

## Ep. 6 - Podcast Wrapped: Key Highlights from Ground Breaking

**Jad Sobh:** You're listening to *Ground Breaking: Where Consulting Meets Innovation*.

**Jad Sobh:** Welcome back to *Ground Breaking: Where Consulting Meets Innovation*. My name is Jad Sobh.

**Peter Nabhan:** And I'm Peter Nabhan and for all the, all of you who are new here, this is a podcast for an engineering consulting firm called ECS Group of Companies (ECS).

**Jad Sobh:** We are celebrating our final episode of 2024 by reflecting on this year's incredible guests.

**Jad Sobh:** From insightful lessons in leadership to discussions on brownfields and research development, our guests have generously shared a wealth of knowledge and practical advice, inspiring us and our audience along the way.

**Peter Nabhan:** Excellent. And to your point, Jad, uh, this year we've had what, six episodes so far?

**Jad Sobh:** Yep, six episodes.

**Peter Nabhan:** Excellent. Excellent. That's a good start and we started the podcast with what we did an episode actually with young talent and we brought in one of our senior VPs from Texas. In that episode, what I liked is they had different experiences in their career. So we had Matthew Jacobson, a couple of years out, we had Caroline Ringler, she's been an intern with us, so she's still in college. Then we had Matt Robbins and they all shared invaluable advice. And I think we're going to go through one of them. But, I do want to ask you first which advice that they shared, struck up with you the most.

**Jad Sobh:** Yeah. So Caroline, during that conversation, brought up a very valuable piece for, you know, individuals who are very close to graduating. She talked about looking for red flags in a company that, you know, whenever you're looking for an internship, your first job, whatever it may be. And it really can resonate with those young individuals that are getting close to looking for their first job coming out of college. So check out this clip real quick.

**Caroline Ringler:** Um, a few red flags I would be aware of are just, companies that don't seem very invested in their interns.

**Caroline Ringler:** ECS has done a great job of really spending a lot of time to develop us. And right from the start, they felt like they really cared about us and our learning. So I would look out for that.

**Peter Nabhan:** Yeah, she's right. I think what she did is she simplified the language and I think you and I talked about, she made it very simple to where everybody can understand. If you're joining a company, there might be red flags.

**Jad Sobh:** Right.

**Peter Nabhan:** Pay attention to that.

**Jad Sobh:** Yeah, for sure.

**Peter Nabhan:** If you think about your trajectory, have you ever seen where, you know, you can pick out some red flags in a particular company?

**Jad Sobh:** Oh, yeah, there's always those. It's like she said, you know, you got it. You really want to hear it from the start of, you know, "How am I going to develop with this company? And where is my trajectory kind of looking like?" So, I think she brought up some very valid points there and it's something that's great for everybody. Keep in mind, you know, whether you're just starting out or maybe a few years into your career, for sure.

**Peter Nabhan:** That's kind of an example of a red flag. Like Matt Robbins was talking about, you know, investing in your new talent because you want them to replace you as you continue on and do bigger things.

**Peter Nabhan:** You don't want, you don't want to have people just simply working for you. You want people that have a path and a future. Yeah. That's how you go. Like, you know, how ECS has grown. I think we're close to 2,800 people through that same thing. It's like, that's how you keep people engaged.

**Jad Sobh:** Very valid things to think about for sure.

**Jad Sobh:** We then moved on to brownfields. You know, brownfields are those properties you kind of see floating around your town that haven't been developed in a long time. Usually, from some past industrial development, things of that nature can also be kind of the problem spots for a community. We had to sit down with Jason Beck, Chuck Whipple and others from West Virginia that deal with these sites on a daily basis.

**Jad Sobh:** And it was kind of a very valuable conversation keeping that in mind, let's flashback real quick and check out what Jason had to say about brownfields.

**Jason Beck:** I mean, I think it's actually, I think this program's going to last a long time. I think we're going to continue to have brownfields and I think people see the direct impact on the communities. Big or small, you know, you're not going to have a more impactful program.

**Jason Beck:** And if you walk into a dilapidated school that's been sitting there for 30-40 years, no one's using, or a big industrial facility and that gets converted into, you know, like a senior housing facility or, a HUD development or something along those lines. I mean, we're converting industrial sites into low-income housing.

**Jason Beck:** You know, it's they've been sitting. We have one site that's been sitting for over 50 years and hasn't been touched. And all of a sudden, it's got life. It's got vibrancy back into it. And it's feeding the community again.

**Jad Sobh:** So, Peter, what did you take away from that conversation?

**Peter Nabhan:** What I liked the most about brownfields, I think this, everybody touched on it for a little bit.

**Peter Nabhan:** But the fact that a brownfield is something that is, for lack of better terms, ugly, it's something people don't want to look at. It's not anywhere you want to go, but it also has so much potential to where you can go in and you can redevelop it. You can invest a little bit of money in it. And you've got a nice asset, a nice piece of property that actually brings the community together.

**Peter Nabhan:** So, in my mind, I think you're bringing hope to a community. You start off with something that's like torn, torn down, torn apart, looks ugly. People drive by it; they look the other way. And now it's this nice development, whether it's like, I don't know, maybe a low-income housing and it can be a shopping center.

**Peter Nabhan:** It could be something of much value to the community. And that's really what I like the most about the fact that we can do brownfield redevelopment, as opposed to going to a nice, greenfield. Greenfield, which is like a new piece of land, we basically cut down the trees and kick out the farm animals and we essentially build something and I think brownfields are a much better investment because that land has already been destroyed.

**Peter Nabhan:** So, that's what I like the most about brownfields. I think it's a cool, it's a cool concept and there's so much we can do with it. I think one of the guests he shared with us is like, we're just getting started.

**Peter Nabhan:** But yeah, I think that's what stuck out with me, brownfields. Like, let's bring hope.

**Peter Nabhan:** So we started off with career development; we went to brownfields. But now we're like, okay, let's take it to that next level and talk about research and development. Yeah. And that was honestly one of our longest, but also, in my mind, unbelievably interesting episodes. So we had Dr. Oliver, who is the head of R and D at ECS.

**Peter Nabhan:** We also had Beena Ajmera. She's a professor at Iowa State. So, I think they both did an excellent job, but what I like the most is that they explain the fundamentals of R and D. They basically portrayed the concept of the "valley of death" and the valley of death is where ideas go to die.

**Peter Nabhan:** Like there's a lot of good ideas and then there's execution. And that's where ideas die in the middle. I think we had a good clip, from Dr. Oliver, maybe we could play that. And once we play that, I want to hear your thoughts on it, Jad.

**Jad Sobh:** Yeah, absolutely. Check out this clip.

**Oliver Taylor:** So if we think about the valley of death and what it really is, it's where the research doesn't transition to development, which then doesn't transition to practice.

**Oliver Taylor:** So you get something that is too complex for people to understand. It does not translate into practice. Therefore, it goes away. That's one problem or one avenue into the valley of death in which good ideas literally go to die. And that's where they will stay. They never materialize.

One of the problems in the R and D field is you get people that are so niche or specific to their focus of research that they don't want to give it up or make it something new.

**Jad Sobh:** Yeah, it's kind of interesting that he, you know, brings up the valley of death, right? It's because it's one of those things that so often, you know, we kind of know and understand the scientific method to a degree of like, hey, you got to start somewhere. But more often than not, it kind of feels like we're always hearing about the projects and ideas that made it from ideation all the way through to becoming a tangible product, service or whatever it may be right. And so, for him to kind of elaborate on that valley of death, it's one of those things that we often don't think about just because, more often than not, we're not going to hear about those ideas that never made it all the way through the whole process.

**Jad Sobh:** So it was really interesting to hear them, bring that concept of the valley of death up and really flesh it out for us.

**Peter Nabhan:** Yeah, that's a good point. And when you think about the valley of death, like, there's probably a lot of great ideas. That died there and probably because of just failure in execution, I don't know if they touched on it, but maybe there should be a concept like, okay, let's pull all these ideas from the valley of death and revisit them.

**Peter Nabhan:** Now we have new tools and talk artificial intelligence. We've got so much to work with or to rework and who knows? It's also again, When you go back to the concept of execution, It's about the person executing on the idea and if the idea is executed by the right person, It has viability and if a phenomenal idea is given to the person that was not incompatible with this idea it will go nowhere. That's kind of my thought process. I did like Dr. Ajmera; she talked about some misconceptions. I think we also joked about what does a R and D person look like. And they're not, there's no Einstein with big glasses.

**Jad Sobh:** Right.

**Peter Nabhan:** She did have a fun clip.

**Peter Nabhan:** I think we can play that as well.

**Beena Ajmera:** The other thing, um, I, one day I would love to see is TV shows stop

**Beena Ajmera:** displaying the R and D person and that old white coat with the crazy glasses in a you know, crazy laboratory trying to, cook up evil schemes or whatever. I would love for that image to go away.

**Jad Sobh:** That's definitely a preconceived notion for sure about what a person working in R and D would look like. But then also to kind of her elaborating and really talking to us about, how anybody can be successful in R and D. You just kind of have to have that drive.

**Jad Sobh:** In October, we kind of elaborated on the first episode. So, we had our career kickoff. Well, now let's say you're five to 10 years into your career. What's kind of next? In my opinion, probably one of, my favorite conversations that we had with Lauren Zengl and Mark Mochel, you know, both very well established in their careers and have done some really awesome things.

**Jad Sobh:** Mark really highlighted the value of professional organizations and networking as a tool to build those relationships. I'm going to play this clip and then Peter, I would love to hear your thoughts on it because you're a little bit further on in your career than I am. I know you are very active in organizations and getting out there and getting your name out there and the company's name.

**Jad Sobh:** So after this, I really want to hear what your thoughts are on it.

**Peter Nabhan:** Sure thing.

**Mark Mochel:** Talking to folks outside of the work environment is usually when you can build the strongest relationships. Because we all get to step away from the day to day, as you talked about, the busy, the phones ringing and all of that. But I've gotten the most networking done in an environment where everybody's kind of free from the tasks of the day.

**Mark Mochel:** That's when I've had some of the best conversations, some of the best learning opportunities. Um, you know, maybe when everybody gets to take a little bit of a breath. So, we have to create that opportunity for ourselves. I think that, ultimately, it is the inspiration because if we don't, we'll be consumed on a day-to-day basis by everything else that's coming at us

**Peter Nabhan:** Yeah, I like what Mark said in his little clip here and you and I actually talked about it the other day. It's like, what is the concept of compartmentalization? And you could be existing in a bubble. You're thinking about every next task. When am I going to write the next report?

**Peter Nabhan:** Uh, let's say you're a geotechnical engineer like me, that's my background. You're calling up drillers. You're drilling a site. You're letting the client know what your schedule is and you're existing in that world. But if you get a chance to step outside, you have to compartmentalize. So forget everything you're working on in the office per se and you go out. And you actually got a chance to disconnect and reconnect with a lot of people. They're all doing different things. Maybe in the same space, if you want, if it's a business type connection, or if it's just a personal self-development, let's say you attend a communication organization, you learn how to communicate.

**Peter Nabhan:** I think it's very important just to leave the office, leave everything you're working on and just take a moment, breathe and reconnect. Expand and stretch yourself because your day-to-day Will be there tomorrow.

**Jad Sobh:** Yep. And I think it brings up a valid point of something that we talk about, you know, on the marketing side, quite often of the concept of "people hire people," right?

**Jad Sobh:** And you are developing those interpersonal relationships and those skills, you know, that's how you get to know somebody. That's how they know that they can trust you. And then moving on from there, they're like, "You know what, I know Peter is really great at this thing and I need him to do that thing for me."

**Jad Sobh:** And that's where those networking events and those professional organizations become such a useful tool, not only for growing your career and meeting, you know, like-minded people, but then, getting to know individuals and developing from an interpersonal relationship to a business relationship and kind of going from there.

**Peter Nabhan:** That's true. And I think you just said something very important. Like people think it's all about who you know and part of it is true, but it's also about who knows you, like you go out, it becomes a force multiplier. If people know you, then they can help tell your story and the things that you can do, as opposed to you just being one person telling your story; you have 10 people telling your story now.

**Peter Nabhan:** So it becomes a force multiplier. That's why you want to invest in organizations and in your ecosystem and help people; that really also helps tell the story and the impact you're trying to make. That's kind of a good point. I appreciate you. It's good that you said that it's about who knows you as well.

**Jad Sobh:** Yep, for sure. And then to wrap up the year, our most recent episode that we had, another one that's kind of near and dear to my heart with my military background, is we had Ben Temple and John Hicks come on the podcast to talk about their service and how that's kind of shaped them as a leader.

**Jad Sobh:** One of the things that, you know, they both provided such valuable insight as to how they've kind of. You know, levy their military career into their professional career. One thing that got brought up by both and, you know, varying degrees, but Ben really kind of elaborated on it, was the notion of a servant leader.

**Jad Sobh:** So, let's look at this clip of Ben elaborating on the idea of servant leadership. And then, Peter, let me know what you think of this.

**Ben Temple:** And so it's hard to pinpoint the specific practices that we implement at ECS in a leadership role. It's really more of who you are as a leader, but the ones that John mentioned of putting other people before yourself, primarily, our job exists as leaders to clear obstacles out of the way for our people to do good work, to hire good people and turn them loose, to do great things, hold people accountable and make them more successful.

**Ben Temple:** And ultimately, that's it. What it's about. The other thing that you touched on, John, that I really resonate with is, giving praise in public, criticizing in private and that you are the leader. This is something that maybe we need to talk about more often: the leader is ultimately responsible for everything their subordinates do and fail to do.

**Peter Nabhan:** Before I tell you what I think, I want to hear your thoughts because you actually served.

**Jad Sobh:** Yeah, absolutely. Um, it's servant leadership is a very, very interesting one, right?

**Jad Sobh:** Because not even just from the military aspect, but I'm going to use a little bit of, you know, maybe some slang and metaphors here for it. Whenever you are "following a leader into battle," right? You want to know that you can trust them and that they have your best interest at heart, despite the situation.

**Jad Sobh:** And I think that that's where the servant leadership really comes in. Because if your people that you have surrounded yourself with on the daily basis, know that they can trust you as a

leader, know that you have their best interest at heart as a leader. You know, things just run so much more smoothly and more efficiently.

**Jad Sobh:** So that's one of those things that as a leadership style, I've always looked for. With my leadership team, you know, can I rely on them to have my back no matter what the situation is? And so to hear Ben really elaborate on how he used it in the military as well as on the civilian side and here at ECS. It was really awesome and refreshing to hear for sure.

**Peter Nabhan:** Absolutely and actually to that point, I do feel like servant leadership is the way to go, even if the stakes are as high as being in the military and being on the front line, because I know Ben served and the same thing happens in organizations too, as a leader or in any position really, you want to serve the next person you want to serve your team, you want to contribute to the success of everyone and that's going to allow everybody, let's call it "A rising tide lifts all ships."

**Peter Nabhan:** That's essentially what that comes. You're investing your time and your experience to help people. And I think for me, there's no better way to serve, but I do feel like a lot of people still, you know, have that leader versus manager, a concept that's not always clear.

**Peter Nabhan:** They think a manager is a leader. A lot of managers are actually not effective leaders on the long term. They end up taking on different roles as opposed to pushing on a team. But I'm happy we got a chance to go down our 2024 episodes and go down memory lane between you and me.

**Peter Nabhan:** And I know we're going to kick off 2025. strong. We've got a lot of topics on the docket. I think, you know, before we close, actually, Jad, we've been asking this question of everybody and I've never asked you the question: What has been something that's been groundbreaking for you?

**Jad Sobh:** Well, Peter, you know me, so you know exactly what my answer is going to be.

**Jad Sobh:** Um, literally a month and five days ago, I became a dad for the first time. And it's been an awesome experience. Um, for me, pregnancy was rough. Let's get that out of the way. I don't envy my wife for having to go through all that. But at the same time, she was an absolute trooper and did amazing throughout the entire thing despite having a little bit of a rough pregnancy.

**Jad Sobh:** Now that the baby's here, I think it's one of those things that you kind of start to discover new things about yourself, right? You think, you know, everything about yourself, right? You think, you know what your limits are. And I thought I knew my limits when I graduated from, basic training in it and did the things that I have with the military and now I'm finding out new things that, you know, the baby's crying, got to figure it out, you know?

**Jad Sobh:** So, that, but then also to just, it makes me really appreciative and grateful to be in the situations in the places that I am in life that I can, you know, try to be the best dad that I can be for my baby girl. And so, it's been the most groundbreaking thing for me, being a dad and getting to go through this.

**Jad Sobh:** All be it short, so far journey. Um, you know, with years to come, that's definitely been the highlight of my year. Peter, what about you? Let's hear what's been groundbreaking for you, man.

**Peter Nabhan:** That's awesome, man. I think what has been groundbreaking and I didn't, you're getting me on the spot here, but this has been a transformational year for me.

**Peter Nabhan:** This is the year where I actually got married. So, not a lot of people know that uh, when you go into union with someone, you realize that your whole life changes. And you've probably gone through that before and we're excited to go on the journey that you're going on now. But I think you realize how life is different now that you're not just living for yourself, but you also have a partner in your life.

**Peter Nabhan:** You have another person that you share everything with, that you make decisions with. They tell you about their day, and you tell them about your day. And it's really been a great adjustment phase. It's never easy. Great things actually should not be easy, they should be challenging. Once you get into a flow, it's just been such an amazing thing because you feel like you have someone that's going to be there for you, through whatever happens and they're your biggest supporter; they're your biggest coach, they're your biggest advocate. They will do anything for you and you will do the same for them. And for me, that's just been really groundbreaking and I wish these types of relationships for everybody.

**Jad Sobh:** For sure. You know, as we always say, that's definitely groundbreaking. Thank you for checking out what we will call, groundbreaking wrapped since, you know, you have the Apple reviews or the Apple wrapped and the Spotify wrapped and all that, so we'll call this groundbreaking wrapped for 2024.

**Jad Sobh:** Thank you to everybody who gave us a listen throughout the year and keep an eye out on all the upcoming awesome episodes that will be coming up in the future. Happy holidays, thanks for giving us a listen this year.

**Jad Sobh:** I look forward to spending next year with you as well. Don't forget to subscribe to us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever else you listen to your podcast. And thank you for listening to *Ground Breaking: Where Consulting Meets Innovation*.

**Peter Nabhan:** Yeah. Happy holidays, everyone.

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