**REALTOR® to REALTOR® Series – Season 3 Episode 6**

**The Community Impact of Your Real Estate Business**

[00:00:00] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** Many real estate professionals choose to give back to their communities through volunteerism, but the work of real estate itself also helps to better our neighborhoods.

[00:00:12] **JESSICA THOMPSON:** You start to see these residents who have lived here for Decades and it's only they lived here out of convenience. It wasn't because they wanted to live in the neighborhood, and I wanted to change that.

[00:00:24] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** What you do every day to put people in homes is one of the greatest services to your community.

[00:00:30] **BO MENKITI:** When you seek to try to make a difference in intractable problems or situations or. In areas where there's been discrimination or lack of access or lack of opportunity, you by definition differentiate yourself.

[00:00:43] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** You're listening to drive with NAR, the REALTOR-to-REALTOR series powered by REALTOR magazine. Listen as real estate pros talk tools of the trade and share stories of inspiration. Get ready to step up your business. I'm Marki Lemons Ryhal, and I'm reminded of our commitment to serve as real estate professionals after just wrapping up NAR's REALTOR Volunteer Days, which is a national week-long event in June when REALTOR associations and members kick their community service activities into high gear.

I'm elated. By giving back to my community during NAR's Realtor Volunteer Days, I made sure that the Marki Lemons Ryhal Education Advancement Scholarship was funded and will be able to help six women of color earn their real estate license or attend an HBCU. What I'm more proud of is my son who hosted a brunch with 65 people in attendance.

The 65 attendants walked away with a guarantee of $487,500 in down payment assistant money. But you may be contributing more than you think to your community through the regular course of your real estate business. Many professionals do business in a way that has tremendous social impact in their area.

And I have two of those professionals with me. Now, Jessica Thompson is the broker owner of City Burb Homes in Oklahoma City, and she has played a role in helping to revitalize her low-income neighborhood and bring many homeowners to the area. Welcome, Jessica.

**JESSICA THOMPSON:** Thank you, Marki. I'm so glad to be here.

We are elated to have you. And Bo Minkiti is the founder and CEO of Keller Williams Capital Properties in Washington, DC, whose company focuses on serving underrepresented consumers. Thank you for being here, Bo.

[00:02:56] **BO MENKITI:** Great to be here with you, Marki.

[00:02:58] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** Both of you have made social impact a centerpiece of your business.

Tell us about the clients you serve and how you got started on your journey. Jessica, we'll start with you.

[00:03:11] **JESSICA THOMPSON:** I serve a lot of my friends and a lot of single women, people that I think didn't think homeownership would be achievable for them. And so I really pride myself in consulting them and showing them that there is a pathway.

I got started in real estate in 2012. And it started when I moved into my neighborhood and I got really involved with my neighborhood and felt that we needed more sense of community there. You couldn't make a living in my neighborhood. And we had very low income, high rentals, not a lot of homeowners, a lot of vacant properties.

People didn't want to move into the neighborhood. And it was also really hard to get a loan for a home on the property because a lot of the homes were so dilapidated or needed major repairs and you couldn't get financing. And so I felt like I needed to bring light to my neighborhood and I felt like I could do that through real estate.

[00:04:15] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** What about you, Bo?

[00:04:17] **BO MENKITI:** My journey to real estate started in a neighborhood in Washington DC called Columbia Heights. And as a young professional originally working in the corporate world, with Fortune 500 companies and strategic consulting, I bought my first home, uh, in this neighborhood. And next to me was a woman named Mrs. Becks who'd lived there for, for over 70 years since she was a little girl. And she lived there by herself. And me and Mrs. Becks were the only occupants on our entire city block of row houses that had a Metro station down at the other end. And it always baffled me that, you know, here we are at Metro station, two stops from the seat of power in the free world in downtown Washington, DC.

And we have all these vacant homes. I used to work in the nonprofit world. I used to travel around the country and visit all of our sites as we were growing to serve students in different parts of the country. And I came back from one of these sort of two week trips and Mrs. Becks had passed away. I found her deceased body because nobody checked on her.

I was the only person that would check on her and do her groceries, take out her trash. It was one of those moments that kind of shapes or shifts your life or your journey. I thought I was making such a big impact in the world running this nonprofit. And I realized that I wasn't even present for the person like right on the other side of this little row house wall, I felt very called and inspired to try and make a difference in my neighborhood.

I had a good amount of success early on in the sales process, being a real estate sales professional, and was able to use those resources and those commissions to start investing in fixing up the homes in my community. Our city had a lot of really amazing first-time homebuyer programs that a lot of real estate professionals didn't bother to really understand or to work with.

And so I leaned into those programs early and at one point we did, I think my little sales team did 70 percent of all the first time homebuyer program done deals in Washington DC and that niche established, you know, a foothold in the industry that's allowed us to grow a very large real estate company.

[00:06:14] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** Excellent. I want to talk to you about how this increases your value as a real estate professional. We're in a time where agents need to show their value to consumers more than ever. How do you see your community involvement as part of your value as a real estate professional? And how do you communicate that to your clients, Bo?

[00:06:37] **BO MENKITI:** So, the way I've always thought about this, when I first got into real estate, I was always really passionate about that opening line in the preamble of the Realtor Code of Ethics that said sort of underneath all is the land, right? And I'm paraphrasing here, but upon its wise utilization, just distribution depend the hallmarks of our society.

This idea that who owns the land, who works the land, who controls the land, who can own the land, who's allowed to own the land. And you think about Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it's food, it's shelter. Like this is a basic human need that every human has as one of their core needs. If you look in this country and around the world, it's the main vehicle for wealth building.

It's how families create wealth. It's how they pass wealth from one generation to the next or have wealth eroded from their family line generationally as it moves from one generation to the next. And then finally it's home. Whether you like a stone tutor or a mid-century modern or…there's a stylistic personal taste element to home.

And then there's a sense of like safety. It's maybe where your family is, maybe where your dog or your cat, it's this place you come home to. It's your sanctuary. It's home. And so I always say that whether it's the distribution of land, the provision of shelter, the creation of wealth, or the making of home, we have this tremendous opportunity to be part of something.

We think about what home means when we talk about home. Right. And then you think about how our industry oftentimes markets itself. And we're marketing, you know, the, the slick car or the cool guy in the suit, the cell phone, you know, slanging deals, but that's not actually what we sell. We sell the power of homeownership in people's lives.

And so for me, being able to go to a place and work with people where it was very clear, the power of homeownership in their lives allowed us to center that in a business. It allowed us to build a niche where we clearly could deliver value and our ability to do really well. Serving a population that other people didn't want to serve has created a company that now, you know, has over 15,000 real estate professionals across 13 states in the U.S.

So we don't now only serve that same population as a company, but it started by going deep and being able as a sales team and a sales professional to serve a group of people where it's really clear that there was a need and that the power of home was real in their lives.

[00:08:55] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** The median net worth, according to the Federal Reserve Survey of Consumer Finance stated that in 2022, the average net worth of a renter was $10,400 versus $396,200 for a homeowner.

We are creating a and with the equity that I acquired through my real estate purchases, I was actually able to send my son to Howard University and not have any student loan debt. And we get the opportunity to empower people regardless to the community in which they live to create equity in order to do whatever it is that they desire to do in the future.

[00:09:42] **JESSICA THOMPSON:** I started out as a community organizer first and then got into real estate. I cared. I cared about the kids in my neighborhood. I cared about the elderly, the single widowed elderly neighbors in the community that, you know, no one was checking up on. And within that, it was, you know, revitalizing a neighborhood association and bringing more life to that association.

So, I have shown value through being a community organizer first, and then that appeal to the goodness in my heart, right, that I'm putting out there. Consumers see that, and they want to partake in that. They want to support people that are doing good things in the community. And if you look at all of my reviews online, that's what they talk about.

A lot of it is how I know my community really well. So, I think that as a real estate professional, how I communicate that to future clients or current clients is just letting them know even the needs of the community currently. Um, we have a community center and at one point it's, you know, it's fall break and the children don't have anything to do at the community center because it's underfunded. And so I'm able to appeal out and do little donations, ask for donations for projects like pumpkin painting, you know, go out and get some pumpkins and bring them back to the community center to keep these kids occupied and doing good things and staying healthy and not getting into trouble because sometimes in my neighborhood, if we didn't have that community center, it would look a lot different.

Once you're putting into the community and talking with the neighbors and when you're seeing these changes, you know, having support, you start to see these residents who have lived here for decades and it's only they lived here out of convenience. It wasn't because they wanted to live in the neighborhood.

And I wanted to change that for them. I wanted to change that experience for them and give them an idea of what a community is so that they do want to stay and at a time when our neighborhood has revitalized now, they're tempted to leave because someone's offering them a lot of money for their property and that's one thing I do, I go out and I educate my neighbors on what their properties are worth because you have people coming in that are telling them it's not worth as much as you think it is and I'm coming in and I'm letting them know, no, it is worth this money.

If you leave be sure you're walking away with this amount and I'm not asking for business in return, but they know that I am a resource for them and that I have good intentions. Sharing those stories is sharing stories about my neighbors that I've helped. Like I had a lady years ago who needed to have back surgery and she needed to sell her property.

It was a lot more maintenance than she could really handle. And so we got it sold and she made $60,000 off the sale of our home at a time when our homes in the neighborhood were not selling for $120,000. They were selling for 50 and $60,000. And so she was able to take that money and go get back surgery. And then the review comes in that like, Jessica helped me so much and was able to help me through the equity of my home to provide this surgery that increased her quality of life.

And those are amazing success stories.

[00:13:16] **BO MENKITI:** I'd say for all of us real estate professionals at this moment, it's really important to think about that we are in a time when the focus on what value we create for the people we serve needs to be much more at the center of our world. And when you hear Jessica talk, you hear how clearly attuned she is to the needs of the people in her community that she's serving.

And I think that one of the values of having come at this industry from a community perspective and from a sort of social impact perspective, is that there was absolute clarity that the reason for being was to serve. And I think that there are some in our industry who've lost that clarity and the idea of the industry became about serving the real estate professional, not serving the client.

And so it is amazing. And I think that's one of the things that's benefited. It sounds like it's benefited Jessica. It's benefited us a lot, this absolute clarity that we didn't come to the table asking, you know, what is this industry going to do for me? This industry has done a ton for me, but I didn't start asking that question.

I start asking the question, “What can the skills and the resources industry do for the people in this community?”

[00:14:35] **JESSICA THOMPSON:** One of the things from a lived-in experience, right? Like I've paid off my house. My is worth double, triple what I paid for it, right? And so I have all this equity. And I have shared with friends and clients what I'm doing with my equity. I'm remodeling my house. I'm updating. I am improving the value. I have added solar panels, so I'm coming at this also from sustainability standpoint. If this is going to be my forever home, I want to reduce my future costs, right? So I talk about ow do you use your equity. Right now I'm trying to kind of brainstorm with my neighbors because we've got a lot of vacant land in our neighborhood still that our city owns. And I am trying to activate my neighbors and consider creating some kind of community real estate trust. And for my neighbors, you know, let's lower the threshold on what they can give.

Let's empower our neighbors that are in the trades to be able to work on a project within their own neighborhood. Right? This is like a pipe dream of mine and I'm putting out here. This is me manifesting it. The idea is like you can tap into some of your home equity to be able to invest it into this community real estate trust so that we can build the housing that we need in our neighborhood. One thing we have is we have a lot of single-family homes.

We don't have a lot of housing diversity and we need that for our community. We I hear that all the time people want to move into the neighborhood but it's an elderly couple and they don't want stairs. So, we need to provide some housing that, you know, they can have a bottom unit and someone can move in above them, right?

We need more options like townhomes that people can own, condominiums people can own. They can tap into their home equity to do that. So that's part of the, you know, serving others is that they don't know what they don't know. And when you have that information and you know you can help other people, don't keep it in, let it out, like share it, help other people be prosperous as well.

It's kind of that idea of like karma, right? You give and a little bit of that reciprocation back as well.

[00:16:49] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** Sit tight for a quick word from our sponsor. I assume most of my listeners have heard of Open Door, but what about Open Door for Agents? There's a lot of chatter about Open Door, but today we have the opportunity to hear directly from them and likely bust a few myths swirling around about their partnership with agents.

Welcome, Nick. Nick is the Head of Agent Partnerships at Open Door and their Open Door for Agents program. Let's start with a quick overview of how Open Door works with agents and then bust a few myths.

[00:17:26] **NICK FROM OPEN DOOR:** Hey, Marki. Well, Open Door for agents was actually created way back in 2017. We created it so agents can have a simpler and more efficient way to serve their clients and bring the best cash offer in the business to their sellers.

Now, since then, we've actually really grown the program and now I've worked with thousands of agents across the country. And we've launched a rewards program called Agent Access that helps agents earn additional compensation through repeat transactions, whether they're helping someone buy an Open Door home or sell their clients home to Open Door.

[00:17:55] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** Let's get into some myth busting. True or false. Agents don't get commission from their clients if they work with Open Door.

[00:18:05] **NICK FROM OPEN DOOR:** Oh, this one's false, and it's one of my favorites to help agents understand when an agent's working with their seller and providing value and helping them choose the best option for their needs, they're getting compensated by that seller with an agreed upon commission between the seller and that agent.

Now, in addition to that, with Open Door, agents can earn bonuses paid on top of the price that we offer. And that's in addition to our Agent Access points, which I mentioned, where you can earn up to an additional $50,000 per year. We also have a referral program that lets an agent simply refer a customer if they're working with someone maybe out of state in a market where they're not licensed and they can also receive a bonus commission when they close.

[00:18:43] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** Got it. Next true or false. Open Door gives low-ball offers.

[00:18:49] **NICK FROM OPEN DOOR:** Got to go with false on that one too. You know, as a business, it's in our best interest to provide competitive offers. You know, just like the rest of the industry, of course, we're subject to macro conditions, but, you know, our business model and the Open Door for Agents program was designed to work in up or down markets.

[00:19:04] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** Last one, Open Door only buys distressed or quote, “ugly homes.”

[00:19:11] **NICK FROM OPEN DOOR:** That one's false as well. We like to position Open Door as a solution for specific sellers, not specific homes. We buy homes that are turnkey or in need of even fewer limited repairs, and generally those sellers just don't have time or don't want to make those repairs out-of-pocket.

Then the homes are ready for the new owner. After we are able to make those upgrades.

[00:19:29] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** All right. You've heard it straight from Open Door. Any final thoughts, Nick?

[00:19:34] **NICK FROM OPEN DOOR:** We're here to be partners to the agent community. Go to OpenDoor.com/NAR to learn more. Offer eligibility varies.

[00:19:41] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** This episode is brought to you by Open Door.

Need a hand? We got you. Open Door for Agents makes selling simple, certain, and fast with an all-cash offer and no finance or appraisal contingencies. Learn more at OpenDoor.com/NAR. Offer eligibility varies.

Many real estate professionals are focused on their bottom line. We all want to earn a living. But that can blind some people to the needs of their community. Can you talk about how you stayed focused on fulfilling the needs of your community while also running your business like a business? How do you both earn a living and have social impact?

[00:20:35] **BO MENKITI:** I think it's so clear that in business, when you differentiate yourself, that's good for business. One of the things that drives me crazy about our industry is people all try to do the same thing, thinking that that's good business. As an entrepreneur, I've always said that my job was to go into the white space, to go into the space that hadn't been discovered yet, to go somewhere where other people weren't and to figure out a way to create value.

And so in my mind, when you seek to try to make a difference in intractable problems or situations or in areas where there's been discrimination or lack of access or lack of opportunity, you by definition differentiate yourself. And when you figure out how to differentiate yourself, that's actually a competitive advantage in your business.

And so I'd say in my life, the focus on trying to make a difference in my neighborhood, because there weren't that many other people doing that, created a real clear focus for the business, but you should go to the place where you have the ability to differentiate your service. If you're going there for your paycheck, not for your capacity, you're making the wrong decision.

So, when you follow where your unique capacity is, you will build a great business.

[00:21:49] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** I'm in total agreement. I believe that the realtor store has the book Blue Ocean Strategy when we talk about that white space that one person would want to enter. But what Jessica stated was the law of attraction and I believe to whom much is given much is expected.

But the more you give, the more you attract. And so, as we build a healthy business, it empowers us to actually give back more. So, I didn't start helping six young women. I started helping two young women every year. I didn't start with my advocacy for years, right? But then as time went on and I was building a more profitable business, I'm able to contribute more to the advocacy efforts.

And so if we're doing things right, then we will earn more money empowering us to be able to give more back to the community because, I was told as a child, if we hold on, there's nothing going out, but there's nothing coming in. And my grandfather taught me that essentially competition is healthy for business.

Give it all away because you actually open up the next level to be able to give even more. Jessica, what are your thoughts on building a stable business? And volunteering and giving back to your community.

[00:23:11] **JESSICA THOMPSON:** I think with the volunteer component, I make the time to go volunteer. And I bring my kids with me because I want them to understand what volunteering is.

I want them to grow up that this is normal. And with that, you make so many connections with people. They learn that you are genuine, that you really care, you're passionate. And then they want to send you business because they believe in that. And then with that business, you're right. You can do more. You can give more.

As real estate agents, we can talk about who we're giving to. One of the things I try to give to is organizations that deal with housing. Homelessness. How can we provide necessities for people that are transitioning out of homelessness. Through the volunteerism, you meet people, you learn things, and then you realize there's some gaps.

We can advocate for change in our communities. And so, that is something that through the volunteerism, I have been able to elevate these voices so that they can be heard and know that this is a need. So we had a lot of real estate agents that saw the increase in homelessness, and we started volunteering with homeless organizations, And, from that, our local association was like, what can we do? We have all these members that are interested in helping the homeless. And so it came to me that we need to create a homeless task force. And from that task force, we have been able to create a fund. And with that fund, we can donate money to the fund. And it does, it helps people that are transitioning out of homeless.

It buys them supplies that they need for their home. Towels, cleaning supplies, all these small things that add up for these people that are just trying to get their feet back on the ground. Doing things like that, putting it out there, this is what I believe in, this is what I'm going to go volunteer with, that helps my business, it helps me, it helps me keep going.

[00:25:18] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** What both of you are doing is taking steps to help close home ownership gaps in your communities. In 2024, we still have large racial home ownership disparities and other gaps. What do you think the average real estate professional could do right now to spur the work of closing these gaps?

[00:25:41] **JESSICA THOMPSON:** So, I would say talk about the experiences that either your past clients have gone through or even present clients are going through because that's going to resonate with someone and likely some of the people that hadn't heard that needed to hear it.

So if you don't talk about it, then people don't know. And I think that because you have these experiences that it's good to tell the stories of others because sometimes they don't have the capacity to do it.

[00:26:11] **BO MENKITI:** One of the first things that we as an industry can do is just acknowledge and own that we have this tremendous, powerful thing in our hands, which is the access to homeownership.

There's a lot of responsibility that comes with being the industry through which people access homeownership. And I think that that means we need to be vigilant about practices or things or things we see that are not facilitating that for other people. And we also need to be thoughtful about how we bring our talents, our skills to the widest array of people possible.

Just another way to take a look at this is that the ability to work with a diverse population very soon in our industry will not be a question of equity or a question of justice. It'll be a question of being in business. Because I've heard Gary Acosta say this many times, right? We're headed very quickly into majority minority country.

And if you can't work with a broad array of people as a business, there's not going to be a future for us. And so, I think as we adjust to the evolution of our industry and the changing demographics of our country, it requires of our industry and ability to have the range and the ability to connect with a lot of people.

But most importantly, it requires of us, you know, our little realtor code of ethics goes on to say that it imposes upon us grave social responsibility and obligations beyond those of ordinary commerce. When we're the gateway to the power of homeownership in people's lives, we have grave social responsibility and obligations beyond those of ordinary commerce to bring equity and justice to the communities that we serve.

[00:28:03] **MARKI LEMONS RYHAL:** As real estate professionals, it's our responsibility to share the information, to be of value every single day, and to tell the story about resources that already exist. And so we have so many resources that are available to us every single day. I want to encourage my fellow licensed real estate professionals to share the information that you already have.

Disperse it to as many people as humanly possible. Possible. Thank you for tuning in.

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