

CAROLINE (00:12)

Hi and welcome to Mind Your P's: The Purposeful Leaders Guide. We believe in all the P's: people, purpose, planet even pizza and prosecco and this week we're speaking to Alan Mahon founder of Brewgooder, beer company with a philanthropic difference. Launched in twenty sixteen with a mission to bring one million people clean drinking water through the power of craft beer. Alan it is a pleasure to have you here thanks for joining us today.

ALAN 00:37

It's a pleasure to be here.

CAROLINE 00:40

Please tell us about a bit about Brewgooder and your values as a company, where they come from, why it's important.

ALAN 00:46

Yeah I guess why they come from bit is a nice place to start I guess and when I was twenty two I I was travelling in Nepal I was doing some international development work and I got sick from an unsafe water source, and after a few weeks things weren't really working well for me and I had to go to the doctors and get you know prescription medication and it was really easy and simple antibiotic to get rid of a parasite that I contracted and that was actually you know an inconvenience, but it was something that really stuck with me because there could have been people born on the exact same day as myself, who you know through no fault of their own that contracting that parasite or another water borne illness could have meant that they might not pass their 5th birthday so for me that was a massive calling into the sort of water sector and I got rejected from all the different jobs in that sector and for about a year before actually find a job and a social enterprise, called Social Bite in Scotland and I when I started getting my at first paycheck and I did two things I bought better coffee and I bought better beer. I just fell in love with craft beer and I thought that it would be amazing to have a career in that industry and then to also put it to work and on something that I really deeply care passionately about so on World Water Day 2016 we launched Brewgooder with a mission I guess and to bring a million people clean drinking water and so far we've we sort of got to around about a I think a 155,290 people have been impacted by Brewgooder's funded work and particularly in Malawi. But when I think about what Brewgooder really is or what it's growing into it is it is definitely a brand that exists to do amazing things for people. We've had impact outside of water, you know, closer to home through various different campaigns you know. We're trying to be used to promote compassion and kindness as well as inclusion within the industry. So for me Brewgooder is a beer brand that looks to empower people and to be the best they possibly can be I guess.

CAROLINE 03:05

Wow this is amazing stuff and so to just talk to us about about I suppose the difficulties and challenges of 2020 and the current situation but and how does that affect your organisation.

ALAN 03:16

Yeah I mean listen, you don't you can't argue kind of factuals, you won't get very far business by doing it but you know right up until March 2020, 2020 was looking like a really great year for us we had managed somehow to convince 254 breweries and 24 different countries to release that a small batch beer that went to fund projects and a part of our global gathering campaign. And that was amazing and we're pinching ourselves, we were thinking this is a run away train of success you know and only an act of God could really sabotage! And the campaign is called the Global Gathering it relied on people being able to go to bars go to tap rooms and breweries and and really joining together to make a statement on behalf of craft beer drinkers and brands everywhere that they had that you know objective of bringing people water, empowering people. and you could not think of a worse thing to to try and encourage you know in late March 2020. Because due to the Covid restriction. I remember the night the night we were supposed to be celebrating that, you know Boris Johnson him on that the the TV and said you know everyone needs to shut up shop and you're effectively locked down from now until whenever. So that was really kind of a blow for us I guess, but it allowed us I think to kind of reexamine what we were like, we're we just a clean water brand or could we, you know, develop some form of kindness and compassion platform at home for you know, in a real emergency situation. And the campaign, the global gathering campaign was cancelled on the on the Friday basically and that on the Monday we had established a campaign called 'One On Us' that allowed drinkers to pay for four packs of beer and like write little notes effectively to me to send to NHS workers, frontline workers, who would just have type in their address and have packs sent to them if one was sent forward and there was twenty thousand beers ended up going around the country in a time where you know, the the simple gesture of saying thank you with a beer could have potentially meant a lot for for people who were you know, on the front line of you know, a pandemic, something that was pretty unprecedented. So that kind of allowed us to think about ourselves more as a brand and what we stood for and what our purpose was, and I think the thing it does separate us from us - and I'm not saying that we're the only ones you do purpose in beer, absolutely not at all - but I think we've done it differently where we've almost, you know, set out with a mission that wasn't beer-related, if you understand. But then became a beer brand through it, if you like. I think that that we've really grown into that over the past twelve months, certainly 2020 was a massive learning curve for us to say 'well if we were to continue to do this, what is the point in us?' And it went I think it might be on clean water and I think in the coming months through the listeners to this and any Brewgooder drinkers will see just how far we've come on that journey, we'll look and sound very different - but if you like, the water the water element of what we do will be even more impactful, if you like. And every drinker will be able to draw a line between what they drink with us and their their actual impact them on a water project so that's being really exciting. I think you know ultimately we could have been in a place where the Global Gathering raised a quarter of a million pounds, and we would have continued business as usual but that's just not the way it happened so there were downsides, bar closed you know our office here shut down but we're here, we're still here and I'm more optimistic about 2021, you know after the

pandemic, then I probably would have been 2021 if it hadn't happened which is a strange irony.

CAROLINE 07:17

And Alan you know it's affected, you know hospitality terribly, you know this whole pandemic and I think what's exciting about what you've just described is you know that your purpose your company's reason for being beyond making profit, you've always had thought the it's always been about the clean drinking water but, you're talking about you've you've reflected and reacted I suppose to a situation and said 'Well there's a more positive contribution that you can bring to the world through your brand', and that's what you're about to launch right?

ALAN 07:55

Yeah, I guess so, I mean I'm not it could have been, I'm not saying it could have been easier or or or worse for us if we didn't have our purpose, if you understand. But it definitely give us something that with the North Star - it helped us react and adjust and reevaluate, it give us the misstest or the yardstick, whatever you want to say, to be better at doing that. I think if we had, personally speaking if we lacked that, lacked that clarity potentially it would be much much harder to get through the past twelve months. So definitely having that purpose in tough times, gets you out of bed in the morning and I think at a time when once you've got out of bed, you've got nowhere to go, that is that is you know pretty invaluable. I used to say that not got you through tough times you know on any entrepreneurial journey, there's there's good times there's bad times and the purpose you through them, but it certainly has meant that I and and the team of really dug deep to find a way out of it I guess.

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CAROLINE 09:02

Yeah and you did lots of impact port last year, didn't you? You did the 'One On Us' campaign and 'All Together Now Campaign' tell us a little bit about those.

ALAN 09:11

Yeah so One On Us was obviously, you know 28,000 beer were sent out to NHS workers all across the country we did some really cool stuff where we were gifted some like Billboard space, electronic billboards space and rather than like direct people to sell more you know, of the packs or get get donate more of the pack, we thought well we might not reach the entire NHS, even if we do have [unintelligible] so why don't we actually and just broadcast people's messages near hospitals, so we actually did like that the nicest messages we could think of. We tried to put them as close to the places were NHS workers would walk up and down as possible, to kind of try and do our bit. With the All Together project it was a case of teaming up with the guys at Overtone Brewing Glasgow and I think we raised just over a

£1000 for the hospitality workers emergency fund and which was set up and I think that that kind, that was an amazing campaign to be part of I think like nearly a thousand breweries took part in that across the world and I think it shows, particularly in craft beer there is such an appetite to be an active like, citizen. You know when things start to go wrong even when it's really your industry that's the one that's getting battered the hardest which I think is great. But the one the one I'm kind of strangely the most proud of is and our Jack and the Beer Hops and campaign, which was done at Christmas time. Pantos were cancelled and you know culturally speaking, they're a big thing! There's a guy in our team James you know he was devastated these pantos were cancelled, he's a big kid at heart and thinking and wanted to capture some of that magic so we worked with a few other breweries, we made four unique beers that represented panto characters, we got Johnny McKnight who's a pretty legendary Scottish panto writer to actually write us a panto and we packed it in a little box and made sure that the donations through that went to the Theatre Workers Fund, which was a hardship fund for for actors and that was super successful and ultimately, you know, that showed us I guess that we we were more than just the water bit, I think if we had banged the drum on the water bit, you know during the pandemic it would've been completely out of touch. But the beautiful thing about it is that, some of the beers that were planned to be released as part of a Global Gathering did actually make their way into the walls and we ended up raising just over £50,000 and we invested that into two health care centers in Malawi. Where there would be solar-powered water that would allow people to access medical treatment, I guess, to a higher standard and part of the funding went towards 60 different community Covid responders, so people who go into different rural cases and that and and basically spread the message of how to fight Covid I guess when there is no real public health infrastructure there, so that project ended up I think the total reach over the next year is just over 90,000 people so we kind of try to do as much as possible because, I guess the way the the sector is and the industry is the minute, you know, every month could be your last. You're clawing on, you're living from moment to moment and we thought that we just didn't want to leave anything out in the field and we wanted to go out in a blaze of doing the right thing.

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CAROLINE 12:54

I absolutely love it, it's great I mean you know I'm just sitting here thinking gosh I mean we we launched our of product. service to the world's accelerated it because it because a Covid and we were like full on crazy, crazy, and you know some of my friends I was talking to relay all gosh you don't come for a walk let's let's let's just chill out for a bit you know and it's just you've just done so much in the in the in the last year really is it's it's quite remarkable, Alan.

ALAN 13:25

Yeah well thanks, I get that I mean I I think for the first couple of months even in doing that you don't know that you've done it, because it's not normal like it's just not a normal environment. I can remember sitting for I think for a week in April and everything stopped like you know, where like where do we go now I know we're pushing this and pushing that but are we busy fools like our is it over already? But the people I kind of felt, it's amazing when you look back on and you say you've got all these things but one of the big things I I really learned from it was, like we're so vulnerable as people like mentally, like mental health wise,

you know, I had friends who who you were on furlough for example and you know you saw them cycling and running and and making the most of it and I had other friends on furlough, who who you know this is almost somebody said to them that you don't have value, or your value can be put on hold. And with our team we we managed to try and keep as many people as possible you know, lots of people took hits that meant that other people could stay in, and all sorts of other things and really the number one concern that I had was that people were being pushed to their absolute limit, and there's lots of you know things that the government are doing to protect jobs and you know to protect life in terms of the Covid restrictions but one of the things I think we really think entrepreneurs need to get our head around, is it how to protect the well being of our employees and the mental health of employees after that if this is a massive trauma and we're not in the PTSD stage of it yet I don't think. And when the furlough scheme ends that could be you know multiplied by ten, a hundred times and what it is now.

CAROLINE 15:10

Yeah I totally agree we've we we actually been working with a psychotherapist who said to us the reason why we're all have an easy sleep patterns and sometimes really really well and other times you don't and you have all crazy dreams is is absolutely about that post traumatic stress situation, so so listen tell me Alan how and how do you support your team you know, pre-Covid, during Covid, to be their best selves? You touched on some of your, is it pillars or values you call them? Compassion, kindness, empowerment how do you support your team to live those?

ALAN 15:43

Our kind of values are and opportunity they're more likened to the outcomes of the work we do but the more I think about it the more they are just internal values, I guess. Opportunity is about that's what we think water allows you to build a life for yourself that is you know basically the the benefits you know your health is looked after but from an opportunity point of view at work, like we have a really young team we have I think the average age of our teams throughout the past four years has been twenty seven, it's a bit older now for obvious reasons, we get older! But one of the things I've been really you know, I've I've tried to stress again is that we don't know what we're doing like if we make a mistake you know it's not the end of the world, like you didn't purposefully make that mistake. You know learn from it and I think that opportunity to experiment from that, opportunity to grow has been really important and I know that that's been important to some of my team. We actually had a, one of my colleagues Abbey who left, and as she was leaving she actually highlighted that'd be one of the best things about the thirteen months that she spent with us which was the ability to make a mistake and not you know get shouted at for it. I think that ultimately I make mistakes all the time, you know I mean like, I can't quantify the values of those mistakes but they're definitely a lot more than the turnover of Brewgooder and and I think about not being really important as a value for me. I think inclusion is one thing like I've consciously tried, and it is hard in the industry we're in and to bring in people who don't look like the average

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craft beer drinker or craft beer person, there's a narrative in craft beer I think that you know, two you guys set up you know with with with beards and you know, hipsters almost set up brewery and basically employe people who are like them, and we tried to get a gender balance in the team which I think is always important. We aren't as good as I think we should be at a leadership level, and and also you know we're not diverse and we don't represent the Scotland that I see on a day to day basis, you know, it more people who look like me and or have similar experiences or background as me and I think that's something we need to get get better. But then, kindness, just be sound to each other, you know like just like everyone is a human being. I think that those things were tested to the limit because they're easy to do in person, easy to give people the opportunity and encouragement it's easy to to try and make people feel included when they're right in front of you, to be kind to them to do whatever but over Zoom, over a phone there's only so much you can really do with that and I think that that lack of human contact is definitely be something that I've missed for my team and potentially my team have missed from me.

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CAROLINE 18:41

We we must be talking to the right people like you Alan, because you're the second company that has kindness is a value and I'd never heard it as a value before, Darina from Ooni Pizza Ovens was talking to me and and that's one of their core values is about kindness and it's so simple isn't it but it's it's not it's not a common one.

ALAN 19:02

Yeah it's it's strange, it can sound corny you know what I mean, it can sounds quite twee and I guess for a beer brand to say kindness it might put off certain people. But the way I look at it, the thing that I love about beer and most simple level and why I think the ethos of Brewgooder makes sense to me and might make sense to other people is that, even the most masculine of cultures, you know you buy your mate a round and it's kind of a way and 'I love you' it's kind of a way of you know saying I value you and it's reciprocity, it's the kindness that you know will get paid back. You know you you never go for a pint and just get a pint with another person, if you're around with them you always balance it off and I think that fundamental act of kindness is often overlooked and I think that if you make it explicit then you can do really wonderful things and it's great to know that a company like Ooni which is you know a relatively new company in a very different catwalk probably older I'm not sure

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CAROLINE 20:02

Yeah they're about nine years actually.

ALAN 20:03

Yeah so what I'm trying to say I guess is that, it's a more modern company and it's been able to develop its values, you know, it doesn't have to get in a consultant to work out its values I guess and is that's in a completely different sector and pizza might not shout kindness but the more you think about it like, you know, when you buy a pizza it's all in slices and everyone shares everyone's you know get the opportunity to join in, and it's very communal so I guess it's just about making what you think is the right thing to do relevant and trying to find the kernel of that and what you do every day.

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CAROLINE 20:35

Yeah absolutely and Alan how has this sort of purpose-first approach affected you, since you started in terms of I'm thinking about you know you talked about the kind of, the big boys I suppose in trying to encourage them to to look at compassion and empowerment and so on, and you know in terms of craft beer, does that purpose-first approach do people believe in you do they support what you do?

ALAN 21:06

Yeah I'm always blown away and a how much time people have for us particularly in an industry level and and why people connect with us and hopefully the story and the authenticity of why we do it. You know isn't something we developed ten years after twenty years in a hundred years, we started there like we always say we refined it on-purpose and I mean that in the double meaning of it, you know we did it for a reason but we also you know are founded on that capital P, purpose if you like. I think the industry, it sounds weird and I don't mean to sound, overly, I don't know, but more beer companies have become like us and we come become like them of various different sizes and I think that we just hit on something potentially earlier for whatever reason than others but I don't believe, that people that aren't really purpose driven, don't have a purpose in there somewhere that needs just unravel, you know, examination. I think that you know the vast majority of the breweries I've worked with in craft beer and I've been privileged to work with with so many, you know, it's in the hundreds now really. You know purpose is there they just need to be able to unlock it and could speak about it you know with confidence. I think it's such a buzz word now that there's a danger that people just because it will help them sell more stuff, I think that the true companies that live out a purpose will never be in danger of I guess, you know undermining it or hypocritical, you know if you're a green company and your green credentials are your purpose and then you start flying you know jets around the world, you know, eventually consumers will look through that. So I think that the the real next five or ten years will be a test of who stuck to their purposes as much as possible and I think that authenticity is what I've learned is is important you don't have to be the saviour of the world, I guess, to have a purpose because the moment you take decisions that are that aren't against that, your purpose is undermined, your purpose may be very simple it might just be to make the best possible product because you love you know making a great product. What I've learned is our business model is well, quite unusual and probably for good reason - because it is very difficult to offer a hundred percent of profit to charities that you're if you're a [unintelligible] business model. I think that coming in you know the next year or so and by the end of 2021 we'll be in a position to transform in a way that is actually much better for the the impact outcome and I think that that's been my biggest learning. How do I take something that

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obviously people that resonates with people and turn it into something that millions of drinkers can engage with you know commercially, you know rather than just a few hundred or a few thousand.

CAROLINE 24:09

Yeah and you else do you think individuals, companies do you do this stuff really well? The people and purpose stuff, how do they you know, who is it and what do they do?

ALAN 24:20

There's lots of different ones of you near to home and and far away I think some of the guys like Patagonia or Passenger clothing you know they live and breathe their stuff it's not something that you know. I think the best the best companies right you can see it from their inception whether they have consciously talked about it or not I think that the likes of Patagonia is a really obvious example, Passenger is another one and I think in the beer industry Northern Monk is a really good example of people who just really live their values and their values are good values ,and I really enjoy working with them. Everly are a good example again of clothing and they're just about transparency, you know they're just about 'here's the things we made, here's how much carbon it takes' rather than any overt you know, preaching, it's just take a look at it and you guys decide. Obviously you've got like the icons of Toms shoes, very very similar model to us but you know hugely successful and we're lucky to have the former European MD of Toms on our board who is helping us to really get to grips with what it can look like when our impact is the same scale as Toms is. And then there's just people you know really close to home I think, Hey Girls is a brand I absolute love with Celia Hodson.

CAROLINE 25:54

Love them, just interviewed Celia yesterday.

ALAN 25:57

Yeah she's just a legend of a person like, and I think that you, when you see her and you talk to her she is her brand. That could sound like a you know an obvious thing to say but it just come through her personality and the passion from which she displays, but I think purpose will become something that is potentially commodified I think once you see the entrepreneurs and the decision makers behind it, you know which what purpose is authentic and what isn't, and I think that the real differentiator between the purpose you admire and the purpose you tolerate, because it's a good thing. You might be able to see through it and say 'hmm not sure if that's a marketing decision or leadership decision' but ultimately it might be you know, cleaning up beaches or planting trees or something and and you got to say that's a good thing.

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CAROLINE 26:53

And listen we're going to finish off with a little peek into you Alan, what are you passionate about outside work?

ALAN 27:03

What am I passionate about work? It's weird I don't know if it's a passion or an addiction I really love podcasts and I know that you're looking for things that begin with P. I can say but I really like learning often everyday trying to teach people and I think if I didn't go down that path and be you know a lecturer and hopefully at a university on a really obscure you know niche topic and somewhere in there in the basement. I love, I just love people and I know that sounds like a really corny thing to say but you know I've been given absolutely every opportunity that could have ever been put in front of somebody, and I think that once you do that once you reinforce people that they're really good at something whatever it might be, and you lean into that you can watch somebody completely flourish and become brilliant so I think that's why I would like to teach in a later life, and give that thing back. In terms of what has kept me going and passing by in lockdown, I love cycling I love trying to just get out and really push myself and trying to clear my head and that's a nice therapy. I've taken up sourdough bread-making and me and my brother-in-law are constantly Facetiming each other like look at this mine is better than yours no his is better than mine - that's usually the case and I think if I had to spend the morning doing something that really energized me I would be getting out and going to Portobello and jumping on a paddle board and just appreciating that you were pretty lucky to be even with all the the stuff is going on, like super lucky to be doing what I'm doing so I guess that's what keeps me going and motivates me.

CAROLINE 28:48

Love it, well I'm glad you called this Mind Your P's, podcast, people and paddleboards.

ALAN 28:55

And pizza's we do like pizzas!

CAROLINE 28:57

And pizzas of course of course and at listen how would your friends describe you Alan in three words.

ALAN 29:05

Aw jeeppers it would depend what friend, all my friends.

CAROLINE 29:09

The dodgy ones.

ALAN 29:09

I know that they're my friends because they never say positive word about me and they they're always constantly slagging me off but I guess, I don't know you know there's a certain passion about what to do and I I would imagine a lot of them would find me funny or at leats banter and yeah I'm always there I want the best for them so if they ever call me up with anything that is a problem I can always talk through and find solutions. A bit of a trouble shooter.

CAROLINE 29:37

Favorite beer other than yours?

ALAN 29:40

Oh Jesus. That changes on a day to day basis but you know what, do you know what I I would love nothing more than to go to a pub in you know somewhere in the country in Scotland.

CAROLINE 29:54

Anywhere right now.

ALAN 29:55

Anywhere right now yeah it anywhere but a belly Best for for me is just paradise when you're when you're, done a long walk or a cycle and you have a belly best in front of you, I mean yeah god knows that's the best feeling in the world.

CAROLINE 30:08

And finally Alan what would your family be most and least proud of about you?

ALAN 30:13

Most proud of, probably I once got my mom into a photo line with George Clooney, when I was doing an event called Scottish Business Awards that we used to run -

CAROLINE 30:26

Did she love you or George more at that point?

ALAN 30:30

I think it was a real fly wheel of love that was going on because of everything and and that was her favourite, you know pin up yes and that was through something I worked really hard to pull off I think that's probably the the pride moment. But at the same token my mum thinks that I'm very foul mouthed and she always shouts at me when I curse so that's probably what she's least proud of.

CAROLINE 30:53

Aw we never got a curse today that's a shame!

ALAN 30:52

We were very close to it on several occasions I think.

CAROLINE 30:58

Brilliant Alan thanks so much for sharing your story with us it's really inspiring and more importantly thanks for everything that you do and all the great stuff that you've done throughout, you know some of the some of the most difficult times in our in our history, thanks Alan. And what's next for you and and Brewgooder?

ALAN 31:17

What's next for us lot and I can't even begin to get into it, but please if you do you have any interest in what we do just pay close attention to what happens in the next and three to four months I think you're really really like.

CAROLINE 31:32

Brilliant, we'll put some links and make sure that everyone can can keep in touch thanks Alan appreciate it.

ALAN 31:38

Nice one, alright cheers! Take care!