

Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator

Episode 101

Tevin Manuel

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Don: [00:00:00] Welcome to another exciting edition of the WCBA powered, of course by Evergy. First, thank you for listening. Don't forget to like us. Love us. Share us. Follow us. We truly appreciate you checking us. Today in the house. Tandem cyber operations. E.

Ebony: That's right. We have my long lost friend Tevin in the house.

What's up Tevin?

Tevin Manuel: Not much. How about yourself, Ebony?

Ebony: Life is good. Life is good. We're so glad you're here today with us.

Don: Is she a friend of yours? Tevin?

Tevin Manuel: She is, I think back to Leadership Wichita, actually.

Ebony: Yeah. Huh? The good old days.

Don: I'm, I'm stunned, but continue.

Ebony: So, Tevin, tell us a little bit about your company, who you are and what you.

Tevin Manuel: Yes ma'am. Tandem Cyber is a company that started in Wichita, Kansas, and it started when I got outta the military and went to Butler Community College. And I recognized that of the 70 community colleges in the state of Kansas, only two of them had dedicated cybersecurity personnel. And that was a huge challenge that I saw and a need that I saw the need to be met.

So that's what we do. Mm-hmm. , we. Provide cybersecurity services to those organizations that can't retain the talent or find the talent.

Ebony: That's awesome. So let, let's go back a little bit before that. So you were, you were in the



military, right?

Tevin Manuel: Yes ma'am. I was the Air Force base at McConnell, actually.

Ebony: At McConnell.

And what work did you do there? Was it in this, this realm?

Tevin Manuel: Yes, ma'am. I did cybersecurity at McConnell Air Force Space. And then, , right. After being able to do cyber security there, there was this new mission called Mission Defense Team, where as you know, we were getting the KC 46 and McConnell. Mm-hmm. . And that job was to protect that aircraft.

Ebony: that is such a cool story. I mean, like, I don't think people know the, you know, the, the depth and type of talent that comes through our city because of McConnell and you're a prime example of that. And so you did that work there, decided to go to Butler, get further educated in on specifically in the realm of cybersecurity and what, what was the actual degree?

I always get 'em all.

Tevin Manuel: Yes ma'am, and that's my miscommunication. I actually went to work for Butler Community College after the Air Force, so I actually don't have a formal degree in cybersecurity. My background is political science and I'm actually working on my master's right now at Carnegie Mellon for cybersecurity.

Ebony: Wow. Wow. Nice. That's even more of a story. You know, cuz a lot of people think that, right? You have to have these formal degrees to actually do the work. But I've come to find out with a number of our guests that you, it's, it's your aptitude for being able to do the work and you can learn it on site.

So it was that what happened with you or what, you know, you got trained through the military and decided I can teach this.

Tevin Manuel: Yes, ma'am. Very similar to that. I got really fortunate in high school I went to a magnet high school that had a technology academy. So we were able to get certified in high school prior to graduating, and that's what we were able to do there.

And in college I said, I want nothing to do with computer anymore. I want to work with people. And as you could tell, fate had other plans and mm-hmm , I stuck with computers and cybersecurity. , but you're right. You do not have to stick. You do not have to formally go through education to be in cybersecurity.

It's one of those fields to where. Pattern. Finding patterns or understanding syntax is very

important, more so than the formalized education because cert certifications are really what's key in our area.

Ebony: Mm-hmm. . So even a person like Don, whoa, would he be able to go in and get a certification? Cause you know,

Tevin Manuel: Absolutely, there's certification for everyone. We can get you in there.

Ebony: Okay. So you know, like I said, we met at leadership in leadership with, and Tevin was such a, you know, a [00:05:00] bright person, and he, the way he thinks is just, you know, a, a, a different way and lets you see things in a, in a different lens.

So, but you started the company in 20. 15, 16.

Tevin Manuel: So that was the first one. 20, yeah. Started the first company in 2016 as a, actually as a mental health break, believe or not .

Ebony: And what, like Okay. Talk about that .

Tevin Manuel: Yeah. So I went into college and I graduated college and I had a degree already . And then normally you go into becoming an officer once you graduate college in the military.

Well, I went the enlisted route, and when you go the enlisted route you don't really make decisions. You're given the decision, like the decisions made for you and you execute. And that was a very tough pill for me to swallow when I got into the military. It was a reality check for me and it was a mental burden .

But after going through the process and speaking with mental health professionals while I was in the military, which is very taboo, somewhat, I found out that I just needed an outlet to make decisions and to execute things on my own. So by starting my own business, that was my outlet and it was a breath of fresh air.

It really got me through that, that dark period of time.

Ebony: Wow. That is amazing. You know, I. A lot of people need those types of outlets, whether or not they realize it or recognize it. And I'm very thankful for, you know, your therapist to kind of guide you in that direction because now look at you now, that was your first business.

Now you're in your second business and you're employing people you know, helping spread the tax base. You are creating wealth. I mean, this is. So back to Tandem. Yes, ma'am. So how many employees do you have now?

Tevin Manuel: Currently we have seven and we're about to hire up eighth from the Wichita. One

more from the Wichita area next week.

Ebony: Yeah. Oh, wonderful. Congrats. That is, that's big time. And so who do you, who are your clients in Wichita? I mean, like, don't tell me their names, I guess. Are they only, let me rephrase it. Sorry. So who do you serve?

Tevin Manuel: Our primary customer base are gonna be universities. And colleges who don't have dedicated personnel for cybersecurity.

So that's our primary base. And then secondarily, we go after customers who are small businesses who need and have a regulatory compliance to have cybersecurity, but they can't quite afford the, the bigger names that are out there.

Ebony: And so how do you even convince people that they. Help with cybersecurity because a lot of people, you know, they, they're like, well until something bad happens, you know, and then it's too late and then it's gonna cost you way too much money.

Tevin Manuel: Absolutely. And that, unfortunately, that's sometimes what has to happen. So for a good size of our portion of our customers who are. They have regulatory compliance where they have to have it. So that's an easier conversation to have. But with smaller businesses, it's a lot more challenging. So we put our name out there and instead of going, Hey, let us provide this service to you, we just go, Hey, if you ever need us, reach out to us because I, I can't claim this term, but I use it all the time.

It's not a matter. If it happens, it's when it happens, and we just want them to know that they have a partner that can work with them.

Ebony: I, I wish we could like scream it from the mountaintops and let everyone know you need to be proactive as opposed to being reactive. Right. And I, I, I just, I don't know what that magic pill is to get people to recognize that, but I'm certain you'll get there and you'll be able to spread that story in, in a more effective way.

Yes, ma'am.

Don: Dawn. Excellent. What gave you the audacity of it? Think you wanted to start a business? I mean, was that your childhood dream or was it just the sign of it? The times and it was right place, right time.

Tevin Manuel: It was both childhood dream. Third grade, I planned out all my life goals. Become the president of the third grade own my own computer company, become the president of the United States.

Be some form of military slash law enforcement. I've checked two of those boxes so far, so we'll

see where the, we'll see where the other goes.

Ebony: But the presidency goes ,

Tevin Manuel: yeah, about that one back. That may just be the Senate. We'll see where that one goes. But no it. It's

Don: dope

Tevin Manuel: But in [00:10:00] regards to the audacity to start the business, that's a really good question. And the reason I bring it up reiterated is because in 2020 is when I started Tandem. It was in the height of the pandemic and mm-hmm. had job offers lined up for other organizations. And my first customer, this was up to a board vote if they're gonna be my first customer, not

So no job at all waiting for a board to vote for it one way or the other . And then turned down the other two jobs prior to knowing what the board was gonna vote. So it was a, wow, it was a scary feeling, , but ultimately it worked out.

Don: What, what was, what was the vote? Five, four, .

Tevin Manuel: It was . It was actually unanimous.

So I was, I was concerned for no reason, but

Don: Excellent. Excellent. So, You mentioned what your company does. I mean, is ransomware in, in your wheelhouse or is that too small of a thing you guys, for you guys to mess with too small of a thing, ?

Tevin Manuel: No sir, it is. That's actually how we got a consortium of schools.

A school wasn't our customer at all, but they knew who we were . And they contacted us saying, Hey, this is what happened. And we were able to quickly go on the ground and help them start resolving the issue prior to their insurance company sending in someone. So we were able to help and start getting through the wall rolling and getting things taken care of to stop the spread before their cybersecurity insurance provided incident response team.

So that's definitely in our wheelhouse to also mitigate that from happening. To protect your environment, but also respond.

Ebony: Wow. Cyber security, insurance, security, I. He said cybersecurity insurance. I didn't even know that was a thing. Yeah.

Tevin Manuel: Yeah. That's a thing that is just like hurricane or flood insurance or whatnot.

Ebony: It's a thing. Or flooding. Yeah.

Don: Wow. Excellent. Do you think you're successful?

Tevin Manuel: No, sir. Today I think we're, I think we're doing a good job. I think we're doing a good job. I think we're servicing our customer. I think we have a, we have a few more bounds, a few more bounds declined before I think we are successful.

Success I'm defining in our eyes is getting our customers to a point to where they're progressive. Getting 'em to a point to where they're not being reactive. , they're able to foresee things and able to take care of those things. So that's my metric for success in this case. Excellent.

Don: Excellent.

Ebony: Yeah, I, so that's, I, I thank you for describing what that what, what success looked like to you, cuz that's, it's different for everyone, right?

Mm-hmm. . So I, I appreciate that definition and allowing us to understand that thought process. Well, friends, we're gonna hear a word from our sponsors, and then we're gonna come back and hear more from Tevin.

Welcome back friends. We're here with Tandem cyber operations and our friend Te Manuel. So te you decided you're not from Wichita originally, right?

Tevin Manuel: I am not. I'm from Jackson, Tennessee.

Ebony: See from Tennessee and now you are considered a Wichitan. I'm curious, you know, cuz I always love to hear this story and I love the success stories of people who come here and then decide to make Wichita their home.

My question to you is why Wichita, not just to make it your home, but to operate a business in.

Tevin Manuel: Wichita has such a great community. It has a big city vibe despite what many people may think has a really big city vibe, but also the community type vibe as well. The talent that's there is amazing. I know it's called the aircraft capital of the world, but there's such, so many tech circles there that are starting to form these bigger groups rather than these silos.

And a lot of tech talent is coming into the area as well from the base to supporting these larger organizations. So I, that's why Wichita has a really good place to start a really good business from the ground up and have really good talent surrounding you to help you grow and scale.

Ebony: Yeah. That, that's awesome.

And it looks like you've grown as well and was able to successfully find that talent here in the Wichita area.

Tevin Manuel: Yes, ma'am. We were we were very lucky to find really good personnel, .
[00:15:00]

Ebony: That's great. So you had can you kind of describe to us what your, what your business brand is?

Tevin Manuel: Yes, ma'am. We're named Tandem, so after like a tandem bicycle because we are partners with.

We partner with the organization because a huge thing in the IT world is replacing jobs with automation or with an outsourced company. We want to make sure that we emphasize even with our name that we are partnering with your organization. We're not making decisions for you, we're making decisions with you.

We're helping you understand what risk is. We're helping you understand how to make risk informed decisions as well, so we don't come in there as a. If your organization's looking for a turnkey solution, it just does it all for you. We're not that, we're not that solution but we are there for you to make decisions with and to help you grow as well.

Ebony: I love that. That is, that's perfect. And speaking of partnerships and working with, let's talk about the Chamber. Yes. So you've been a member of the Chamber since your inception, is that correct?

Tevin Manuel: Not since our inception, unfortunately. I would say the year after our inception.

Ebony: Yes. And so what are the things that the, the resources and tools and that you use from the Chamber?

The Chambers, this podcast, obviously.

Tevin Manuel: The podcast is a great one, but also being able to see what other businesses are in the area and what they're doing, being able to communi. With the community and network with them as well. Not in a matter of just trying to grow the business, but also trying to understand what's in our landscape and where we as tandem need to be posturing to better help that community.

So it's a great way for us to see what's going on in that environment.

Ebony: I love that. I love that. Don.

Don: Excellent. You've been here for a little bit in Wichita. Who are the local folks, if any, that you take your inspiration from?

Tevin Manuel: That's a really good question. Andrew Gough from Reverie, seeing Reverie's transformation, moving from a smaller space to a larger space, seeing what they've done, that's been a huge inspiration to seeing what can be done in the Wichita environment and what it takes to be a part of the community and give to that community.

I would say another one is Groover Labs. I've been really inspired by them because that's something I've always wanted to see in Wichita when I was. Workspace, a makerspace a, a space to where you can come together and just build things out. So I would say those two have been really instrumental in that area of motivating and inspiring.

Ebony: Yeah. I remember the conversation you and I had and when I saw Groove doing exactly what you said, you know, we need, I was like, ah, yes, we're winning .

Tevin Manuel: We're doing it.

Don: Nice. That's, yeah. Excellent. What about nationally? Anybody you look up to, that's. You wanna be like that when you grow up nationally?

Tevin Manuel: Besides naming the big tech companies, I, I, I'm really admire Google and what they do and what they stand for and how they do it. And I really like the presence of Microsoft. And I know those are two really big national companies and everyone looks at them like the pie in the sky, but the ability for them to be able to recruit and retain such good talent and to be able to make such good product.

Really inspires us and their culture is something that we really look forward to. So we really appreciate their culture and we try to embody that culture in our smaller team.

Don: Excellent. Back to Wichita. What about our ecosystem would you change in Wichita the business ecosystem?

Tevin Manuel: I would stop trying to spread out the, the business ecosystem so much.

I would try to build closer together like more of a community hub, I would say. What I see in Wichita is we're expanding on the east side. We're expanding on the west side, but we're not really developing our downtown as much, and I think the more we develop on top of each other building up, we can better communicate with each other better run into each other.

There's one book I really like called The Idea Factory. It's about at and t or Bell Labs at the time and how they moved to a new headquarters. And how 3M and Kodak and Bell Labs help all

their engineers went and talk to each other after work, just together hanging out in the Wichita environment. That's, that's really tough.

You have to drive and meet up somewhere. You just don't have those. Rent to each other and have those good technical discussions. Mm-hmm. .

Ebony: Yeah. So that's this, you know, that's the same thing that James Chung said when he was here and he did his research. We don't have those natural collision spaces that, that are available to us.

And I think that would help solve it, right? If it's we're building this way as opposed to this way, and we have that concentrated area where those natural collisions where it happen and you just run into them at the coffee shop or at the ice [00:20:00] cream or at the bar, just whatever that may be. To create that next idea.

Absolutely.

Don: Excellent. That is true. One more question. You got this company, you got seven employees rolling around and making good money. I added that part, . What's next on your frontier?

Tevin Manuel: So, providing cybersecurity services for the, the public. For example, if you have an issue at home, you kind of have a few options and the police department's not one.

If you get ran somewhere at home or if you get a virus at home and you call Wichita Police Department, they're not gonna be able to help you. They're actually gonna refer you and you can go to the Internet crime center and you can form a complaint there. But the FBI's gonna take that as they can, and Geek Squad's just gonna fix it, and charge you a good portion of money for it.

But who's there to help you with the preventative side? Who's there to tell you, Hey, here are the secure options that your bank has available to you. Or, Hey, did you know your password is already exposed and being in your usernames with it? So I think the next team we're gonna try to do is figure out a way that we could automate and leverage working with closer to people in the community on a normal scale and not on a business scale.

So just consumer. And how we can better help protect the population that way.

Ebony: Well, you can test it with me. I'm free and available to give you feedback for services .

Don: Absolutely. Keep that in mind. That is true. And that brings up a good point. You know personally I use Norton and is it true or false that when they say your name or. Something has already been exposed on the blacklist or is that a marketing thing or is that fact

Tevin Manuel: It's both. The likelihood that your information is not on the dark web is very little. Like if it's, it's very little. It's not there and, but it's also a marketing tactic as well. And they want you to get you to, they want you to buy their product, they want you to subscribe to those.

But one thing that they're not providing you is a remedy. Like how do you actually change that behavior? How do you actually prevent it from happening again to the best of your abilities? And that's something that we haven't found any singular product to be able to do because that requires human interaction, not just a product to get to.

Don: Gotcha. So one more question. I know I said that before, but one more question. How, how does your. Get on these dark lists. I mean, is it cuz they breach something and Yeah. They just keep on adding to this. Every time there's a breach, a new breach adds that data to a dark list or what's going on there.

Tevin Manuel: That's exactly what it is. You go to a website, that company gets breached, that data gets downloaded, it gets shared among various groups and re-downloaded and re-downloaded. And some people combine it all into one. Database dump. And then they had that wow data set to go based off of and search for based on your user name.

So that is one option or one avenue of it. So picking your vendors is very important and then having throwaway accounts is very important as well. That's one thing we recommend is you create a throwaway account. So you can name it Netflix, you can name it, home Depot. You can name it whatever at your own personal domain dot.

And you have a unique password with it. So that way if that account gets breached, it's one, you know it was that account, but secondly, it's not your primary account. So that way you can reserve your sensitive accounts to your banks and things of that nature, but to other accounts that, ah, someone got into my Netflix.

Okay, just change your password. That way it doesn't cross boundaries. Interesting.

Don: Okay. You got any more questions?

Ebony: One more before we wrap it up. So you talk about your employees and you talk about, you know, your method of learning and getting certifications and things like that. Let's talk about the culture that you've created with your, with your group.

I know that because you are, you guys are mainly remote and do a lot of different things. Sounds like you guys aren't doing like, Six day a week deal, or a five day a week? How, what does the culture look like for you guys?

Tevin Manuel: Yeah. We are actually working towards a four day work week with the fifth day

being a hybrid day.

So that fifth day is focused on you to go to lunch with your, like, actually everyone who has children on our team has a daughter, at least one, everyone who does have children. Wow. So it's go have lunch with your daughter today, or what is that professional development you wanted? Or hey, there's just some things you have to do during the week that you can't do during the week and you normally have [00:25:00] to take time off for mm-hmm.

So we're trying to focus that one day to be for them to take time for themselves, and then the other four days that we are working together to get the job done. And that's the type of culture that we're trying to build, and it's burn in our areas very high, and it's very easy to get burned on our area.

That's one way we're trying to combat with that.

Ebony: That's what's up. So is it they get to choose whatever that that fifth day is, or is it all everyone? I mean, like, so mine is Monday, his is Wednesday. Does it vary? I mean like it's not, is it strict? Like I always have to take Wednesday?

Tevin Manuel: No, it's not very strict.

We try to put 'em on Fridays and Wednesdays. So that way we kind have some natural breaks there, but it's not very strict in that regard. We're very flexible and work with you as long as we have the coverage to make sure we get the job done and be there for our customers. It's pretty flexible.

Ebony: Yeah, I guess you kind of have to be there for the customer side.

Yes. That's important. Well done.

Don: Excellent. Well, we appreciate you coming through. You've dealt with Ebony long enough and now it's time to have some fun. But first I wanna say thank you for referring to her as Ma'am . She thinks she's rolling at 25.

Ebony: Everyone as ma'am and sir, I knows in the military

Don: D about that , we're not talking about his military.

He's trying to make, so we're talking about you being a. We truly appreciate you coming through. We're gonna have some fun with some word association. I'll give you one word. You gimme one word back. That's not wrong cuz it's your word. Are you ready? I am ready. Oh, okay. Here we go. Leader.

Tevin Manuel: Follower.

Don: Success.

Tevin Manuel: Life.

Don: College.

Tevin Manuel: Fun .

Don: Failure.

Tevin Manuel: Blue.

Don: Did you say blue liked the color?

Tevin Manuel: Blue Liked the color.

Don: Okay. Can you, why did you say blue? I'm sorry, I had to ask it.

Tevin Manuel: Yeah, it's just you sticking some childhood books that I read and like you feel sad and you're feeling blue, like you're.

Don: Oh, okay. Mm-hmm. .

Ebony: Gotcha. And happiness is yellow and bright colors.

Don: Gotcha. Yeah, I see. Entrepreneur.

Tevin Manuel: Fun. Fun.

Don: Wichita.

Tevin Manuel: I immediately see the keeper of the planes, but if I had to pick one word, I'm gonna say. I can't say one word. And I was gonna say, not too bad. It's not too bad.

Don: We'll just not too bad. We'll go at keeper. Refer to it as a keeper. So, vacation.

Tevin Manuel: Oh, Pacific Northwest Washington.

Don: Nice. Hero.

Tevin Manuel: Hero. It was Colin Powell.

Don: Wow. That's a good one. Wichita Chamber.

Tevin Manuel: I think parties, every time I've been spend event, it's been fun. .

Don: Ebony had to be there, I'm sure, but family comfort, fun driving. Last but not least, you gotta tell the truth about this. Beverage.

Tevin Manuel: Beverage. Kirk and Sweeney Rum.

Don: Kirk and Sweeney.

That sounds upscale.

Ebony: Too upscale for us.

Don: Kirk and Sweeney. I'm gonna have to Google that. Yeah. Thank you for coming through, my man. Truly appreciate you being here.

Tevin Manuel: Thank you all very much for your time.

Ebony: Of course it was fun, Tevin and I appreciate it. Good seeing you. Hope to have coffee with you soon or some of this fancy rum.

Don: Kirk and Sweeney. Yeah. Oh yeah, that Bo. Some of that bougie

Ebony: Well, friends, we've come to the end of today's segment. If you would please make sure that you like it and share it. Please send this to someone who might find value in hearing TE's story and let us know who you wanna hear from next Till next time, peace.