one word?

Rowan Claypool: How about three?

Kirt Jacobs: Alright. Make it quick Rowan.

Rowan Claypool: That's right OK.

Kirt Jacobs: Even though it is about leadership.

Rowan Claypool: OK.

Kirt Jacobs: Fire at will buddy.

Rowan Claypool: I think the three of the three words that I would pick up on are tenacity...

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Rowan Claypool: ...leverage and gravity.

Kirt Jacobs: OK

Rowan Claypool: tenacity.

Kirt Jacobs: I don't think we've had those words.

Rowan Claypool: I think these are a little different. I think at the end of the day what defines an entrepreneur is their tenacity. I mean you have people that are smart that are entrepreneurs or people that are not smart. They're successful entrepreneurs. But universally it's tenacity. That drive. The unwillingness to accept failure or problems and the tenacity you just keep fighting through them. The second one leverage. I don't think anybody can be successful on their own. I think we're all looking for ways to leverage other resources, other people, to achieve our goals. So you have to have leverage. Which means you have to work in an environment that's bigger than yourself. You can...

Kirt Jacobs: Sure

Rowan Claypool: ...seek out and get excess resources and then I think sustainability is in large part gratitude and maybe that's particular to this social entrepreneurship realm but you know I all I do

is call out people to give out of their joy. And then try to orchestrate that into a coherent pattern or program and it's by their continual expression of gratitude to those people that I think I'm able to sustain their interest in the mission of what we're doing.

Kirt Jacobs: Could you describe in detail a particular incident or scenario you know maybe you've touched upon in your professional personal life where you've utilize the style and philosophy of leadership? You know the tenacity, the gratitude.

Rowan Claypool: I'd be happy to. I doubt I'll tell the story of the creation of Bulldogs. Star on that Thursday night

Kirt Jacobs: Right

Rowan Claypool: Make the commitment and then what what happened was a series of ever enlarging concentric circles. Where I brought other people in. Got them to share my vision that this was a legitimate way to bring young people to our community. Introduce them in an intensive way in 10 weeks. To set the table that they might come back after graduation. So I started with the Yale community. Sort of building that. I had a series of meetings where I bring folks together and I would sort of try to describe each program element. How I thought it should work and then we did something which is a very scientific term but you can borrow it. We moosh it around. You know we're in the...

Kirt Jacobs: Tenacity, gratitude, moosh

Rowan Claypool: That's right moosh.

Kirt Jacobs: Nice

Rowan Claypool: But we wouldn't moosh those things around and reach a consensus about what was important. And then we enlarge that to potential employers. or Rob Rifsnyder who is the head of Metro United Way that time was a great ally. He said you know I'll make a commitment to bring meaningful nonprofit jobs to the table through our agencies. And then it went out to the funding

sources. Once we've gotten those pieces in place and gotten them to to also sign on.

Kirt Jacobs: You want to mention briefly who Molly Worthorn is? Did I pronounce her name correctly?

Rowan Claypool: Molly Worthorn

Kirt Jacobs: Is she a Yale Bulldog? I want to read something here that she described about you but I don't know if in brief if you want to mention who she is as out of respect to the audience.

Rowan Claypool: Yeah, no. I'd be happy to. Molly was a one of our Bulldogs I believe it would have been the third year of Bulldogs. She had finished her freshman year. She was a young woman from the suburbs of Chicago. Tremendously gifted young woman. She was an improv actress and so we have a closing formal ceremony when the Bulldogs report back to the sponsors about their summer experience. and Molly did this incredible recounting going down in Cave City and listening to a sort of a spontaneous bluegrass jam session that emerged. And she did it by pacing back and forth and driving guys in overalls and big pot bellies and you know all sorts that she just captured this imagery and it was just fantastic. She actually went on had a you know great career Yale. Has already written her first book the year after she graduated. She was the topic of a David ...

Kirt Jacobs: You are a detail man.

Rowan Claypool: It was a David Brooks, one of the columnist for the New York Times. He taught a course at Yale and actually used her as an example of this generation's you know sort of initiative.

Kirt Jacobs: When the great big comes how do you want to be remembered?

Rowan Claypool: I think it's interesting about that juncture that you know what is written in someone's obituary. We're not the authors of that. We have to depend on those that watched us, loved us,

interacted with us to write the story. And I think it's interesting that when it comes to the maybe the most significant thing the thing that you really want to get right. It's not in your hands. It's in somebody else's hands. And I think that's the thing about trusting with your energy and your effort and all of your being so that others can write well of you and your time on this earth.

Kirt Jacobs: Rowan I want to thank you for being a guest on the Leadership Landscape.

Rowan Claypool: Thank you.

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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 email me at kirt@moxietalk.com or catch us on Facebook under MoxieTalk with Kirt Jacobs, or on Twitter under [@kirtjacobs](https://twitter.com/kirtjacobs) or our extensive website at www.moxietalk.com