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Announcer: Welcome to Marketing in the Know, the premier podcast to help you leap ahead of the marketing curve so you can grow your business. Now get ready, set and grow with your host and tour guide through the marketing jungle Buckley Barlow.

Buckley Barlow: All right. Hello Insiders and welcome to Marketing in the Know. It is a great day today and I am thrilled to have a chat with my next guest. She has built a solid, solid reputation as a leading communication strategist who tackles big problems and reduces them down to practical solutions.

Now, that's a skill set that's not easy to come by or perfect, I might add, and she is known for her work on building thriving collaborative teams to help foster the growth curve that we're all looking to achieve. So Lee Caraher, it is a pleasure to have you on today.

Lee Caraher: Buckley, it's so great to be with you. Thank you so much.

Buckley Barlow: Well, Lee, I love talking with people who have tons of experience that are right in the mix of growing successful and modern-based companies. And I'm excited to see where this conversation can go today, particularly because as we all know, there is a major generational mindset shift that has transpired in the workforce today. And with it comes a lot of hiring and recruiting challenges.

And you are an expert at connecting companies to the right people. So this is gonna be a very cool conversation. I'm excited.

Lee Caraher: I hope so.

Buckley Barlow: Are you ready to do this?

Lee Caraher: I am ready to crush it.

Buckley Barlow: Let's do this. Okay, Lee. Before we get started to dive into these topics, would you mind telling us a little bit about yourself, your company, your role?

Lee Caraher: Yeah, I started my company Double Forte about 13 years ago. It's a public relations and social media firm based in San Francisco. We have offices in New York and in Boston as well. And I started it because, well, a lot of reasons but basically because my husband told me I was driving him crazy.

Buckley Barlow: That's a great reason.

Lee Caraher: I had left a company after 9/11. I decided that where I was was not how I wanted to live, which was in a large multinational media company. The company was very generous to me but that is not what I wanted to do. And 9/11 really [inaudible][00:02:23] sort of my focus and what I wanted to do with my career.

And I took some time off and in that time off I was contemplating lots of different go-forward things. Basically I drove my husband crazy. The short story is he said, you've gotta go back to work. And so I did.

I was not gonna start an agency but my mother got sick and my mother lived in Wisconsin. I live in San Francisco and it was very clear that I was gonna have to have a job that allowed me to be where I needed to be and to bring home the bacon. I'm the chief bacon officer in our house. My husband's the chief home officer at our house.

Buckley Barlow: So the pressure was on.

Lee Caraher: The pressure was on and so I started the firm because I knew I could do this consulting work, this working with a team remotely no matter where I was. I mean, I had a lot of experience at that.

So I started the company 13 years ago with a friend who has since moved on. I bought him out a few years ago. He wanted to be in a big, big firm. I'm like, I've already done that. I don't wanna do that again. And we have evolved dramatically since 13 years ago.

I mean, if you think about how the world of social media, podcasts being marketing, email marketing, all these things have changed, my agency sorta started as one thing and has evolved to the same purpose but with different tools and skill sets.

Buckley Barlow: Was a pretty heavy focus on PR, right?

Lee Caraher: Probably about right now – well, I consider social media part of PR.

Buckley Barlow: Of course.

Lee Caraher: I mean, it's this dealing with the public, you know. And why I think public relations people frankly are much better at social media than traditional marketers who are my age because they're just used to negotiating. And social media is negotiation, not a dictate and marketing is more of a dictate than a negotiation.

But, yes, so if you're talking to consumers, if you're talking to people who basically [inaudible][00:04:10] have negotiation with who you want to be in communication and relationship with, then that is what we do for a wide range of clients.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah, that's great. The ongoing dialogue is so key to social media today. That's great.

Lee Caraher: Absolutely.

Buckley Barlow: I noticed that you're a medieval history major and I just – I love that. I just got back from visiting Spain and one of my favorite places was the Alcazar of Segovia, which is the Segovia castle. And I think it was built in the 11th century, right?

Lee Caraher: That's true.

Buckley Barlow: But I love that time period and the architecture. I mean, if the walls could talk, well, actually it would scare the crap out of me.

Lee Caraher: Wouldn't it? Oh, my goodness, yes. Well, very useful.

Buckley Barlow: Oh, I love that time period anyway. I just had to bring that up.

Lee Caraher: That's great.

Buckley Barlow: Now, I notice that you have a no-jerk policy when it comes to clients. What does that mean exactly?

Lee Caraher: Well, if I knew you better I would use a different word but I'm a lady, some of the time. We're an independent firm and I had worked for companies that were owned by publically-traded firms. And when you're a publically-traded service firm you have a whole

different set of rules that actually may not be conducive to great client service, which is my thesis.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah.

Lee Caraher: So when I started my company it's like I wanna work with people I wanna work with. So I made these rules. One is, somebody other than myself has to be interested in the business. I think that you do the best work when you're interested in the business. You can be interested in it for a lot of reasons but if you're interested, man, you're just gonna wake up every day and go, I cannot wait to tackle this.

And if you're not interested, it's like dragging your feet. Well, you can't be in the service business dragging your feet. So one rule, someone else but myself has to be interested. I'm interested in everything. I could find a story in a straw and that doesn't really help.

Two, we have to be a good fit, like Double Forte has to be a good fit, right. We have to have the right experience, right expertise. And really very, very importantly, and I think this is true for so – for most business, we have to be a good fit. We have to actually be a good chemistry fit. You can be a great client and a great agency and just suck together frankly. So is it a good chemistry fit is the thing.

Three, you have to pay us. We like to eat. And four, no jerks. And what no jerks is, you know, frankly the more people you have the more definitions of jerk you have because it's personal. But if you're not going to respect us then you're not gonna work with us, period.

We have fired clients because of that policy. We have not signed with clients because of that policy as well. And we structure – I structure my contracts in a way to ferret out those people in that process if I haven't figured it out beforehand.

Buckley Barlow: Well, that's a great filter.

Lee Caraher: You know, some people say, oh my gosh, Lee, you've left so much business on the table. I said, well, this might be business limiting but it's life enhancing. And if I have a life-enhancing business, then I have a business that's more sustainable. And sustainability

is really what I'm totally focused on. How do you have clients who stay with you longer than other agencies have?

So in San Francisco the average client tenure is around three – two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half years. Well, our average tenure in clients is six-and-a-half years.

Buckley Barlow: That's great.

Lee Caraher: And then if you have clients a long time you can have people a long time, right. So particularly for millennials, people – the younger millennials, 22 to 27 year olds, in San Francisco the average millennial stays in a job for about 13 months. Well, if I can keep somebody three years then I – I mean, A. I've saved myself a lot of money and B. I'm getting a lot more sustainability. And that is our average. Our average for people under 30 is three years.

Buckley Barlow: That's great. Well, that's – you just hit on a major point. So one of the biggest issues I see out there for especially smaller organizations is their ability to recruit and retain valuable talent, right, in particular, younger talent. So, Lee, what's working out there in terms of three things, one, recruiting younger talent, because they are talented. They're young, they understand it. Two, how do you get them to see your vision and then three, how do you get them to stay and actually stay vested in that vision? So let's dive in with the recruiting portion of that question. How do you recruit them?

Lee Caraher: I think that – what I explain in my book is millennials are looking for four things. They're looking for meaningful work, they're looking for work/life balance, they're looking for opportunity and they're looking for a lot of communication. And when you peel those things away – actually those are the things that we all want but –

Buckley Barlow: Yeah, and transparency, I see that.

Lee Caraher: And transparency is in the meaningful work piece. So if you think about those pieces, we've learned to be super transparent in the recruiting process and then through the on-boarding and then obviously staying process. But what is the vision of the company?

You have to say that right up front when you're talking with somebody, right. What are we here for? Who do we work with?

What are you gonna get out of working here? If you show up every day, fully engaged, working your tail off, what are you gonna get out of that experience? What's the difference of working here versus working with another agency or another company that might be in the same category? What's the special sauce and how do you want everybody to contribute to that special sauce?

Buckley Barlow: So if I'm hearing you correctly, you're basically saying, hey, be up front and honest about the vision 100 percent.

Lee Caraher: One-hundred percent.

Buckley Barlow: So instead of actually going about it from a job descriptive –

Lee Caraher: Yeah.

Buckley Barlow: -- yeah, you're going about it, saying here's our vision. Now if you believe in it, we welcome you to go to that next step, right. If you don't believe in it whole heartedly, hey, there's the door. But then a lot of people just want a job so they can get paid. How do you filter through whether they really do believe in the vision or not?

Lee Caraher: Well, I think that you – it's not a bad thing if they wanna get paid as long as they participate like everybody else does. What really grinds an organization down is when you have uneven participation.

So you might have someone who's parking themselves in their career for a little bit for one reason or the other. But as long as they show up and participate and do their job and are responsible colleagues, that's okay if you don't advance. It's all right. But if you're a drag on the organization, you gotta go.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah.

Lee Caraher: And I think the more conversation I have with my employees – and not just me but everybody – we understand where people wanna go in their careers and how does my company fit into their career plan. And what do we need and what do they need out of the organization and out of the work experience then it becomes a give and take. We don't ever lower out standards just because somebody may not want to advance, advance, advance, but they have to show up too.

Buckley Barlow: So I think we have a lot of listeners, the Insiders are a lot of small businesses. They're not BC-backed businesses that are aiming for an exit in 24 months. They don't have this gigantic stock option policy. How do they keep people vested, engaged and to stick around?

Lee Caraher: Millennials are looking for work/life balance day one, right. They've heard it from their parents their whole lives. I mean, work/life balance was the narrative for the last 25 years in business conversation, right. So the more you can describe your business and what is the flexibility that you can give or not, or what is the opportunity that you're gonna have and what does this – being at your company, what will that mean on your resume? What does my network mean for somebody who works for me?

We have a woman here who she wants to go do something entirely different eventually. I'm like, well, okay. Well, you're gonna go to school. You can work here and go to school at the same time. We can dial you back. As long as you do your work, you can work three-quarters time. That's fine with me but you've gotta show up. You've gotta keep doing your job. And then she'll go do something totally different eventually but she will be lifetime loyal to us because we were so loyal to her.

So the more you can show how you're invested in their careers, even if they're not gonna stay with you forever, the better it is.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah well, let's talk external for a second. Once you have the right people on the bus and in the right seats, what is working out there in terms of communicating a brand story and getting people to engage and take action, take notice? Once you have those people, the next stage is, hey, I want to showcase what we do to the public so that we can grow our business. What's working out there?

Lee Caraher: Well, first you have to have a story, right.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah, yep.

Lee Caraher: So many companies think they don't need a story like, who are you people, right. Today's consumer, no matter what age, wants to know who they're dealing with. So the first thing you have to do is really take the time to write your story down, like why are you in business. What are you all about? What's the goal of the business? How will working with this business be different than working with another business? Figuring out that story so that it's

– and it can't be pretend or it can't be total BS, right. It has to be really authentic story.

I can tell you I started this company because my mother got sick and I needed to be able to have flexibility. Well, everyone understands that but that's not the reason for continuing the business, you know, kinda stuff.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah.

Lee Caraher: And not trying to be perfect. The more we try to be perfect the more we set people up to be disappointed with us, but what are we striving for? What are our aspirations? And being imperfect with that is fine as long as we're fast to acknowledge that, right. I think if you just look at social media today or a Facebook page or Instagram feed, some people are spending so much time making their images perfect, well, they don't get as much traction as the imperfect ones, right, the ones that really show real life. And maybe they don't have great lighting or maybe it's not all like branding's perfect. But what's the essence of what you're looking for?

And the more you can be authentic with that and imperfect is better than perfect, I think, to that because people are expecting you to be real. And then transparent, if you say you only do good work then only do good work. You define what good work is. If you say you only want organic food, well then, only serve organic food. Don't let a sloppy instant choice ruin your reputation.

Buckley Barlow: If we could, do you have any case studies for some of your clients that we could talk about as far as how you've helped them and what kinda metrics that you analyze and look at to help them grow that would kinda tie into everything we've discussed?

Lee Caraher: Sure. I can't tell you the name of the client but I can tell you what we do when we get a client. Well, the first thing we do is we measure. We measure what they think their story is and what the actual – what is the story out there in the world. And so that means we're talking to their customers, we're looking at their social media, we look at all the media coverage, we look at – we talk to partners. And we just get an audit, really brutally truth audit.

And then we figure out what we have to measure. So if a company is struggling against bigger competitors and have some loyal customers, well, how are you gonna advance those customers?

So once thing that has been really useful for us is sometimes when you're in a category with a lot of competition you just look at everybody else and say they're doing it great. Well, just assume that they're not, right.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah, really.

Lee Caraher: Everything looks better from the outside than it is on the inside, right.

Buckley Barlow: Um-hum.

Lee Caraher: So number one is like, what's going to work for you? Don't worry about that other guy. Worry about what's gonna work for you and what your customers are telling you. Your customers are telling you what works. They are telling you what doesn't work. Focus on them first.

One client of ours, we dug into their customer feedback and we found all these great things that the client had no – really hadn't appreciated about themselves. The customers were so thankful that they got back to them within 24 hours. They were so thankful that if they had a problem with the product, someone would show up at their house. I mean, just [inaudible][00:15:39] that someone would just show up at their house.

And the thank yous that came back in the customer survey really helped us hone down on where to focus in terms of getting new customers as opposed to – what they wanted to do when we first started with them was focus on this other customer – this other competitor was doing all these razzle dazzle flashy things.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah.

Lee Caraher: But it looked awesome, it looked great. When you peel the onion on it, it was not very authentic and it was hard to see what was real. When we measured it all we were like, when people get to your website they're not abandoning you. They're staying on that website. You need to know this, right, how are they clicking around. When they talk to you they're telling you what they like about yourself. Well, focus on the things that are great. And then here's the things that they don't like. How can we improve those?

This one client when we just focused on what the customers are telling us for the first six months of the engagement, and we increased their – things to measure in our world are how many followers you have, what kinda media coverage do you get, how much traffic do you have.

And their traffic doubled and then the media coverage sort of – it takes a long time to get media coverage – was – had tracked another increase of about 25 percent within six months, which is a really good measurement.

Buckley Barlow: How did the traffic double? What was the strategy behind that?

Lee Caraher: The strategy behind the traffic doubling was we honed down their website a little bit so that it was easier to – when you got there you didn't leave, but they already had good retention. And then on Instagram and Facebook the feeds that they started doing were focusing on those things that mattered to their customers.

Buckley Barlow: That you discovered that they did well.

Lee Caraher: Right. We just focused on those – there were three things. We focused – that was the content – the content that we were pushing was all about the stuff that they do well, right, that was mattering. And so that was just driving more traffic and driving more likes. And the more likes you get the more – you know, that kinda thing and the more referral you get – they didn't even have a referral program. We didn't incent for referral but there was more referral because people were sharing.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah, what's interesting, that I've seen, is when first of all, small businesses don't have a lot of time, right.

Lee Caraher: No.

Buckley Barlow: They don't have an extra budget to hire out someone to focus their time on doing customer surveys and feedback loops and so forth. But you just made a case study and a point that if you do take the time, hey, you don't have to spend a huge amount of money to drive – to double your traffic. You have to pull out what you do best and then show the public what you do best in an authentic way.

Lee Caraher: And double down on what you do best. Imagine you have only 20 customers. If 20 customers – pick ten and just either send them an

email with a Survey Monkey survey in it. In fact, I can send for your show notes I'll put some links in for good survey samples, number one. And then two, or just pick up the phone and call them, right. Or have – host something.

Sometimes just inviting ten customers to sit around the table with you for an honest conversation, give them lunch, give them dinner, whatever, have little [inaudible][00:18:44] to go, they want to tell you – customers wanna tell you what's going on.

Buckley Barlow: Now, let's assume for one second Buckley is not a jerk and you decide to take me on as a client, okay. Let's say – as an example let's say we're an online marketing education provider. We're doing a million dollars in revs. We wanna grow our business to 5 million and that's small comparative to what you see in the valley there, right. People wanna scale to 20, 50, 100, 200 million.

And I think for most smaller businesses, hey, they just want that incremental growth. They wanna double. They wanna go from a million to 2 million, 2 million to 4 million and so forth. If we came to you and said, hey, what can you do for us and what kinda metrics are you gonna track, how do you put a program together for a company that's doing seven figures and wants to double, triple, quadruple?

Lee Caraher: Essentially what we always wanna understand is what is the goal. So you're selling 100,000 online webinars, just say, 100,000's yielding a million dollars. So you need to – you want 7 X of that so 700,000 perhaps, right.

So we might look at your – the first thing we would do is evaluate your programs versus other people's programs on the same topic, before we even look at marketing. We're gonna look at the quality of the product. What's the quality of your product? How does it stack up? So is it a nine-session course, is it a three-session course? Is it binge – can you binge course or is it overtime, you know, all these kinds of things?

And then what's the – what are the metrics that are happening on the other places, right. What's your price point? Is your price point too low? I think often we under price ourselves, particularly – I would say particularly on education there's a lot of under pricing going on.

Buckley Barlow: It's probably because there's so much free education, right.

Lee Caraher: Well, free puppies, right. So a lot of free stuff happens that actually never gets used. I mean, people are downloading stuff all the time that never gets used. But if you have a price point, you know, 397, a thousand dollars, people are gonna – all you need is a **ten** of those and you've made \$10,000 versus 100,000 one dollars, right.

So we're gonna look at price point, all of these things. And then we're gonna come up with a strategy that lets us **[inaudible][00:20:49]** testings overtime, you know, longer versus shorter, binge versus not, price point versus a different price, that kind of stuff, right.

Then we're gonna look at the marketing piece like, how are you distributing your content? Where are you – are you known as a thought leader on this? A lot of people do on my courses and they have no other platform. Well, I don't know how you really drive thought leadership if you're not though leading somewhere, right.

Buckley Barlow: I know a lot of places more than just one place.

Lee Caraher: Oh, my goodness, right. So do you have a blog? And it's a content war. Today it's a content war. Content is the king.

Buckley Barlow: Quality content, isn't it?

Lee Caraher: Quality content. Not just link bait. Oh, my goodness, don't get me started. So we might come back – if you don't have a blog we might come back to you and say, you know what, let's do a blog next year. What we're first gonna do is use your LinkedIn profile to start posting blogs on the LinkedIn platform.

Buckley Barlow: That's good.

Lee Caraher: Let's focus on LinkedIn first because LinkedIn is so powerful. Oh, my goodness. And we might say to you, okay, we're gonna blog later but right now we're gonna quick activate my going on to the LinkedIn platform as a posting thing so we can start generating some content.

And then we're going to quickly, particularly if you're online at **[inaudible] [00:21:59]** space, link that to a – and build a Twitter profile where you're following and being followed by the people who are making decisions in the space.

So that's probably what we would do for you. First measure and evaluate the product, understand where it fits in the market for these things totally, quality, length, price, all that kinda stuff. And then look at how you're distributing – look at your thought – look at who you are and how you stack up against other people in this category and do you have – are you known for things – besides people who know you in your hometown – like how are you putting yourself out there.

Buckley Barlow: Pull out the best.

Lee Caraher: Pull out the best and it is so much better to do fewer things really, really well than do a lot of things really, really poorly.

Buckley Barlow: Great point.

Lee Caraher: So if that's the business you're in, we're gonna focus you on LinkedIn and then Twitter and nothing else.

Buckley Barlow: Well, that's great advice. You look at things holistically and that's what I love about you.

Lee Caraher: Totally.

Buckley Barlow: Now, I would love to know, if you were to hire one person today in your growth or marketing department, what kinda person would you hire, what kinda skill sets would you be looking for and why?

Lee Caraher: Well, I wish I had a growth department.

Buckley Barlow: They're hard people to find.

Lee Caraher: They are. There's a lot of switch and – bait and switching that people really hate. That a person goes out and sells something and then they get a totally different team. So we really try to avoid that.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah.

Lee Caraher: Well, I would try to – who I would hire today is someone who is a very – who has very good social skills. And I don't mean just online. I mean social, can sit with another person and engage with them. I think that's becoming more and more critical as we're more and more online and not seeing each other. The actual social skill

of engagement and getting people to have a conversation is what sells, is understanding.

So tell me your pain points, like what – instead of just trying to sell the same thing over and over again, you wanna have a conversation with someone that says, tell me what's keeping you up at night. And not everybody can do that, right. So I would be focusing on someone who can really have a conversation with people and who is empathetic and it's not about so, so, so, you know. Increasingly, increasingly that's not going to work.

Buckley Barlow: Yeah well, good stuff. Now, would you mind leaving us with your best growth or marketing tip that you've learned along your journey? I mean, you've been around a while. You know what's working, what's not but somewhere along the line you have found something that is really relevant for you today. Would you mind sharing?

Lee Caraher: My biggest tip in this is be generous. The more you share, the more you help other people, the more people are willing to help you. My whole business, we're 13 years old now, we're a \$4.5 million business, we probably will grow another 25 percent next year based on what's going on right now, is based on relationships I've had with 11 people.

I figured out who the 11 people are I wanted to work with and I was just generous with them. Like, how can I help you? Here's some information you might need. And when they had something cross their path that they thought we were good for, they generously gave it to me.

And so the more generous you are, not worrying about what's in it for you but just helping other people, the more it comes back to you.

Buckley Barlow: I cannot believe how fast this conversation has gone. I've gotta have you back. There's so many other things I'd love to ask you but, Lee, it's been fantastic chatting with you. If you wanna know more, Insiders, about what Lee can do for your business, head on over to DoubleForte.com. But it's Double-Forte.com. Lee, thank you so much for coming on and sharing.

Lee Caraher: Buckley, it's been such a pleasure I hope I get to come back someday.

Buckley Barlow: All right, Insiders. That is a wrap. Thank you so much for joining us on Marketing in the Know today. Now head on over to BeInTheKnow.co for the links and the show notes to this podcast. And while you're over there, grab the free version of my guide, "Ready, Set, Grow." It took me a long time to pull together all this information and I spent a pretty penny getting the look and feel just right. But feel free to grab your free copy. And there's also an upgraded copy where it's the full version. Be happy if you downloaded that as well. Thanks again, Insiders, and I'll see you next Tuesday.

Announcer: We appreciate you joining us for this episode of Marketing in the Know. For show notes and a free version of "Ready, Set, Grow" visit BeInTheKnow.co. Thanks again and we'll see you next Tuesday here on Marketing in the Know.

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**Duration: 27 minutes**