SESSION 167
LEVERAGING CONNECTIVITY
WITH MICHAEL KIRBY

BETH: Hello, this is Beth Brodovsky, and welcome to Driving Participation. Today I am on with Michael Kirby. Michael is the Vice President of Business Partnerships at an organization called Within3, and Michael does a lot of work connecting with people, meeting with people, selling to people; and he uses LinkedIn in really unique and interesting ways, and I wanted to have him on today to bring in somebody from the business world, from a nonprofit to talk about how people who are in other types of businesses are using tools that we have available to us and can potentially be used to our benefit to serve our goals. So, Michael, thank you so much for joining me today.

MICHAEL: Happy here to be here, Beth.

BETH: Now the interesting thing about Michael is that you are working in corporate for-profit business now, but you do have a past in the nonprofit world. Can you talk a little bit about your journey to ending up doing what you're doing now?

MICHAEL: So I started out in working for the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf and then the Arthritis Foundation in the Eastern Pennsylvania chapter, which were both nonprofit PR/development positions where I really began honing my skills of communicating with people and engaging people and developing relationships with people, and all of those skills ultimately evolved quite naturally into a sales career because everything that I kind of learned and mastered in my nonprofit days has continued to serve me very, very well in my for-profit days.

BETH: It's so interesting because I know a lot of times people that are in nonprofits, like the word "sales" makes people really uncomfortable. So what is it you think that you learned from being in the nonprofit? Is there anything in particular that you think that you really use on a regular basis today?

MICHAEL: So instead of describing it as sales, I like to think of everything that I do and has ever done as business development, and I think anybody listening to this conversation would really understand that business development applies pretty much to any role that anybody is in. So whether you're in nonprofit looking to secure contributions or you're trying to get awareness or public support or you're trying to promote a political or social agenda or you're trying to sell a product or a service, all of those activities all involve business development in one form or another. It may not be for profit, but it's still business development, and still many ways, sales. So the skills that I learned in the nonprofit arena were really about engaging people to get them to do what you want them to do and what you need them to do. So understanding what their needs are, understanding the things that excite them and heighten their passions about doing something or achieving something and then translating that into getting them to help you in one way or another, whether it's a donation or a gift in kind or a sale, it's the same process no matter what environment you're working in.

BETH: I think it's so valuable for all of us to start thinking about it that way, both from a skill set perspective, but also from a staffing perspective. A lot of times it's easy to think that you need somebody that's worked in a nonprofit to do development work or if you want to work over in the for-profit side that you only need people that have worked on that side. So the more we can get everyone understanding that it's about skills and experience in doing things and that there's so much commonality of it, I think there's a benefit of crossing skills over from one side to the other and sometimes even back again.

MICHAEL: Yeah, I think the skills are extremely interchangeable and can be applied to any business situation once you've learned them.

BETH: An interesting question to ask you is the one I ask all of my guests, which is this idea of participation that we talk about here on the show a lot, and I ask everyone that I talk to, what does the word "participation" mean to you, and how does it show up in your work in a way that helps your organization thrive? I'm really curious about how you would interpret that in the for-profit world that you support.

MICHAEL: So to me, the idea of participation in the for-profit world really amounts to engagement and getting people to participate/engage in a common activity for a common goal. So if you're trying to get a new client on board for a project, you're trying to get them excited about the project, about the potential vision of that project, what that project ultimately might entail for their organization and for them and then get them motivated enough to want to have that become a reality.

BETH: That's so true. It's amazing that is really is the same across the board. So in your work, you've got to do that. You've got to motivate people to take action and then take another action and move along that chain until they take what we would call the desirable action for your business, and everybody has different desirable actions. In our world, sometimes it means becoming a volunteer. Sometimes it means coming to an event. Sometimes it means giving to a donation or funding a capital campaign. There's lots of different things that any organization or buying a product. So to do that, one of the things that we've seen in our work is that you really need to understand your audience, you really need to know who you're shooting for. The thing that we're gonna be talking about today is how you do that, like how you find your person and then how you warm up that sale. How do you leverage connections to get closer and to get more towards a relationship with somebody on the way to creating an actual business relationship. So to start off, I would like to talk a little bit about how you figure out who you should be targeting.

MICHAEL: So in my industry we are, Within3 is a software as a service provider, better known as SaaS. So we create a license for pharmaceutical companies to use our platform to run virtual collaborative engagements with physicians and patients and payers and other types of external stakeholders. So we are basically targeting anybody who is involved in pharmaceutical marketing or pharmaceutical clinical operations or pharmaceutical medical affairs, three very, very distinct groups of pharma, but all of these people have similar mindset, which is they're not going to be where they are for very long. The interesting thing about the pharmaceutical industry is that it's kind of predicated upon the fact that people are constantly shifting responsibilities within a given company and if they're not shifting responsibilities within that company, they're moving on to another company. They're leveraging what they did in company A to move on and find a better role in company B. We're also in and near tremendous mergers and acquisitions. So companies and people within those companies are constantly positioning themselves to come out on the positive end if a merger and acquisition occurs so that if a little bio-tech comes up with an explosive drug that changes the marketplace and that company gets bought by somebody like Pfizer, everybody in that bio-tech makes millions of dollars. So people are constantly strategizing and positioning and thinking about where do I need to be in order for the biggest payout to occur. So you're most likely appealing to their sense of innovation and a little bit of ego in the sense that you're gonna be a trendsetter if you use this platform, you're gonna be a person that's gonna change the communication paradigm at your company Those types of messaging is really what seems to trigger people to want to work with us.

BETH: I think that that's so important for people to hear because the very first thing that you said is you described the three different types of people that are good prospects for you. When I talk to people in the nonprofit space, I tell them all the time you really need to understand who your perfect person is and I get a lot of resistance from that because of that exact thing, is that people look at their different what we would call segments, that they might be their demographics or their behavioral graphics, who they are or what they do right now and you see three completely different groups and you think I've got to market completely differently to these three different people, but beyond all of those groups are the commonality among those groups is a mindset that's similar and that's true in every organization and it's hard for people to sometime see that at the outset, but when you take the time to understand what are those motivations that are in common among all of your audiences, it becomes so much easier to find them and market to them.

MICHAEL: You may tweak your message a little bit depending on the different segment that you're talking to, but ultimately, your straight message is always going to be the same. It's gonna be very, very consistent. In our case, you're trying to help these companies find a more efficient, effective way of communicating with external stakeholders. Everybody within that company, no matter what department they're in, has that same need. You may have to come up with a different message or a different approach to tap into that need for those different groups, but the ultimate objective is the same.

BETH: That's a really key thing, to make sure that you really understand because a lot of people it's easy to get goals, strategies, objectives and tactics all mixed up or to think that it's all the same thing and to know that you can have different tactics to execute it, but you need to still know what your outcome is and that it might be the same outcome for everything, but each of those audiences might need a different tactic like social media versus email is something that you might do differently if there's two different segments, but the message, the core story, the purpose that like in your case innovation is something that's going to be throughout everything that you do.

MICHAEL: Yes, that's true.

BETH: The reason I wanted to talk to you today is that you work LinkedIn like crazy and I think that LinkedIn, even though it's been around for a really long time, a lot of people struggle with what the heck to do with it if they're not looking for a job. I think the opportunity for people to hear about how somebody whose job is business development, building relationships, building departments is using it to find people and then start the relationship there. It's really innovative and it's really, I mean I'm sure other people are doing it, but I think in our world, in the nonprofit world, people aren't looking at it as much like that, and I think we could all really benefit from learning more about what you do. You talked about who your target is. When you're out there working on LinkedIn, how do you take what you know about your person and go forward and find them using LinkedIn?

MICHAEL: So a couple of things about LinkedIn. First of all, I got my job through LinkedIn, so it's absolutely a great resource if you're looking for a job. I mean there's no question it could lead to conversations and access to people that you wouldn't normally have outside of that online environment. The way I've been using it at my job for the last five years is to really get a snapshot of the types of people that I'm trying to target. So for example, almost every client that I have at this point and there's at this point dozens of companies that I've sold to, every single one of them was the result of a contact I made on LinkedIn either to that person or that person referred me to a person that became a client. The ability to leverage your connections and your contacts on LinkedIn is probably the single most important thing and again, this applies to any type of working environment, whether it's nonprofit or for profit. The contacts and connections that you have on LinkedIn are really your ultimate resource for growing your business, whatever that business is. So every time I have a call with someone I meet at a conference or I get a referral to, I link in with them immediately because a) I'm fresh in their mind and they just had a conversation with me and they're more likely to say, "Oh yeah, we just talked. I'll link in with you," and right away, not only do I have access to everything about that person, but I can also see a) all the people that he or she is connected to and also, this is something a lot of people don't really pay a lot of attention to, but it's really, really important, particularly when you're profiling prospects, again whether it's nonprofit or for profit, but when you have the upgraded level of access that you can buy on LinkedIn and this is not a plug for that, but typically your company will pay for this, you can see the area where it says, "people who have looked at this profile have also looked at these profiles," and immediately you've got 10-15 identical prospects that have the same characteristics, kind of the same backgrounds, the same sort of professional situations as the person that you're looking at. So right out of the gate you're looking at that person, all his connections, plus 15 other people who have been looked at in the same way that he's being looked at. So it just gives you so many opportunities to then understand the type of people you're gonna be talking to and then formulate the strategy on how to communicate with them.

BETH: Do you happen to remember what level of paid LinkedIn, like which LinkedIn paid level that people need to have to be able to see that level of information?

MICHAEL: It's called LinkedIn Navigator and it's $50 a month.

BETH: That's helpful for people to know; what does it take to get that.

MICHAEL: Yeah, and basically it just gives you deeper access to that person. It also allows you to send InMails to that person. So currently in the free version, unless you're connected to somebody, you have no way to communicate with them on LinkedIn. You could try to figure out their email address and send them a random email, but the likelihood of that even getting opened is slim to none, but if you have the upgraded version of LinkedIn, you can send an InMail to that person and I believe you get somewhere around an allotment of 50 InMail connections a month and you can just message them directly and say, "I saw your profile, and it looks like you're involved in A, B and C, and we do C, D and E, and we'd like to talk to you."

BETH: Do you get a good response from that? Actually, part interview and part research for me because we're still on the free version of LinkedIn, and what I tend to do when I want to meet somebody or if I find somebody on there that I'm interested in connecting with is I'll send them a connection request with a little paragraph about why I'm asking to connect with them and then they'll connect with me, but sometimes the thing that I ask them about they don't respond to and it gets a little jilted trying to get them to respond to the thing that I was talking about, and I've always been curious about how people respond to an InMail versus a connection request.

MICHAEL: Well the InMail has a little bit more context generally than a connection request. If I send somebody an InMail I'm usually referencing a common connection or a company that I have sold to that he or she has worked for. I'm creating some kind of a connection and a frame of reference with that person in the in mail so that there's more of a likelihood, hey I noticed that you and I are both connected to Beth Brodovsky, so I thought it might be worth reaching out to talk to you about A, B, C. So you create that little bit of a sense of intimacy with that person that kind of is a little bit more personal than just a random LinkedIn connection request, which I get those from headhunters every day and probably just ignore 90 percent of them.

BETH: We're pretty good at getting people to say yes because I use the connection request to do the same thing that you're doing in the InMail, but it's much shorter. I often don't have the space that I want and I've been evaluating is it time to step up to the next level. It's nice to know that there is some value to that and I wondered if someone gets an InMail versus a connection request, do they read it? Do they take it seriously? Does it feel invasive to them or do they appreciate the detail that you're able to put in there?

MICHAEL: I think it depends on the person, but I think the other thing that I should mention that I always do is that after I send the InMail, I will wait about a day and then I will send that person an email and I will say, "RE: my LinkedIn message."

BETH: Got it.

MICHAEL: They didn't get to their LinkedIn message and hadn't seen it, this is another way to hit them, but if they did see it, maybe they didn't pay a lot of attention to it. The email is the way to reinforce it so that that double-pronged approach is always a lot more impactful.

BETH: I was actually just doing a speaking session last night where we talked about the idea of repetition and that people always think that they have to do something different every time and that it's actually that repetition that builds that remembrance for people and even if they don't totally remember it, it's like a little buzz goes off in the back of your head that seems like "that's familiar," and it really does work psychologically on people to take more action if something feels familiar, which is what this whole process is about. I would say how do you move from I looked at my caller ID, and I don't recognize that number, so when I pick up the phone it's like, "What?" to that person saying, "Hi, I'm Beth, and I'm calling you because our mothers know each other and your mom recommended that I call." Oh, it's like all of a sudden the gates go down. It seems like a lot of what you're talking about reminds me of what I'm always recommending people do when they write a cover letter, which is sort of what LinkedIn is a little bit of the cover letter, but for business development as opposed to just for getting a job. When I get a cover letter that says, "Dear Beth," or "Dear Ms. Brodovsky," as opposed to "Dear Sir or Ma'am." With the internet it's not that hard to figure out somebody's name and then reference to something specific about my business. Oh, I see you guys do nonprofit communications. I'm interested in that because. It's like it instantly takes that person out of the black hole of millions of candidates and turns them into a person that's taken the time to learn about us and show where they might have some value. It's amazing the difference in how I respond to them, so I'm sure that that holds true on LinkedIn as well.

MICHAEL: Yeah, and I would even go so far as to say that not to sound like a Luddite, but using the phone is still really, really effective. Rarely do people pick up, but if you leave a message on somebody's work phone, and I ask my clients all the time about this because I want to understand people's behavior, and I say, "Do you listen to voice mails?" and they say, "Absolutely, I listen to the voice mails. If it's somebody that I don't know, and it's something I'm not interested in, I don't return the call, but I do listen to everything that is left on my voice mail." So if you know that going in and you send them an email and you send them an InMail, you leave them a voice mail and you space those touch points out strategically, you're gonna have a better chance of warming up your prospect in getting a better reception.

BETH: OK, so what's your strategy? Are you email/message or message/email?

MICHAEL: I will typically send an email. I will wait a couple of days, send another one, but I think one of the key things there, at least in business development is emailing for the sake of emailing is a waste of time. You've got to have an email with a purpose, and you've got to have an email with some substance and meaning. So I'll give you a couple of examples. If I haven't talked to somebody in a number of months, and they had expressed interest in doing something earlier in the year, but I haven't been able to get back on their radar, I'm not just gonna send them an email and say, "Hey, it's been awhile. Haven't heard from ya. Are you ready to sign your contract?" I'm gonna send them an email saying, "Here's a new case study that we just did with a clinical operations team that you might find really relevant and is a really good example of the type of engagement that we can generate for you." So you want to be seen as a sales resource, not as a sales pain in the neck.

BETH: I think that's so critical because I think people get really nervous about calling because they feel like they're bugging people, and I mean this is true with sales. I hear people when they talk about fundraising talking about I have to go out begging and I'm like no, oh my gosh! This is the wrong way to think about sales or fundraising. You want to think about how can I, if I'm telling people to pay me, and I will be a resource for you, how can you demonstrate that? How can you show people what working with you would be like? It's always like give something before you get something theory.

MICHAEL: Exactly, and when I was doing fundraising or development work in nonprofit, our strategy was to show people examples of how money that's being donated is helping the people that we're serving. Hey, thought you'd want to see this video of this new arthritis aquatics program that we've developed with the YMCA thanks to people like you who have contributed in the past to these programs. So you try to give them a sense of, a real literal sense that their contributions are making a difference in something.

BETH: It's really very much in line, I think it's our most downloaded show, is an episode that we did with somebody named Lynne Wester and of course I always forget the numbers of the show that I can't remember to tell people, but it will be on the show notes page, you can grab it there. She talked about doing things in a cycle. Like you ask somebody for something, then you thank them and then you show them impact and you're not allowed to ask again until you've done those other two things. It's a good rule for fundraising, but it's a good rule for any sort of reaching out behavior. So, are there any other sort of tips and tricks that you might give to people as far as the ways you use LinkedIn to research people or like places you can go to find out information? Are there parts of their profile that you particularly look at or pay attention to? What are some of the sort of specific ways that you might dig in to go find out like the tactics you use in LinkedIn to find out more details about somebody?

MICHAEL: Well, I think what you're initially looking for is some sort of commonality, whether it's companies that they've worked for that your company has worked with or companies that they worked for where you know people at that company, connections that you have in common. Those kinds of essential connections are the best place to start because that's a great reference point to begin with. Like I saw that you used to work at Pfizer and we actually have done hundreds of programs with them globally over the last five years and maybe they've gone to new bio-tech and you want to kind of introduce to our platform there. So you have to look for a point where it kind of makes sense to reference and say I know this about you, therefore I want to talk to you because of that and so you're trying to create that understanding in their minds of why I'm even reaching out to you, why would it make sense for you to talk to me? Because of these points that I'm making.

BETH: Right, exactly. I think that's really, really helpful. You also mentioned something else. You said that after you send a LinkedIn message to people, if you don't hear back from them that you might send an email to them.

MICHAEL: Yes.

BETH: Well, a lot of people say that's great. One of the reasons to use LinkedIn is you don't have to have their email and I often use the tactic for purposely sending messages through LinkedIn even to people I'm already connected with. So after I've gotten connected with people, I have their email. I'll still use LinkedIn to send the email to them, because I'm gonna think I haven't talked to these people in a year. If I send a LinkedIn message to them, they're at least gonna say, "Well, I must know this person because she's sending me a LinkedIn message," as opposed to if I send them an email. They're gonna think, "Who is this person?" So that's one of the tactics that I use, but you go out and find people's emails. People always want to know how the heck do you find people's emails?

MICHAEL: It's actually very, very easy.

BETH: People really do think it's really challenging and hard.

MICHAEL: So here's how I do it. So let's say I find somebody on LinkedIn who works at some bio-tech that I've never heard of. I go to that bio-tech's website. There's usually a section under "investors." Under "investors" there's a section called "news releases." You click on "news releases" and there's usually a list of all the press releases that that company has sent out over the past how ever many months. You open up one of those press releases and at the bottom usually if you scroll down there's a company contact for that press release, and it will say firstname.lastname@abc.com. You've figured out the person's email address.

BETH: Right. So if they're not in PR or not in a place like we've had good luck finding people's names if they are in some sort of profession, every profession has an association and a lot of times the association membership list you can see sometimes. They're getting more sophisticated. It's getting harder to find things on membership lists. They're not always public anymore, but just even Googling people's names and their company name or any details that you know about them will often show up their name and their email. Maybe they posted on a forum somewhere so you can often find things there, but if all of that stuff happens and it doesn't work, is there a tool that you find that people can use to find an email address?

MICHAEL: There's actually a tool called CellHack, which is an online system that you can actually use for free on a limited basis and what you can do, it's kind of a reverse search. You can type in a domain name, so it could be @novartis.com or @Pfizer.com and it will list for you every single person on LinkedIn with an email address with that domain name.

BETH: Wow!

MICHAEL: If you were trying to target a particular company, it's not good for finding people, but it's good for finding a lot of people in one location.

BETH: Great! Well, I think that's definitely worth checking out. I think these are some really great tips to have people start to think more strategically about using LinkedIn. The last thing I wanted to ask you is what are your thoughts and strategies on outbound marketing, strategic posting and putting up articles in some of those things? Do you do any of that or value any of that work?

MICHAEL: So that's a great question, and that ties into a couple of things. One is that when you're on LinkedIn, it's really important to be active on LinkedIn. You don't just go in there and look and read. You should always like things. If something really motivates you enough, you can comment on it. You can also share it, because remember, every time you like something with one of your connections, that like gets posted for all of that person's connections and many of your connections that are not going to be in common. So your name and title and presence is now gonna be put in front of a whole other group of people, and in my case, probably related to the pharmaceutical industry that I would have no knowledge of, and no pre-existing contact with. So it creates awareness with you with a whole new group of people. Same if you share something. You're promoting that person. If that person shares something that you wrote, they're promoting you. So it's good to get in the habit of liking things, sharing things and even commenting on things. It's also really important to check every day when you log in your notifications because the notifications provide a lot of really important information. In the industry that I sell to, people are constantly moving around. It's rare to see somebody stay in the same company more than two or three years.

BETH: It's the same in this industry, too.

MICHAEL: Constantly jumping from one company to another. Everybody knows everybody, particularly in a therapeutic area like oncology. Everybody has worked in every oncology company out there at one point or another. So you always see notifications, at least in my industry, that Joe Smith just began a new job at so and so. Or Joe Smith is celebrating two years at company X. It's really important to stay on top of that. Say the happy birthday. Say the happy anniversary. Do all those kind of exercises every single day to remain top of mind with your customers and know who they are.

BETH: Exactly, and that's huge because I find that you're on LinkedIn, you're on LinkedIn, and then all of a sudden you go to a conference or a workshop and you see people in person. Like you don't want to be the person that's like, "So what's been going on?" It's like, "Well, I've actually been at a different company for three years."

MICHAEL: Right.

BETH: It builds your presence, and it makes you seem like you are aware of them, and it's that same feeling of going, "So I heard that you moved to this company." It makes people feel noticed, and anything that makes people feel like you know them is your one step closer to making a sale.

MICHAEL: Correct.

BETH: Thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it. If people had a question or wanted to reach out to you further, is there any particular way that you like people to find you?

MICHAEL: Sure. My email address is MKirby@within3.com and that's the number 3 not the word three.

BETH: We will put a link to that on the show notes page. Michael, thank you so much for sharing all of your insight with both me and our nonprofit community.

MICHAEL: Thanks, Beth.