

Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator

Episode 97

Maddie Butler

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Don and Ebony: [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. We truly appreciate you checking us out and the house E can audio visual. Yes. I'm really excited today because we have Miss Maddie in the house.

How's it going?

Maddie Butler: It's going pretty good. Going pretty good.



Don and Ebony: Yes. Well, tell us who you are and what you do.

Maddie Butler: Yeah, so my name's Maddie Butler and I'm the general manager for Kent Audio Visual.

Don and Ebony: So what does that mean? Like what

Maddie Butler: Yeah. A little bit of everything. So it's kind of funny. As a small business, I feel like our general manager title needs like an explanation. Yeah. Cause 150 different roles. So, kind of it's all of the C-suite.

It is, hr, everything you could think of. Also. Repair person.

Don and Ebony: Repair

Maddie Butler: Yeah, repair person. I'm getting pretty good at the repairs, so, probably not certified, that's why we hire people now. So, Yeah. So take care of all that. And then I'm also a big presence in our sales and service side, cuz I have a big passion there.

So, Yeah. Okay.

Don and Ebony: So from what I know about you, which is, I mean like, weren't you like in music

theater or something?

Maddie Butler: I was, Yeah. Yep. So I started, it's kind of funny. So my career started in, in live events, but in live theater. So I went to college for letting design and theatrical management, which translates to a lot of what I do now, but I'm not putting on a show of my fair lady three times a a week at our office. I think we could.

But, Yeah. So I started, I started in the arts before I went to corporate.

Don and Ebony: What college?

Maddie Butler: Wichita State University.

Don and Ebony: Good. All right. Go Shocks. I like that. That's, that's awesome. Did you grow up

Maddie Butler: I did grow

Don and Ebony: What? High school?

Maddie Butler: So I went to Trinity Academy for a couple years and I finished out at Heights High School. Hollywood? Yeah, Hollywood

Don and Ebony: I see you. I guess it's okay. Long as it wasn't southeast, it's all good.

Southeast had the best productions. Okay. Gold dust. I

Maddie Butler: Yeah.

Don and Ebony: don't have a question.

Maddie Butler: to Southeast and so, when we first started dating, I got to watch all of their gold dust performances from he and his brother. So,

Don and Ebony: And that's pretty spectacular. Yeah. And, and, You married a good one. I tell you that

Maddie Butler: I think I did.

Don and Ebony: Yeah, you did well. You did well. So, okay.

From Music Theater to Kent Audio Visual, did you ever think that you'd be doing this?

Maddie Butler: No. If you would've asked me 10 years ago where I'd be today, I would've said I'd

be on tour somewhere. Wow. Yeah. And

Don and Ebony: When did you start with Kent?

Maddie Butler: So, I started seven years ago at Kent, so I think like 2016. Okay.

Don and Ebony: Seven years ago.

But Kent Audio and Visual, everyone knows that name. Right? It's been a part of Wichita for like ever.

Maddie Butler: Yeah. Yep. We actually turned 50 next year, so yeah.

Don and Ebony: 50 years. Okay. So tell us, I, I, I'm interested. And you getting started with them. just because for my personal knowledge, you were like, Okay, I'm gonna transition from live things and I wanna now make this a different part of my career.

So what did that look like?

Maddie Butler: So a big push for me was I was looking for, you know, it kind of sounds hooking back at it. I kind of laugh cuz it was, I wanted to transition to somewhere that had basic 40 hours a week and health insurance and those kind of things and still let me tap into a lot of my passion. And my husband at the time, he worked there but wasn't the one that was trying to recruit me.

It was actually another gentleman that I had worked with in theater previously that moved from theater to corporate av and he was really enjoy it.

And really sold me on, on that transition, cuz I still do a lot of our shows as well. So I get to design things for clients. So it's not, we still get to do creative things.

It might not be a, a full scale musical, but people's events are just as important. So that was intriguing to me. And why kind of made that ultimate leap? So,

Don and Ebony: And so what all of the services do you guys provide?

Maddie Butler: Oh, so many. So we've got a really, I think what most people know us for is our large rental and staging side. So big shows, meetings. events, all kinds of things like that. But then we also have a sales installation and service side, so we can redo your conference rooms, change how you guys look at AV in your space and how end users use it. But one of our coolest, kind of like little known things that we do is media preservation. So we'll take old [00:05:00] VHS or film reels and convert it and digitize it so you can preserve your memories for your family.

Don and Ebony: Oh, wow. Yeah. Don, you hear that?

Bring out those VHS tapes. What do have betas,

Maddie Butler: We do, I dunno, anything about

Don and Ebony: vhs, beta,

Maddie Butler: track or

Don and Ebony: Anything? That's good to know.

Maddie Butler: your sketchbooks too, if that's how you're still capturing in your

Don and Ebony: not sketchbook. She said sketchbook one when they like,

Maddie Butler: Yeah. Those flip books.

Don and Ebony: Oh, that's hilarious. No. Well, I thank you for you know, bringing this up today. Don't what they do cuz you're right. Most of the time, anytime we have anything Right, we call you guys and you do the stage and you do the sound and you get us.

Right. One of, one of Don's biggest pet pee. Is going to an event in the sound, in the audio and the, just the visuals are all messed up. Yeah. Does that r cue as well?

Maddie Butler: Oh it it does.

I have trouble going to things cuz I always feel like I'm working. But yeah, I mean your event is only as good as if people can hear it. Right? It can be as pretty as it is, but if they can't understand what they're saying exactly. Might as well go home.

Don and Ebony: Exactly. One thing Ken AV does not do is, mobile, automobile. Correct. Okay. Just wanna make sure our neighbors do

Maddie Butler: our neighbors do at the radio shops

Don and Ebony: shop. Okay.

Maddie Butler: constantly sending people over there. Yeah.

Don and Ebony: Yeah, y'all should be okay. Does it go both ways?

Maddie Butler: It does, yeah.

Don and Ebony: Okay. Excellent. Excellent. You never know how that story goes. I mean, sometimes it's one way deal. You, you've been there since oh six, no. 16. Mm-hmm. , Did you come in as a gm?

Maddie Butler: I did not. So I actually started, as an inventory manager, but basically was just kind of ended up as a front admin.

and then identified a bunch of ways that we could increase our customer service and just hit the ground running. And then it was kind of just history. So,

Don and Ebony: So, I mean, how did they, how did the owners of Kent know that you wanted to be the gm or they, were they grooming you to be the GM and you just didn't know it?

Maddie Butler: I don't, I don't know if they were grooming me as much as I think that they saw, the change in progress that we had had.

So really a lot in the last six years, we've gone through a rebrand, maybe not necessarily a logo rebrand, but a rebrand in how we approach customer service. And we weren't having large employee turnovers because I was pushing for us to add some programs for the employees that were there. So I think that they saw, if I was to mind read, I think that they saw a lot of that progress and realized that it would be a better fit, a better fit for the organization.

Don and Ebony: When you say programs, what do you mean by that?

Maddie Butler: Oh. So we've, we're definitely doing stuff totally different than most of the people in our industry. So we do a lot of employee outings together, trying to do that during company time.

We have got mental health support and help for our employees, So, yeah, it is. Yeah, it is. And if you kind of think, of think about the entertainment industry as a whole, you know, kind of, for lack of a better term, think of sex, drugs, and rock and roll, right? Like there's a lot of addiction issues, different things, especially when you work long hours, making sure people are taken care of that way.

So we do just like little benefit things and have snacks in our break room all the time. And you

Don and Ebony: I I like snacks

Maddie Butler: Yeah, everybody loves snacks, like

Don and Ebony: Just

Maddie Butler: employee retention, snacks,

Don and Ebony: Right. So I know it's kind of obvious, but probably not. What does your business solve when folks come to Kent AV? What do you do?

Maddie Butler: I think? It's different in each one of our areas, but it's almost all the same. So it's helping tell a story or solve a problem with their technology.

So on our event side, we're. It's still storytelling. Whether or not it's the storytelling of celebrating their people for the year, or if it's a telling the story of why people need to donate to the cause that evening, or simply just awareness on the install side. We help different places tell their story and how they want their end users to interact, or what the impression they want people from the outside coming into their space.

So whether or not that be huge informational boards when they walk in, or just how good they look on a Zoom call.

Don and Ebony: So when, Cause I notice you folks over the years have worked with a lot of non-profit organizations. Is there, do you like, have a non-profit department or whatever? Cause seem like you do a lot

Maddie Butler: No, we don't have a department, but it's so important to us, right? So if we want the community to invest in us, we have to invest into that community.

So we just have a really big heart for nonprofits and making sure that they can tell their story to the best of their ability.

Don and Ebony: I think what you guys do is great.

What I'm really interested in is like the e d walls that you do. Mm-hmm. . Let's talk about that, cuz that makes everything like really pop. Like who can you do, Can you do that in my house? I mean, like we

Maddie Butler: Actually? We could. Yeah, we can. So, yeah. I mean, it can go anywhere with the right amount of money

Don and Ebony: Well, I mean, well that part, yeah, the details that, that, Well, I don't know how my husband's gonna feel about that, but I mean,

Maddie Butler: he like sports or is We just started with his favorite movie,

Don and Ebony: I mean, Yeah. [00:10:00] So how, how long ago did you guys start implementing this piece?

Maddie Butler: So I know they had invested in LED Wall right when I had started, so at least six years ago, seven years ago. And it's just grown as, it's kind of more like with technology, right?

When computers first came out, not everybody, it wasn't as accessible or easy to use. And now the newer LED wall that's out is very, very easy to use, very to set up, very economical, to set up and tear down a bunch of times.

Don and Ebony: So of help help us understand what an LED wall is,

Maddie Butler: Because the best way to describe it, it's a bunch of pieces, like a bunch of panels that are almost like their own little TV that get put together, like Lego pieces.

Don and Ebony: Oh, you. Got you.

Maddie Butler: To make however big or small Okay. That you want, and then you need to create your graphics. To whatever that size is. So they look really good. cuz with graphics, potato and potato out. So if you're making it on Microsoft paint, it might not be

Don and Ebony: Yay. It will not work.

Maddie Butler: yeah. And we don't have a, a don't suck button with it.

Don and Ebony: Nice. Nice. That is funny. So is that a in inside deal or outside?

Maddie Butler: Both. You can, it can be both. It can be anything.

Don and Ebony: to remember if I've seen them outside. You guys did one like for, for the symphony, didn't you? Kind of like, or maybe not. Did I make this up?

Maddie Butler: No. So they have, we've done inside for the symphony, so yeah. So we've done inside for the symphony. Mm-hmm.

Don and Ebony: she has to watch cuz she'll make something up and I, you know, sometimes I do, but I feel like this one was real

Maddie Butler: Yeah. Nice.

Don and Ebony: Well, Maddie, I appreciate it. We're gonna go hear a word from our sponsor and then we'll be back with. Okay. Welcome back friends. We're here with Ken Audio Visual. We're here with Miss Maddie Butler, and she's telling us a little bit about her organization and, and what they've been doing. So, Maddie, what I did not realize, and maybe tell me if this is true or not. Is Kent Audio Visual woman owned?

Maddie Butler: It is woman, fully woman owned and woman operated. Wow.

Don and Ebony: Did it, did you know that Don? Nope. Had no clue. That's pretty dope. Like let's talk about that a little bit because you don't ever one, you know, it's a male dominated field it seems like, and I don't know that we've ever shouted this from the rooftops. This is big.

Maddie Butler: It is huge. So it's, it's definitely makes me a minority in the field, just because it is such a male dominated industry.

Don and Ebony: But having both a woman owner and woman operator is huge. is that is, that's phenomenal. Are you the only one the in Wichita.

Maddie Butler: No, we're, So, Wichita is kind of a really unique place because McClellan is also woman owned, a woman operated. That's correct.

Don and Ebony: Is correct.

Yeah. We, we, we had her on

Maddie Butler: Of my heroes. Yeah, she's cool.

An og. Yeah, she is an og, so,

Don and Ebony: for sure. Okay. Well, yeah, that, this is great.

Maddie Butler: Yeah. Which tells a really great place to grow cuz it's not like that anywhere else.

Don and Ebony: Uhhuh. I would agree. I would agree. Now I know that you guys have been members of the Chamber for a number of years and great supporters, right?

So what are some of the things and reasons, why you support the Chamber?

Maddie Butler: Man, Chamber is so cool.

And it kinda goes back to what I said earlier, like, people who invest in their community, then the community will want to invest in them. And Chamber is so great because it connects businesses that. Really small, starting out to like the big giants and creates those bridges, which I really like and gives opportunities to just immerse yourself and then also learn a lot about how to network and how to do those things.

So we've leaned a lot on those resources. As a small business, it's a great investment. I think if you're not investing in your chamber, then you're not doing something correct in your business. And I've had that conversation with our ownership before about why it's important to do that.

Cause where else are you gonna get all those resources for your investment?

Don and Ebony: Yeah. Where else are you gonna get a cool podcast like this? I mean, I mean, yeah. I mean that next time lead off with that. Yeah. and your next conversation.

I'm just saying and get to hang out with Ebony too.

Maddie Butler: Mm-hmm.

Don and Ebony: mean, you know that you can't, you can't beat that . so you do a lot of the Chamber shows though,

Maddie Butler: Yeah, we sure do. Yeah, We do their, Oh my goodness. I think. Almost everything. So we do the annual meeting every year, which is, has been fun last year with the shakeup where we got to go to the arena and kind of reinvent what that backdrop looked like since it was one of the first biggest, you know, first big get togethers, post covid.

So that was fun. It's really great to work with the chamber cuz they let us throw some new [00:15:00] ideas out there to be creative and spice it up.

Don and Ebony: Do you do honors night?

Did you do honors? Last year.

no we didn't. So that's, Yeah,

Don and Ebony: Didn't have to work with Ebony on that. It was, it was brutal.

Maddie Butler: Oh, I bet, I bet it was brutal

Don and Ebony: Oh my. Wow. Right. I'll, the excellent, you talk about how you love, you know, partnering with the Chamber, how you love Wichita, but we're of course not perfect. What can Wichita do to get better, especially in its ecosystem.

And how can it help your business?

Maddie Butler: Yeah, I think one of my biggest pet peeves with Wichita sometimes is for as much as people scream from the rooftops to shop local, they won't. And that's a hill I will die on.

So

Don and Ebony: Right. She feels strongly about that. Everyone

Maddie Butler: it's, you know, cuz there's some things it's like, so for example, for a transfer service, yeah, you can mail, you can mail your family memories off somewhere, but are they gonna take care of it? Are they gonna be accountable for it? you know, so I think.

Don and Ebony: Some safety by shopping local and knowing the people that you're working with. So explain that. Transfer service some more so we can get people towards what exactly is transfer service?

Maddie Butler: Oh, yeah. So it's, it's taking all your old media formats. Okay. so film, vhs, tape cassettes. We've had cool things where it's the only recording of their grandparents that they have to share with their family and modernizing it and putting it on a DVD or a flash drive or something they can download and send to their family.

And I wouldn't wanna trust. Like somebody from a big box store in Arizona to, to handle any of

Don and Ebony: Plus you gotta get it there.

Maddie Butler: Yeah. You gotta mail it and hope that it gets there. Right. so I think that's, that's one of the things I struggle with. I'm like, man, if you're gonna stay shop local, come local to get these solutions.

But

Don and Ebony: So you're saying they could just get in their car and come down and bring you their precious artifacts or gifts or whatever, and you, you'll take care of

Maddie Butler: of. Yeah, and you know, sometimes we get like 40 hours of Law and Order svu we're like, Hey, this is 40 Hours Law and Order svu.

Don and Ebony: I love is Law and order, though

Maddie Butler: But then there's some cool footage that people have gotten where they've.

They've never met their great-grandparents. That was the only opportunity to see them. Or some great historical pieces that we've encouraged people to turn into the local library museum for people to enjoy later. It's just incredible what people can find in their basement.

Don and Ebony: But like, what if it's on an apparatus that like no longer plays or like, you

Maddie Butler: we can take, most of anything we can do.

Don and Ebony: 8 a track.

Yep. I mean like, Okay. Well that's interesting cuz there's, Oh, I think I have a project for you.

Maddie Butler: Okay.

Don and Ebony: Don't run away when you see me coming to the store. Wow. So shopping local where folks they. Do you think? Do you think folks don't know that you provide that service or they hear something that's advertised and you can send it in real quick? Yeah. Makes it sound easy and send it back.

Maddie Butler: I think, I think it's both. So what's also blown my mind is that for us being around for almost 50 years, sometimes people still don't know exists.

Don and Ebony: And so like like kinda looping back into why the Chamber's so great. It's great to be able to go to Expo and go to those things and have like a purpose to be like, Hey, I'm here. Still here.

Maddie Butler: Yeah, still here, but anymore we get a lot of, Oh, I can get that on Amazon. Or there's a YouTube video on how to do it or,

Don and Ebony: not.

Maddie Butler: yeah, just like some of those things it's like, man, yeah.

Like yeah.

Don and Ebony: You only have one time to mess that up.

Maddie Butler: Exactly.

Don and Ebony: Wow. Okay. You mentioned you've been around 50 years. What's next on the Kent AV horizon that you can. Well, how, where do you see can a in five years?

Maddie Butler: Oh man. I think that we're gonna continue growing, so we've increased staff numbers post Covid, which. Been incredible. Even with kind of the shortage that our industry is facing.

Analysts are suspecting that it'll take roughly 10 years for us to get back to pre covid levels because our industry functions so highly in like apprentice internship kind of rotation, and that all got messed up when people retired and people weren't app apprenticing and. So I think, I think our staff will have, you know, double or tripled at this point.

I mean, we've already tripled since pre pandemic, so we're like nailing it, I feel. But, and I really think that we'll just continue to be a good beacon of how to function in the enter entertainment

industry because we do things so totally different, than other places. So we really value our workers and strive to do so.

Don and Ebony: Now you've been here 50 years, have there, if you can share, has there been any opportunity to think about expanding outside of Wichita?

Maddie Butler: So they did at one point in time. Oh, they did. So they did. So at one point in time, Ken Audiovisual was, part of a larger group called J&S Audiovisual, and they were all over, I think they even had a branch, the Caribbean.

yeah. So they did a lot of hotel work and then, the owners, it was maybe three or four years before I started, they decided to buy the the business.

Maddie Butler: Not back, but you know, [00:20:00] separate, separated out mm-hmm. . So that way they could kind of extend their legacy here as a local legacy. So yeah. Yeah.

Don and Ebony: It definitely is a local legacy. Yeah, exactly. You dealt with Ebony long enough. It's been brutal. I know , but now it's time to have some fun, some word association. I give you one word. You gimme one word back. It's not wrong because it's your word. Are you ready?

Maddie Butler: I am ready.

Don and Ebony: Like, she's born ready.

She was looking at me like, Yeah. She's like, Come on, this is not luck guy. Exactly. You know who I am. Okay.

Maddie Butler: Leader.

I thought I was ready, but there's so many words and I gotta pick one word.

Leader. Path shaper.

Don and Ebony: Success.

Maddie Butler: Good legacy.

Don and Ebony: College.

Maddie Butler: Unnecessary.

Don and Ebony: Failure.

Maddie Butler: Growth.

Don and Ebony: I thought you say necessary.

Maddie Butler: Oh yeah. Necessary.

Don and Ebony: Entrepreneur.

Maddie Butler: Innovator.

Don and Ebony: Mm-hmm. , excellent. Wichita.

Maddie Butler: Home.

Don and Ebony: Vacation.

Maddie Butler: What is that? Just

Don and Ebony: Nice.

Maddie Butler: Relaxing.

Don and Ebony: Hero.

Maddie Butler: My parents.

Don and Ebony: Oh, . It's nice you. Wichita Chamber.

Maddie Butler: Lifeblood.

Don and Ebony: Hmm. Wow. Yeah. Family.

Maddie Butler: Everything.

Don and Ebony: Fun.

Maddie Butler: Everywhere.

Don and Ebony: Last but not least, and you have to tell the truth. And I, I'm very interested in what you're gonna say.

Beverage. See we're on, not on radio, but you can't see what she does . She looking at, She's still looking at me.

me. What? Like

Her favorite? Yep. Gotta tell the truth. Pinky swear.

Maddie Butler: Man. It's like two, but

Don and Ebony: Nah. Okay. Yeah. Let us know.

Maddie Butler: Coffee

Don and Ebony: Okay.

Maddie Butler: or Hopping Gnome.

Don and Ebony: Hopping Gnome. Yes. I love that. Excellent. Thank you for coming in.

Nice to meet you. Thanks for having. Thank you for joining us. Make certain that you like us, love us, and share it amongst all your friends. Let us know who you wanna hear from next Till next time. Peace.