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Episode 487: Thinking Ahead: Building an Employer Brand Air Date: March 8, 2023

[0:00:06] **Jason Stowell:** I am eager to present to you our quarterly Thinking Ahead show with host Jason Stowell. Jason delivers a stellar interview about employee engagement in this tight labor market. Stay tuned for another educational episode from the Fitness Business podcast. Looking to learn more about the Fitness Business podcast and our guests, follow us on LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook for weekly updates. Oh, and I almost forgot.

[0:00:39] **Jason Stowell:** As we head into 2023, we are looking for feedback, so please head to itunes to leave us a review.

[0:00:56] **Jason Stowell:** Today we welcome Richard Hadden. Richard is a certified speaking professional who focuses connecting people to profit. He is co author of the popular Contented Cows Leadership book series, including his latest book, Contented Cows Still Give Better Milk and also Rebooting Leadership.

[0:01:12] **Jason Stowell:** Getting excited? Yeah. Me too. Jason is about ready to start his episode with Richard in just a few minutes. First, a huge thank you to Hapana for supporting our show.

[0:01:25] **Hapana Rep:** This podcast is brought to you by Hapana. Hapana is a cutting edge membership management solution prioritizing insane engagement. Hapana puts your brand first so you can facilitate deep, meaningful connections with clients and members to book, pay, consume content and build community. Hapana partners with fitness brands in both the boutique and big box segments that want to drive efficient operations and maximum engagement with clients and members.

[0:01:55] **Hapana Rep:** And they do this by providing direct, world class support with a passionate team who cares about your success. To see how you can transform your brand, go to Habana.com and ask for a demonstration. Habana Engineered for Engagement.

[0:02:14] **Jason Stowell:** Jaron and his amazing team at Habana will be at this year's Ursa show. Make sure you stop by their trade show booth and say hello. But if not, go check out their website@www.hapana.com. You know, I like to throw in a little girl power every once in a while. Well, next week, Reena the cone is representing the women in the fitness industry as she delivers an inspiring episode. After today's interview, I'll introduce you to Reena, the founder and CEO of Passion Fit.

[0:02:48] **Jason Stowell:** MyZone has pioneered unique wearables with talking point technology that makes the difference reach more members of your community and keep them engaged for longer through motivation and gamification wherever they choose to work out in the gym, at home or outdoors, we're stronger together. Get in the zone@myzone.org. It is an honor and a privilege for me to hand over the mic to our Thinking Ahead host, Jason Stowell, along with his guest, Richard Hayden.

[0:03:22] **Jason Stowell:** Richard, welcome to the show. So I'm going to start off with the first question I got here. So can you tell our listeners just a little bit about yourself and your professional journey to today?

[0:03:30] **Richard Hadden:** Well, sure. I started out as a computer programmer and software designer a long time ago, before PCs and when I graduated from college and then I went to graduate school, the job market was pretty bleak and most people kind of took whatever was available, not necessarily what was their passion. And so I did that, and I did fine with it, but it really wasn't my passion. People were my passion. And so after a while, I had the opportunity to branch out on my own, and I had my own software consulting business, but my clients were asking me more and more to help them solve their people issues.

[0:04:08] **Richard Hadden:** We had the machines and the software taken care of, but they were asking me to help solve their people issues. I had an MBA and I guess a little bit more of a business orientation, so we did that. And then I started teaching at Jacksonville University, which is where I went to undergraduate school. And I said, I really like standing in front of people, but I can't afford to do this, but I really like it.

[0:04:31] **Richard Hadden:** And so I just kind of set myself up and decided that I was going to start researching and speaking and training and writing about the workplace and about the people part of the workplace. And so I did that. And then a few years after I got into that, I met a guy named Bill catlit. And Bill had been in on the ground floor of the Leadership Institute at FedEx in their early days, and he and I collaborated on our first book, which was called Contented Cows Give Better Milk. And since that day, I spent most of my professional time writing and speaking to audiences all over.

[0:05:12] **Richard Hadden:** I've been really lucky all over the world to talk with people about, here's how to create a great workplace, and here are the benefits of creating a great workplace. So it's been a real fun, fun journey, and the journey continues.

[0:05:25] **Jason Stowell:** That's excellent. So speaking of your books, especially Contented Cows, in a previous conversation you and I had, you shared this idea of building an employer brand. Can you tell us a little bit more about what that actually means and why it should matter to us?

[0:05:42] **Richard Hadden:** Yeah, great. Well, first of all, I should mention that the brand, Contented Cows, comes from Carnation Milk, and we use it with permission from Carnation and from Nestle that owns that. The books have absolutely nothing to do with cows. I want to be clear that our books are not about cows, and they're not saying that people should be compared to cows. That's not the point. The fact is that in the same way that Contented Cows do give better milk, and that's pretty well established, science satisfied, engaged people give better performances at work, and we find that it always finds its way to your customer, and that always finds its way to your bottom line.

[0:06:16] **Richard Hadden:** And so as we look at the labor market today and it's always been this way, Jason, but as we know, since the pandemic, everything has changed with respect to the workplace dynamics, the connection or the relationship between labor supply and labor demand. And so you really have to look at recruiting like marketing. And so if that's the case, then it's important for you to be identifiable to your prospects in the job market.

[0:06:48] **Richard Hadden:** And having an employer brand means that people know what you stand for. They know what they can expect if they come to work for you. And it keeps your organization at the top of the minds of people who are looking for, looking for a new position. Over the last, well, since the beginning of 2022, every single month, there have been about 4 million people in the United States who have left their jobs, have resigned.

[0:07:15] **Richard Hadden:** They've left voluntarily of their own accord. Most of them, the vast majority of them went on to another job. They didn't just go and sit at home. And so that tells us that the job search market is extremely active right now. One source says, and this is from a study that came out from Hierology in 2022, that the average job applicant today is looking at 16 different opportunities in every job search.

[0:07:45] **Richard Hadden:** So you've got to look better than 15 other organizations if you're hoping to be able to fill that position. So developing a brand, an employer brand, one that's very positive, that people can identify with and that they think about frequently, can be one of the most important steps in attracting people to your organization as a place to work, not just as a place to buy things.

[0:08:08] **Jason Stowell:** So I'm going to stick on that thought because I think that's a very important thing for my listeners to hear. So you discussed recruiting itself as a form of marketing, right. So can you help me better understand that concept and little nuances that

we can do as fitness business owners to really lean into rethinking about how we do recruiting as a marketing effort?

[0:08:29] **Richard Hadden:** Yeah, the whole relationship between the employer and the employee has really got to continue moving in a more positive direction. Throughout history, there has been contention, it's been an us versus them kind of a thing. It's extremely difficult to, number one, to run a business under that kind of environment, but also to attract the very best. Now you can attract, maybe not the very best, not the most skilled, not the most committed, not the most loyal, not the most hardworking people.

[0:09:02] **Richard Hadden:** You can attract people who don't really have a lot of options. But I think your listeners are looking to attract people who have a lot of options, and they want to pick you as their option. And so we have to really look at marketing, how you treat people before they even come in. So I always say treat your employees, treat your prospective employees as though they were a prospective customer. And how do you do for a prospective customer? You want to put your very best foot forward.

[0:09:37] **Richard Hadden:** You want to convince them that coming to buy from you is the very best decision they can make from all the competitors that you have. The very same thing happens in the employer employee environment and that is to convince the best people that you want that coming to work for you is going to be better for them in whatever ways that they're looking for, than going to work for one of your competitors for talent.

[0:10:03] **Richard Hadden:** So we have to think about not only competitors for business, but competitors for talent. That's especially true today as we're recording this. The US unemployment rate is 3.4%. It has not been that low since 1969. Many of your listeners were not even thought of in 1969. And so for most people's lives, this is the lowest unemployment rate we've had. There are simply too few people for too many jobs.

[0:10:40] **Richard Hadden:** And so you have got, you know, we're never going to solve the labor shortage with more people. It takes 21 years to, you know, to create a 21 year old, I think, right? And so we can't do it any faster than that. So the only option at this point that we have is to be better than the next guy or the next organization so that you can attract people and get them to come to work for you because they can't work everywhere.

[0:11:07] **Jason Stowell:** What a fascinating thought because I've been in the industry, fitness industry for 25 years and I've never really put the correlation of the materials I put out in regards to hiring is also a contact point of potentially recruiting. So it really is kind of a challenging my status quo. So let me ask then, what are a few specific things that you're seeing organizations do right now to improve the success they have with both recruiting and retention?

[0:11:40] **Richard Hadden:** Well, let's talk about recruiting first. And one of the most valuable pieces of property or pieces of real estate that anybody has is any business has is their website. And so few organizations are utilizing that nearly to its fullest extent when it

comes to looking for employees. So really need to capitalize on the value of something you already own, an asset that you have already invested in and that is your website.

[0:12:09] **Richard Hadden:** And four things that I think an employer's website needs to do. Number one, it needs to have a prominent careers tab right up at the front. Nobody's going to go digging and looking for oh gosh, they're looking for the word careers. And it needs to be near the top of the page, not down at the bottom. Secondly, it needs to create this employer brand. It needs to communicate your employer brand, whatever that is.

[0:12:34] **Richard Hadden:** Third, it needs to communicate your culture. People assume that people are going to find out how much they might get paid, what your benefits are, that kind of thing. They're going to look for that's all pretty cut and dried, but they're looking for your culture. Is this the kind of place where I'm going to be happy. Is this the kind of place where I can fit in? Is this the kind of place where I can do my very best work? They're going to look for that. And you can dip pick that on your website.

[0:12:56] **Richard Hadden:** And one of the best ways of doing that, which is the fourth thing, is through the use of video. So having video testimonials and things like that, where people can get a look at what it's like to work in your company. So that's one part of marketing. No organization today is going to try to market their products or services without doing so on their website, among other things. So that's one thing is a website, but just in terms of where do you look, there's all kinds of untapped resources that we probably haven't thought of. One would be what I call boomerang employees. These are people who used to work for you, and they left for some reason. Maybe they thought the pastures were going to be greener, but they weren't. Well, they're a little embarrassed to come back to you now and say, it really wasn't what I'd hoped it would be. Kind of come back and work for you. Well, you don't have time or you don't have the capacity to let people worry about being embarrassed. So just welcome them back to have that conversation. It doesn't necessarily hire them back, but go contact other people. Who knows what's happened during the pandemic? People might have left before the pandemic thing. Maybe the company they work for went out of business. Who knows?

[0:14:02] **Richard Hadden:** Get in touch with those people. Another would be people who are maybe runners up from before. You had one position, you had three or four good candidates. You can only hire one. Don't let those people get away forever. And again, if you think about that, this is marketing. If you're marketing to someone and they say, no, thank you, what do you do? Just drop them and never come back to them? No, you follow up.

[0:14:24] **Richard Hadden:** So the same thing with people who don't come to work for you. So those are just a couple of ideas.

[0:14:29] **Jason Stowell:** So, Richard, if you don't mind me circling back, you also mentioned retention. So what are some of the strategies that organizations can use to really keep our top talent?

[0:14:38] **Richard Hadden:** Well, I think one of the most important ones is this. They say we have a labor shortage. I'm not so sure we have as much of a labor shortage as we have an appreciation shortage. Think about any relationship you might have ever been, and the minute you start to feel taken for granted, you start looking for the exit from that relationship. The same thing happens at work. And so it's so easy because people come in and do the same good job every day and every day.

[0:15:04] **Richard Hadden:** But if you take folks for granted, they're going to look for a place where they're going to get more appreciation. So anything you can do to express your appreciation and it doesn't have to be elaborate and it doesn't have to be expensive. I did a series of polls over that during the course of the, during the course of the Pandemic when I was doing a lot of training and speaking online. And I polled over 2400 people to ask them how they liked to be thanked. And I gave them a list of eight things.

[0:15:33] **Richard Hadden:** The top thing was a handwritten thank you note from their manager and that beat time off without pay and a monetary gift card. So I mean, those kinds of things just say the words thank you. Don't let a good deed go unnoticed and unthanked say those words, but also look for ways to include the person in their family to show appreciation, not only to individuals, but to your entire team, to your entire group, things that you can do.

[0:16:03] **Richard Hadden:** Food is always a great way to show appreciation, but I would just ask myself, am I, am I really being appreciative enough? Am I saying thank you enough to the people who keep this business running?

[0:16:17] **Jason Stowell:** What an incredible quote. Don't let a good deed go unrecognized. I mean, that really is going to be just that resonates with me and I'm sure it's going to resonate with listeners. Thank you for that. An industry with fitness, most of us had personal trainers, right? And so the pandemic happens. We all shut down and then the personal trainers start doing zoom calls and then all of a sudden they realize like, well, why am I working at the gym? I can just do this, right?

[0:16:44] **Jason Stowell:** As we've seen, the business kind of come back in and we get this new norm. There's still that lag between us bringing back all these trainers because most of them are still doing it on their own, but we're slowly seeing them come back and come back. So let me ask you this, is there a proactive opportunity for us to go back and start re-recruiting those folks, you think? Or is that a lesson they need, the people that have left us, is that a lesson they need to learn on their own or should we be marketing to them?

[0:17:14] **Richard Hadden:** I think you should be more aggressive and be marketing to them, be more direct. It doesn't mean you have to drag them back in kicking and screaming, but just let them know, hey, we have some opportunities here. Let's talk about this. And of course, in that profession, people can work for you and kind of do their own thing at the same time, right? And this is another thing for anyone listening to this, one of the things that

is probably not going to go back, we talk about the post pandemic workplace. I don't even know if that term even makes sense.

[0:17:45] **Richard Hadden:** I call it workplace next. Where we are now with the workplace, we're not ever going to get all of that toothpaste back in the tube. And so a lot of things are not going to go back to the way they were in 2019, thank goodness, in some ways. And one of those things is flexibility. So even if people this whole idea of working from home and working from anywhere, remote work, hybrid work and all of that, people like that, many people like that, and we're never going back to the days where people worked, where everyone worked on site all the time.

[0:18:18] **Richard Hadden:** There's going to be a continuous mix of that. And with personal trainers as an example, yeah, they can do that. They can work at a club, they can also work, do their own thing. So we've got to provide flexibility because when you ask people today, is it the working from home? That is the real thing? They'll say. When I think about it, it's not. It's the flexibility. I've been working from my home for over 20 years.

[0:18:49] **Richard Hadden:** It's a nice house, I like being here. But it's not about working from home. It's about the flexibility. Another study that was done by Hierology found that they asked like 16,000 people who had turned down legitimate good job offers, why did you turn down the offer? The number one answer was lack of flexible options. So that's another part of not only recruiting but retention. To the degree that we can offer flexible options, whether it is working remotely or fluid hours or creative hours or working a schedule that works with perhaps your unique life conditions or circumstances, that's the kind of thing that gets people to give a second look at you over a competitor for talent.

[0:19:38] **Jason Stowell:** That's a great thought that not only should we not be discouraging these hybrid options, but maybe we insert some kind of help to help them have the flexibility here and be successful at home as well. It's a really interesting thought. So can I ask you this? I'm going to put you on Spot. Is there anyone out there doing it very well right now that you point to an example of this group? This organization is really hitting the nail on the head right now when it comes to retention, culture, recruiting.

[0:20:08] **Richard Hadden:** Well, I could name some big company names and those are people that people would know. But the ones that I'm familiar with that are doing the best job are not necessarily the ones that are household names in a similar kind of industry to yours. The Eugene Country Club in Eugene, Oregon has an amazing not only culture for their members, but for their employees. And I recently spoke for the Club Managers Association of America Oregon chapter in Portland and I met the people there at the Eugene Country Club and they are doing a great job of recruiting, of retaining, of marketing themselves on their website, of creating that kind of culture where people want to come and they want to stay. They have a number of long term employees, people who have been with them for literally decades, and that's really unusual.

[0:20:59] **Richard Hadden:** But they've also created the kind of environment where newcomers to the profession are coming in and say, hey, we really like the vibe here. We really like the way it feels. I hope we can stay for a while.

[0:21:09] **Jason Stowell:** Excellent. Thank you for that. I can't wait to check them out. All right, I got one last question for you. So listeners are going to come out of this show and they're going to feel energized to rethink the way that they approach recruiting retention. Is there one piece of actionable advice, some really soft ground we can begin at that? You would recommend that listeners, again leave this show and say, I'm going to start here.

[0:21:32] **Jason Stowell:** What would that be?

[0:21:33] **Richard Hadden:** Yeah, the first thing would be to ask yourself the question, why would I want to work here? What's so great about working here? And then only if you can answer that, then take the answer to that question and put it out everywhere on your website. The people who already work for you, they need to be taking that message out there. When you're out in the community, you need to be out there sharing that message. Here's why it's so great to work here at this particular location, or here for our company.

[0:22:02] **Richard Hadden:** Even little simple things, Jason, like, everybody sends business emails all day long. You send dozens of them. Put a little line at the bottom of your signature line, hey, we're always looking for great people. Click here and that will take them to the career section of your website. Put signs in your facility with QR codes so that people can scan that and they can go right to that part of your website.

[0:22:26] **Richard Hadden:** Also, keep in mind that something like 80% of people under the age of 30 do the entire application process on their mobile phones. Make sure that your application process works and works well on a mobile phone. If it doesn't, they're going to go on to one of those other 16 that they're looking for.

[0:22:46] **Jason Stowell:** Wow. Tremendous advice, Richard. I can't thank you enough. I know my listeners are going to be really excited after the show to move on from this. So with that being said, if my listeners would like to reach out to you, what's the best way to do that?

[0:23:00] **Richard Hadden:** Come and visit us at our website, contented Cows.com. I have to emphasize the s at the end because there is a website called Contented Cow Dotcom, but it's for a pub in Minnesota, so don't go there. Well, go there because they're great people. But Contentedcows.com, you can email me at richard@contentedcows.com. I'd love to hear from you.

[0:23:20] **Jason Stowell:** Richard, it's been an honor and a privilege. I truly appreciate you making time for myself and our listeners today.

[0:23:35] **Jason Stowell:** Great job, Jason, and thank you so much for leading today's Thinking Ahead episode. If you would like to reach out to Richard, his contact info has been

posted in our Show Notes. The show notes. They can be found@fitnessbusinesspodcast.com. And you know what else can be found at Fitnessbusiness Podcast.com? The subscribe button. Yep, it's just one click away. So the Show Notes will be emailed to you directly each and every week.

[0:24:04] **Jason Stowell:** Yeah, it's that easy. Give me 30 seconds and I'll introduce you to my upcoming guest. Reena Vokoun.

[0:24:51] **Richard Hadden:** Quick Fire Five, sponsored by Hapana.

[0:24:54] **Jason Stowell:** Let's get to know Reena as she dishes on her guilty pleasures. Welcome, everybody, to the Quickfire Five segment here at the Fitness Business podcast. Today, our Quick fire five guest is Reena Vacone. Reena is the founder and CEO of Passion Fit. Reena, thank you so much.

[0:25:13] **Reena Vokoun:** Thank you so much for having me dori. I'm excited to be here.

[0:25:16] **Jason Stowell:** Yeah. So next week you come onto the Fitness Business podcast. You're going to really talk about a cool topic, which is women leading the fitness industry. We get asked all the time to have more topics about this on our podcast. So I think all of our listeners out there will be excited next week when you come onto the show. But before you do that, let's learn a little bit about Reena. So let's get started.

[0:25:41] **Jason Stowell:** First one is Reena. Can't wait to hear what is your top guilty pleasure?

[0:25:47] **Reena Vokoun:** I have two of them. So my top two guilty pleasures are chocolates and watching romantic comedies. I guess they're fun, indulgences. I've always been a romantic at heart, and I think the light heartedness, especially with all we've been through in the last couple of years, the heaviness in the world, I think that light heartedness and happy ending is just kind of refreshing.

[0:26:08] **Jason Stowell:** I like that. Refreshing. Wait, I got to ask you, are you a Hallmark movie Christmas movie channel geek like myself? Yes.

[0:26:19] **Reena Vokoun:** I find them so fun. I'm the only woman in my house because my husband and I have two sons and they watch sports all day long, so they don't understand my Hallmark obsession. But yes, I love Hallmark, and there's a lot of really good ones now coming on Netflix and Amazon Prime. And so there's a lot of different options.

[0:26:36] **Richard Hadden:** Yep, there are.

[0:26:37] **Jason Stowell:** I've noticed that. All right, good. Here we go. What is a habit or action that you do to be productive?

[0:26:45] **Reena Vokoun:** So I actually like to color code my calendar I know it's a little bit overly organized, but I do it. And I put in there my work meetings, my appointments, my

family activities between my husband and kids. I put wellness and self care practices in there. Big milestones. It's just a really great way for me to stay organized and to kind of keep track of everything happening personally and professionally.

[0:27:09] **Reena Vokoun:** And I've been doing it for years, and it works really well. So if you're into that kind of thing, I highly recommend it. Perfect.

[0:27:16] **Jason Stowell:** All right, number three, what's an activity that you do that calms you?

[0:27:21] **Reena Vokoun:** So? I have a couple I mean, I love practicing yoga and meditation. I teach yoga a weekly class, and then I also love taking other people's yoga sessions. I do guided meditations at the end of every fitness class I teach, whether it's Pilates, yoga or Hit. But I also love to listen to guided meditations in the morning, especially by Deepak Chopra. And honestly, talking to my mom just calms me down. It always has. She's a great listener, and I love having her there.

[0:27:49] **Jason Stowell:** Great. And number four, we'd love for you to recommend. Now you only get one here one book for our FBP family.

[0:27:59] **Reena Vokoun:** So I would say the Universe Has Your Back by Gabby Bernstein. It's a New York Times bestseller, and it's just a really great book. I think in a time where we don't always have control over what's happening around us in the world, I think this book is really great for learning how to do your part, do everything you can, but then let go and trusting that the universe will have your back. And it's just a very great way to learn how to let destiny take over. It's good in terms of spiritual health and well being.

[0:28:29] **Jason Stowell:** All right, well, we will make sure that we put a link to that book on our show notes. So, Fep Family, if that's a book you think you'd like to maybe take a look at, please head to our show notes and click on the link. All right, Rima, finally I get to hand the mic over to you. It's your turn. You are going to invite all of our FBP family to your episode next week. Take it away.

[0:28:52] **Reena Vokoun:** All right, well, come check out my episode on the Fitness Business podcast. This episode is going to be engaging, inspiring, eye opening, and informative. We're going to be talking women in business, women in entrepreneurship, and women in fitness. These are really hot topics right now, and I think more attention should be actually given to them. So I'm really excited to chat with Dory and share all that I know, and I hope that it will inspire you and get you pumped.

[0:29:28] **Jason Stowell:** I hope the weeks live by, because I can't wait to share Reena's episode with you. Have a beautiful day, and I look forward to inviting you into my world for 30 minutes next. Week. Thank you to our founding partner, Active Management. Our partners MyZone, ISSA, Hapana and Bodymapp, as well as our Advertisers REX Roundtables and MX Metrics. We believe what you leave behind is not what's engraved in stone monuments, but is woven into the lives of others.

END OF EPISODE