

Episode 33

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Cost of entrepreneurship, Iron City Sports Bar, hospitality business, restaurant ownership, real estate investment, student housing, Ada Ohio, business partnership, hustle and grit, Rich Dad Poor Dad, downtown Bellefontaine, building renovation, mentorship, work ethic, lessons from failure

SPEAKERS

Jason Duff, Matt Brown, Ethan DeLeon

M

Matt Brown 0:00:00

Our GM at the time went back to the back. I went to the front. And then the beginning of the, what I like to say is like falling down a flight of stairs and comfortably landing on a landing every like, you know, 10 steps for the next couple of years happened. But we learned so much during that time.

E

Ethan DeLeon 0:00:16

Hey everyone, my name is Ethan DeLeon and I'm here with our founder and CEO of Small Nation, Jason Duff. Joining us on the show today, we have the owner of Iron City Sports Bar and local entrepreneur Matt Brown. We want to welcome you to the Small Nation Podcast where we share some of the valuable lessons with what we have learned about entrepreneurship, real estate, economic development, and more. The point of this podcast is to create value for you, the listener, and create a space to learn, talk about what's trending, and inspire others.

J

Jason Duff 0:00:48

Thank you, Ethan. Matt, welcome to the show.

M

Matt Brown 0:00:51

Thank you. Excited.

J

Jason Duff 0:00:52

I have been excited about this all week, so much in fact that I saved my black sweater today. There you go, man. Because this is Matt Brown Black. I have known Matt for many, many years, and the dude looks good in a black shirt. And literally, that is like— if you look at most of his photos that are out on the internet, that is his thing. So I had to wear my black sweater. You can't go wrong with black, the safe color, you know?

M

Matt Brown 0:01:16

And it's just more efficient. You look at my closet, it's like I have 10 black v-necks, and it's just easy.

J**Jason Duff** 0:01:22

There's something to that, you know. There's people like— they've studied very high, successfully producing thinkers, and many of them subscribe to exactly what Matt's saying. Like, they like the consistency that they're so busy solving so many other tough, challenging problems that don't want to worry about that.

M**Matt Brown** 0:01:38

Well, that's— that makes me feel good about it. Yeah, it's not that I'm just lazy and I like my clothes.

J**Jason Duff** 0:01:42

You're an elevated thinker. Well, you mentioned the title being owner of Iron City Sports Bar, but the truth about it is, is that Matt is very humble but is also, um, the leader and owner of a lot of other companies and ventures. Um, I mean, that's Ada Ohio Properties, so he is an investor in student housing, um, which I'm excited to talk more about real estate and, and that with him today too., and, uh, I could probably mention if we started adding up the LLCs that Matt has behind his name, we would be here for the rest of the episode. So, um, no, it's a pleasure to have him. That's on the professional front. On the personal front, why Matt is important is that, um, we have had a very deep relationship over the years. We met, um, in college, and one of my favorite experiences of meeting Matt Brown is that we were in a business class, a small business class which our university had, and the responsibilities of learning about this professor, Dr. Banthy, is that he helped inspire us to start a restaurant for one weekend. That's right. So we were in charge and put in teams to create menus. We were in charge of sourcing food costs. We were in charge of getting food licenses, and then we had different roles and jobs. What were you?

M**Matt Brown** 0:03:04

I was, uh, I was actually like the videographer and then a server.

J**Jason Duff** 0:03:08

All right. Yeah. When I met Matt, he had hair down to here. Hey, longer. Come on. Longer than yours, Ethan. No, but here's the thing is that I recognize when I met Matt, like he had this creative side where, you know, capturing the right images and he mentioned video and then that lent itself to being able to market. And then the other thing that, um, after we got out of school, uh, you worked professionally in an insurance job, like a lot of us do. Like, you graduate, you go get the regular job. And then the thing that really impressed me is that, uh, the next thing I read and learn about— Matt wrote a book. He literally was an author and wrote a book. And he wrote a book to help other young insurance agents in the industry understand how to get their name out there, how to market, how to connect. And after he wrote that book, like, part of what we were all doing at the time is we were attending professional networking events. And what's great about having conversations with people at those events, you kind of get the behind-the-scenes story. Like, we all have a little bit of bravado, like, life is great, I'm, I'm doing so well in my job, I love my career. And, you know, having a real vulnerable conversation, he's like, so, so what are you kind of doing in this real estate stuff? And you're you know, you're working. We had just like, we really hadn't even bought our first building in Bellefontaine. We were talking about like taking what we're learning in real estate and doing things here. And at that point in time, I needed to build a team. I needed to bring on more people. So we've had guests like Adam Rammel on the podcast, and Adam was one of our first employees at the time. It really was Dustin, I think Adam, and then you were like number 3.

M**Matt Brown** 0:04:51

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 0:04:52

Number 3 in the beginning of any company is a pretty darn important role. And at the time, we were sharing offices in our family business at Ohio Ready Mix. And, you know, in a family business, you work with Grandpa, you work with Dad. You got to know Grandpa Jim really well.

M**Matt Brown** 0:05:13

He was a great man.

J**Jason Duff** 0:05:14

And the thing about it is we— that Matt would show up— what time in the morning would you show up to work?

M**Matt Brown** 0:05:20

Usually about like 5:45 or 6. Wow. Jim would beat me there.

J**Jason Duff** 0:05:24

My grandfather would be there.

M **Matt Brown** 0:05:26

Yeah, that was— first of all, that was one of the greatest stories, like, for me that I've kept with me, is that Jim— how old would Jim have been then?

J **Jason Duff** 0:05:33

Probably late '70s.

M **Matt Brown** 0:05:35

Yeah. So Jim would come in and like, we had this bullpen in the back. Yeah. And I would be at my desk because it was like the quietest time to get shit done.

J **Jason Duff** 0:05:42

And I was like, can you describe what your desk was? Do you remember the kind of table?

M **Matt Brown** 0:05:46

It wasn't a desk, it was like a picnic—

J **Jason Duff** 0:05:48

not a picnic table, it's like a card table. Card table, real high quality one. Oh yeah. But we put like filing cabinets under it, so we made it look like a desk. It looked good.

M **Matt Brown** 0:05:57

No, but Jim would come in and he would be emptying the trash cans at all the desks. And I remember like the first time I got in there early, which is actually super cool to think that you guys got me a key, I could go in and actually work and stuff. And then Jim would be there like before me, but I never knew he was. He'd come in, he'd be emptying the trash cans, we'd shoot the breeze for a little bit and talk to him. And I just always like thought to myself, man, I knew Jim's story. I knew he was first generation, like, of entrepreneur and built, you know, something significant. But here he was, like, coming through and just emptying trash cans and, yeah, dragging the bag through. But he would take the time to talk to employees as they were coming in because— and I— he's super strategic about that, wasn't he? He was making—

J **Jason Duff** 0:06:41

he was humble about it and quiet. Yeah. But he knew what he was doing, and it was, it was a smart—

M **Matt Brown** 0:06:45

it was good, and it was a great example. I really resonated with that at that time.

J**Jason Duff** 0:06:50

That was cool. And I think the thing of those early days is oftentimes you don't know what you're building. It starts as an idea. But for us, we had hustle and drive and we had unique skills. So, you know, what I appreciated about Matt is Matt was very list organized and driven to like say, okay, this is the goal. I'm going to break it down into all of these tasks. And then I'm gonna put my head down and work harder than anyone else to get it accomplished.

M**Matt Brown** 0:07:20

That's right.

J**Jason Duff** 0:07:21

Yeah, so we put our heads down, and I think that's where time flies, is that we started buying and investing in buildings here in Bellefontaine. So where our studio is, we're in the basement of the Main Street Marketplace right now. Matt was a part of us acquiring this building, and in the early days when we bought it, it was sure a beauty.

M**Matt Brown** 0:07:40

And what's funny though is, if you remember, you asked me— because you had hired me to do some marketing at the beginning, you were like, you're going to be doing a lot of marketing. And then like this opportunity came for Center City Mall, and you were like, hey, do you have any experience in construction management? And I was like, no, but I've insured contractors. You know, this is just so stupid. I was like, I mean, we can figure it out. And we— I mean, that year it took what, 14 months to do this project, I believe.

J**Jason Duff** 0:08:08

Yeah, and the thing about it is everyone thinks that you need to know or have a title or a degree, and I think that was the difference when we first started. We didn't know any of that, but we weren't afraid to like ask questions and then sometimes just go in and we would learn on the job. So just going for it, renovating this building. The only tenant that we really had stay was the knife and gun store, which was in the front of the building, actually moved to the basement. And I've shared previously on the podcast that I was hoping we could just keep the knife and gun store, and Dave shared with me, I don't feel safe staying in downtown Bellefontaine. Yeah. And that's just how bad the town used to be. And we're like, wait a minute, you're a knife and gun store and you don't feel safe here? So we moved in the basement, we renovated this building, and I think the thing in the early days is that we were doubling down on finding other entrepreneurs that would take risk and were willing to work hard like we were. And it there weren't a lot of people standing in line.

M**Matt Brown** 0:09:03

Not at the beginning.

J**Jason Duff** 0:09:04

No.

M**Matt Brown** 0:09:04

And that was hard. Lonely.

J**Jason Duff** 0:09:06

Very. And so scary. But, but part of it is like when you're young and maybe a little dumb, a little naive, you're like, we're, we're gonna figure it out.

M**Matt Brown** 0:09:14

It's gonna be okay.

J**Jason Duff** 0:09:15

Yeah. And I think we've had Brittany Saxton, uh, on the podcast in early days. My, uh, Brittany and her mentor Michael, when they opened up 600 Downtown, What did you think that did for the town?

M**Matt Brown** 0:09:29

Oh, that was, that was a shot in the arm that it needed. And we always kind of talked about that food really is a good food is a destination. And that really was like, I mean, you remember that time, it's like the traffic. What's super interesting is, as you notice, in those years, we were just getting a revisit on traffic counts, even in this community for Main Street. And I remember they were super low at the time, because now they're like so high, like comparatively speaking, but that definitely helped. I mean, it was huge.

J**Jason Duff** 0:09:55

What if you think about us working that college project? We ran the restaurant, we sold the tickets. You realize how hard this was. But did you not walk away with the highest rush that you've ever had?

M**Matt Brown** 0:10:06

Yeah, absolutely.

J**Jason Duff** 0:10:08

Like, better, better than any pill, any— yeah, like, alcoholic beverage, whatever you name, put on your list, whatever it is. Yeah, we'll keep it PG today, but like, that high felt pretty darn good.

M**Matt Brown** 0:10:21

It's that— I don't know, doing something that pushes you beyond what you normally think you could do, and then being able to see that you actually could do it with the help of others, obviously. But like, it's super interesting to me, confidence, that how you can continue to grow even though you're scared shitless behind the curtain.

J

Jason Duff 0:10:43

Yeah, I think that's You started buying property.

M

Matt Brown 0:10:47

Why? Well, you talking about like when we were first— when I was— we were first working here? So I remember watching you, and I was reading Robert Kiyosaki, Rich Dad Poor Dad. Classic. I read that like — and listen, actually, I'll back up. I didn't read it, I listened to it on audio, and that was like my thing because I was driving 40 minutes back and forth.

J

Jason Duff 0:11:10

You were commuting.

M

Matt Brown 0:11:10

So that's right. So I was like, man, I can crush books. So I was just listening to everything, but I got onto that one and it really open my eyes up to be like, I have to really start looking at my life and what I want, why I want it, and then design it to be going down these routes that makes sense. And real estate to me made so much sense. And watching you and like learning, sitting shotgun, you know, with, you know, what we were doing.

J

Jason Duff 0:11:38

Because Matt really was kind of like a right hand. And what I mean by that is that in the beginning we had to have people that were prospecting spaces. So doing advertising to say this place is available for lease. And I still miss this of Matt, one of my favorite skills he has, his Sharpie marker skills. He can take a white piece of— he's actually really— he's very artistic. He can take a Sharpie marker and lay out a brochure that you don't even need a graphic designer to do it. And so in the beginning, we couldn't afford graphic designers, we couldn't afford nice websites. So like we had to like bootstrap and use a Sharpie marker and put things on the front door to get the calls. And so, you know, I think in the beginning you are the leasing manager. Mm-hmm. You're then the construction manager. You're then the property manager. And then I think you're just— just as people are hearing that, more weight, more weight, more responsibility. And then the other thing, and this is probably— this is a negative of my leadership style. If I know you can handle it, I'm going to throw all the weight on your back because there's, there's two things with that. Like, number one, I kind of want to test and see how much you can handle. Right. But on the, on the flip side, like, I, I need to get that stuff off my back because I want to take on even more to grow the company.

M

Matt Brown 0:12:58

Right.

J

Jason Duff 0:12:59

There's, there's cost to that, though.

M**Matt Brown** 0:13:01

Absolutely.

J**Jason Duff** 0:13:02

Yeah. And so, you know, the DNA, we work together. 10 years. So, um, you have to understand that we started from one property, and probably by the time that Matt left in his employee role at Small Nation, we are probably closer to 30. Um, and those are significant projects, big projects, and, and the thing about it is a lot of those restaurant focused. So yeah, the Brittany, you know, having the success of 600 we saw Adam and, and Jeremy and Brian open the Brew Fountain. And I think we, we had had a property on South Main that was a Ponderosa. Do you remember Ponderosa growing up?

M**Matt Brown** 0:13:46

I do. I remember that auction too. Your grandfather went, didn't he? He did go. Yeah. And he's—

J**Jason Duff** 0:13:52

no, he wasn't in support of us buying it, truthfully.

M**Matt Brown** 0:13:56

No. But it was, it was fascinating, man, because I remember when we acquired that, our job was to get it rented. And so we created— do you remember that development packet? Like that recruitment packet?

J**Jason Duff** 0:14:08

Because, because what we needed, the town was missing. You have to understand the whole county of Logan County is 46,000 people. Let me just ask our guests to think about this. 46,000 people in Honda country. We have a lot of hardworking, good people that love sports. Right? This is football country. How many sports bars do you think exist in Logan County at the time? Not very many, actually. You would think B-Dubs, no Roosters, no Frickers, and then no— very few places that you can go get a great beer, a great, you know, sandwich or steak, and then be able to have big TVs to watch a game.

M**Matt Brown** 0:14:44

The void was Wingers, truthfully. They left when they left. Yeah, and that's when— that's why the building went up for auction. And so the goal was well, let's just get Wingers back. And I remember having that conversation and it sort of not going anywhere.

J**Jason Duff** 0:14:59

And so full circle, one— a very successful entrepreneur in the sports bar industry is John Haffey, um, Beer Barrel, which in Ohio, I think they're now up to like 8 locations and growing. Yeah, we were, we were so interested trying to catch his attention, we had a baker bake a cake, cookies, or— yeah, it was like a custom cookie cake, all made with beer barrel logos and stuff with our proposal of like checking out this building. Yeah, we didn't get a single reply, callback, nothing. I saw him, I saw John probably about a year ago, and I said, hey, we were sitting at the restaurant. I said, yo, I said, do you remember? He's like, you know, now I think about it, I do remember. And the thing about it is we were just like dumb kids at the time trying to catch someone's attention. Yeah, but it took those guerrilla marketing techniques techniques. But I think you and I ended up, after a year of trying, we were pretty down on this. And I think at the time Matt said— he's kind of canny—

M**Matt Brown** 0:16:02

one day he's like, I know, what if I do this?

J**Jason Duff** 0:16:05

And I'm like, because you're going after those big name, like, franchise, like, rather than— I mean, right now we're all about small business, everything, right? But like, at the time, we're like, you needed somebody to come in and operate the space, right? So that's what you're going for at first.

M**Matt Brown** 0:16:17

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 0:16:17

But after that didn't work out, that's what brought about this new idea, right?

M**Matt Brown** 0:16:21

Well, and I think you naively, when you don't know what it's really like, you know, to own and operate a restaurant of that size and magnitude, you get to be the owner. Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 0:16:32

And you think to yourself, I know the owner, right?

M**Matt Brown** 0:16:34

It's like, and you think to yourself, especially predicated on like Brittany and what Michael and Brittany had done, and Adam and Jeremy and Brian at Brew, you kind of like to yourself, I mean, at least, you know, what I was thinking at the time was Man, if we build the right team, you can do this. Like, I, I felt naively enough that I was like, I knew enough to do it.

J**Jason Duff** 0:16:59

I can handle it.

M **Matt Brown** 0:17:00

And it's like, I bartended at the Beagle at Northern, you know, for 3 years. So like, I—

J **Jason Duff** 0:17:04

and you eat good food, you know, you know what good food is.

M **Matt Brown** 0:17:07

Yeah, right? Like, come on. And, uh, no, that's— and that's, that's the beginning. Like, that's where—

J **Jason Duff** 0:17:13

well, but this is where the behind the scenes was happening. As Matt was using what his really great skills are of building the team, he's interviewing kitchen staff, he's interviewing servers, he's working on building a brand. So, you know, doing research about that history of that part of Bellefontaine was a company called the Bellefontaine Bridge and Iron Company that built bridges in steel that in the late 1800s, early 1900s was shipped all around the country. So he built the logo, he built the, the name, the brand. We went through and worked with architects and engineers to pick out the light fixtures and engineered and updated the kitchen, figured out the draft system, started working on the food and beverage program, like all these things behind the scenes. And really the excitement, because he's a really good marketer, he starts teasing out menu pictures and starts teasing out like— and people are just, oh my gosh, we are so excited about this. Yeah. And then we hired a chef, a chef for the sports bar. And I say we because he and I in the beginning partnered up. Mm-hmm.

M **Matt Brown** 0:18:17

Yeah.

J **Jason Duff** 0:18:17

And said, we're gonna do this together. And I said, Matt, I, this is your gig. I'm here to kind of be on the sidelines and support and help where I can, but I can't be in the restaurant every day. And he kind of said, I'm gonna be the guy. So remember he has all of those. Yeah. While still supporting Small Nation.

M **Matt Brown** 0:18:33

Right. Right. And a full-time capacity at that time.

J **Jason Duff** 0:18:35

And let's just be real. Property manager, leasing manager, construction manager, marketing manager. You start adding, like, I don't even know. Did you have a business card that had a title? No, I think he's called — my default title for a lot of people, you're a project manager. You really, you really look at all the things the project manager does. And people that are my team members are laughing right now about this. They're like, I'm more than a project manager. But like, the thing about it is, is that we hired a chef. And do you remember the test dinner, dude? But it was wonderful. Do you remember how great— like, tell me about it. I want to hear about this.

M**Matt Brown** 0:19:10

Yeah. No, so, well, from a test center perspective, that went well enough.

J**Jason Duff** 0:19:13

How many people came? Maybe 40, 30, 40, 45.

M**Matt Brown** 0:19:16

Friends, like a soft opening, kind of soft opening. Everybody's supportive, everybody's going good. We have a few hiccups, but the people love the food that we had.

J**Jason Duff** 0:19:24

These, the probably the best sauerkraut balls that I've ever experienced.

M**Matt Brown** 0:19:27

Well, it was really like highly curated, like, you know, I mean, it was a very high-class sports bar food. Yeah, if you look back at the pictures, if you really scroll back through And remember, we shared all the pictures on social media. That really is like the learning. Like, the learning is like, I loved marketing and I was like, we gotta get business from day one. And now if you notice, like, with— not to jump out, but it's like with other ventures I've done, I'm very quiet, very quiet at the beginning. Because like, dude, if you can get people in, that's great, but if you can't execute Yeah, what's the point? Like, and that's where we were, is it was, man.

J**Jason Duff** 0:20:07

Well, I'm gonna fill in the gap. So after test night, the next big opening night, it's a Saturday. I just remember you, you, I mean, the people were standing out the door. They, you know, we had like all this, all these sales, all these bodies. And remember, our chef was used to doing maybe one dinner service at 6 o'clock PM, and then the prep was very minimal and then they close out and probably be out of the restaurant by 10 o'clock. Well, that, that's not how a sports bar works. And particularly when you open a new restaurant in a small town, everyone wants to try it. Right. And their expectations, because they saw the photos, they heard about the test dinner, they expect up here. Not only did we get our asses handed to us badly, the chef and his beautiful knives that he had laid out for his chef knives, he went like this, he folded them back up. And said, peace, you guys, this, this is your deal.

M**Matt Brown** 0:21:05

Well, didn't even— which, this is another learning point for me, is like, I really have harbored no bad feelings or anything towards anyone in my history that's flexed in and flexed out, because these are chapters and yeah, life happens, right?

J**Jason Duff** 0:21:18

Life is the journey.

M**Matt Brown** 0:21:19

He, uh, yeah, he, he exited mid-shift, and, um, I remember going back to the kitchen and all the cooks are like doing what they're doing, but it's kind of chaotic, and I was like, where's You know, where's Chef at? And they're like, um, he went out back. And I was like, going out back and smoke a cigarette or something in the middle of this busy shift? Like, what? And I go out there and I just saw his taillights. And that was like the beginning of like my— truthfully, that was the beginning of my like being, uh, from a selfish perspective, saying let down and being like, oh, like now I gotta pivot. What's that look like? Yeah. And that's when the GM went back— our GM at the time went back to the back, I went to the front, and then the beginning of the— what I like to say is like falling down a flight of stairs and comfortably landing on a landing every, like, you know, 10 steps for the next couple years happened. Yeah. But we learned so much during that time.

J**Jason Duff** 0:22:16

You don't realize, like, you're frying a wing and you're like, these wings look beautiful on the outside, But in those early days, I also remember that we were known for serving raw wings.

M**Matt Brown** 0:22:26

It was a stigma, man.

J**Jason Duff** 0:22:29

Like, and it's because you don't know until—

M**Matt Brown** 0:22:31

you just don't know.

J**Jason Duff** 0:22:32

You don't know.

M**Matt Brown** 0:22:32

And it's like, if I could— it's like people say this— if you could do it all over again, like, sure, I would have it dialed in. But that's the learning, is like, and what you go through. And it's amazing to think back, that was 2017, 6 years, almost 5 and a half years ago. It feels like 20 years ago, truthfully, because of how much you really do learn over the course of just a— and that was just the beginning because things did get really, really bad.

J**Jason Duff** 0:22:59

Yeah, so from there, take us, take us what happened. You're working full-time still from Small Nation.

M**Matt Brown** 0:23:03

You have your chef leave, your restaurant you're supposed to be running with this, you know. Well, yeah, we pivoted. Manager. Yeah, we pivoted through that. We, we, we sort of, we, you know, you're building a ship as you're out at sea, right? And so we, we, we backfilled. We figured that out temporarily, but my learning was, and while working full-time with Jason and Small Nation, was like, you, you can get so excited to pursue this dream, um, but if your focus is— if you're overwhelmed and you can't focus, like, everything starts to crumble. Yeah. And so for the learning curve of going from— and this takes me back to Rich Dad Poor Dad— of going from employee to self-employed, you know, from the—

J**Jason Duff** 0:23:54

that's a jump for a lot of people.

M**Matt Brown** 0:23:56

Yeah. And then coming back into employee world working with Small Nation and then going to this side where there's business owner and investor, and you're like, as a business owner, it's a completely different— it's completely different. Like, and I— and so for me, over those, those years, I, I found that culture, if I had to boil this all down culture is everything. Like, it really is everything. It, it's the foundation. And I, I know that a lot— that word gets tossed around so much, especially, you know what I mean, on business talks and stuff. But if you really understand it, it's like, it's not that hard. And that was the learning at Iron City, because if about 2 years in— yeah, 2 years in, we had— I had managers in place. I was trying to build what to me looked like how other, like even Adam and those guys, how they were able to operate and still work here and still be operating from helping with marketing and support, those types of areas. And I think I just naively thought to myself, like, I would be able to have a role like that. And that's just not how it works. It just isn't, not in my model. And so like 2 years in, we start really, uh, you know, I was going through personal, like, crises as well. I went through a divorce. I'd been married for quite some time. I have 4 sons. And that was a very earth-shattering experience to go through while the business was essentially doing a little bit of a decline. Like, it was like we were experiencing, like, a top-line revenue decline, which is a super good predict— like, it, you know, it shows you that you're doing something wrong.

J**Jason Duff** 0:25:37

Yeah. And just related to the reason why you were starting a business, the reason why you were sacrificing thing was your wife and family.

M**Matt Brown** 0:25:46

Well, and you know, right, this is good learning, isn't it? Because like, this is something that I've grappled with for 5 years, is like, you— I lost my why in my mind, in my body. I was like, what's, what's the why? And then it's like, it's almost like you were so blind at that time to not understand. Like, my why is like very much probably what it was for Jim. Like, I'm, I'm a first-generation, uh, college student for my family. Like, you know, like I'm the first one, and going into being a business owner or entrepreneur world, you know, that's not something my family comes from, right? And so like, for me, it's like, no, really, truly, like, no matter what the— what I want and what my purpose is, is to do this for my family. And then that's my sons, my grandsons, like my niece, like our family. So if you hold that true, you really can go through all the like that you do go through. And that's kind of like where we got to, was at that 2, 2, yeah, 2 and a half year mark. And we were having major culture issues, like in terms of man— like, this is something else that I've learned, is like the old way of management, it doesn't work. Like, that, that died over a decade ago, and I lived through it.

J**Jason Duff** 0:26:59

We weren't trained.

M**Matt Brown** 0:27:00

It's funny, right? School. Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 0:27:02

Isn't it great? The employee handbook, you This is how you, you know, create schedules and accountability.

M**Matt Brown** 0:27:08

Well, even just from how you, how you like at that time when managers think, how do I get this person to perform the way I need them to? Well, you don't get it by being abrasive. Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 0:27:19

It's not command and control.

M**Matt Brown** 0:27:20

It's not command and control. Right. Like that does not work. And so we had managers in place and that I had appointed. So I'm owning this like this is me owning like the experience of folks came through like in that period. I, yeah, like, I feel like I owe a lot of people apologies at times because, like, it was this time, but, like, we didn't— we did not lead. We were— our managers were not doing a good job at that time, and it reflected. We went through a social media, um, experience that went viral locally that, you know, it's funny because even now I've had an opportunity to talk with, you know, the employee that that had started that and talked to her a couple years ago. And we made like— it was like a good talk. And I was like, we learned a lot. Yeah, like I owned it and was like, dude, like, I, like, I can't believe things got that out of control. And I remember, like, I want to kind of talk about this because I don't think people on the outside knew that this was happening behind the curtain. Um, but like, at that time, it's like going through— going through my divorce Um, I had leaned on alcohol so much at that time as a, a relief. Yeah. And still working the Small Nation 80-hour work week and then doing the restaurant scene as much as I could. And to be, to be fair, you remember this, I was like, I was, I was there a lot. I was here, but I was there. It's like I was pulled.

J**Jason Duff** 0:28:49

We were trying to hit stuff and, you know, and trying to be a dad and trying to navigate the crisis of his family and just trying to do stuff. And like, you know, at time—

M**Matt Brown** 0:28:57

and this isn't like a pity show, like I'm not doing that, but this is just reality. I think a lot of people go through it where you're couch surfing. Um, you know, I stayed with Zach Weber, who we went to school with, and he was working with Small Nation, and he put me up on his couch for probably 6 months, longer than he ever wanted to.

J**Jason Duff** 0:29:14

Yeah.

M**Matt Brown** 0:29:14

And, uh, you know, I was going through those issues, and it was extremely hard. And I, I had— when that, the social media posts went out, um, sort of it was just calling out like how bad we were in terms of how we treated staff, um, you know, in terms of like food and how like operations. And people had pictures of stuff and just, it was so bad. I remember calling you. In fact, I was at one of the Lakeview properties getting ready to show it, and, uh, I mean, the weight of everything was so much. And I remember talking to you and I was like, I don't know what the fuck to do. And you were like, you just got to go in. And that's like all you said. And I got off the phone and I cried because it was like a moment where you're like, there is no one else. Yeah. Like, this is on you. And I remember going back in and being overwhelmed with the thought because at that time, I mean, the only right answer to rebuild anything and to redo it is to just start removing the cancers. And so like when you do that, you also have to remember, okay, that's great, like let's get rid of cancers, but how are you operating in a local market where everyone knows everyone and everyone knows everyone and workforce is already hard enough and the rumor— families and the rumor mill's already like picked up on the social media thing. So like people already just you know, yeah, go down that rabbit hole. Um, it was, it was a very stressful time. I remember, uh, Haley from the Chamber called me that same day and was like, hey Matt, is everything okay? We had the Better Business Bureau call us asking about Iron City. And I just remember being like, oh man, yeah, I was like, dude, this is so bad.

J**Jason Duff** 0:31:06

And, uh, and I think the other thing that weighed is that this is Matt Brown. Matt Brown in the community, you know, the way he was involved in chamber events, the way he would serve, represent us at Small Nation. Like, that's probably even the heavier pressure is the disappointment that you're not only disappointing his new employees, his company, he also disappointed me. And, and so like, that, that pain. And I think kind of going back on that, like, you don't really know what someone's going through. And, and that's where I have a lot more grace with dealing with people that take on these kinds of roles because you don't understand until you're in those shoes of how hard this is. That's how hard.

M**Matt Brown** 0:31:49

And if you're— and like knowing your intent, like my intent has always been good, like, right, we needed this. Like Wingers was, you know, I have, I have— I say kids, but I have, you know, high school students that work there at Iron City with us and their parents met at Wingers there. Yeah, you know what I mean? Like, it's nostalgic. It's just a— it's, it's that building. It's a, it's a— and when I walked around to get the signatures for the liquor license and all that and got like 80,000 steps in 3 days type thing, and literally all the people in that district felt like 80% of them, when they would answer the door and they found out which building it was, were like, that building's cursed, good luck. And like, that's before—

J**Jason Duff** 0:32:29

and the reason is there have been a lot of things that had tried that had never worked.

M **Matt Brown** 0:32:33
Yeah.

J **Jason Duff** 0:32:33
You know, I think the thing about the large— you have to understand the scale of this restaurant. How many employees does it take to run an Iron City?

M **Matt Brown** 0:32:39
It's part—

J **Jason Duff** 0:32:40
there's part-time and full-time, but if you add it up, we have 30, 40 count.

M **Matt Brown** 0:32:43
Yeah, 42.

J **Jason Duff** 0:32:44
That's a very different headcount with payroll. And then what most people don't know until you get into this industry is your food cost, because you have a lot of proteins.

M **Matt Brown** 0:32:52
This is—

J **Jason Duff** 0:32:53
yeah, it's not like a pizza place. Like, it's different.

M **Matt Brown** 0:32:57
No. And that's another thing is like what I have you know, just to sort of skirt through that period because that was a very bad period, right? But we started to come out of it, all right? And it took a solid year and a half of 14-hour days. Like, that's just what it is. Like, you have to put in the time. And I don't judge myself for that. Like, you know, at the beginning, like, when you're going through all these hard parts and these challenging times, and especially if you've gone through divorce and stuff, you kind of feel like a failure. Like, you're like, Jesus, what the like, what did I do here? Like, and then reflecting and being like, well, I probably— I did— like, I probably wasn't, you know, present. Like, I was, you know, like I mentioned before, like, alcohol really had a strong hold on me in that period. And getting away from that was like so huge. And it—

J**Jason Duff** 0:33:45

yeah, well, and I think the, the thing that when you care, you know, I think Matt and I, we have that brotherly kind of relationship where I saw him going through this and I did two things. I was actually pretty hard on him to say, get your shit together, like, like this, you have too much at risk. Reminding him, you're a dad, you're these things. The problem is, is that was only putting more pressure on him and really forcing some resentment probably towards me. And so the, the, our relationship, number one, the weight of me I use the word I care. I, I, my care for him says this is what you should be doing. Yeah, but that's not caring like in the way of he's got to have his journey in his space. All that, that they're receiving is that, you know, I'm being disappointed. Yeah, there's that, or I'm being controlled. And the problem is, and as you deal, like, I have, I am an addict Like, I, I identify as an addict, and most entrepreneurs will. Yeah. Luckily, my addiction, and people that know me well, is unsweetened iced tea. And I love to work. I don't have hobbies. I don't— like, I will, will work to the point that I have health issues. Yeah. Okay. And so that's my addictive personality. Alcohol, probably any other types of things you put in front of me, sugar, whatever, name your drug of choice. If I could abuse it, and if I got in a situation where I needed it, I probably would abuse it. Yeah. And I think that when I saw that with Matt, and, you know, we, we had some really tough times. We did. Going through that, like, yeah, um, moments where I wasn't sure, and I — maybe you weren't sure you were going to pull through this.

M**Matt Brown** 0:35:31

No, I, I really do remember. It's funny because I do talk to people that are close to me and I share with them, uh, I remember being at my parents' house at the time after I got off Zach's couch, and I was in my niece's bedroom, which was my old bedroom, but it was painted pink. And I was like, okay. And I remember being in there and going through this and being like, I don't know if I want to be— like, you know, it's not like you— you know how depressed you can get? Like, it's like, I just— I think that this is— I think if anything that I can like share with people as part of my journey is being transparent about how hard this is and how many people I hear say, I want to do that. And it's like, my feedback to them is, don't do this. Like, or mate, you better know you.

J**Jason Duff** 0:36:23

Yeah.

M**Matt Brown** 0:36:24

First, I didn't really— I knew me at the time. Then you go through that whole experience, which is like a multiple-year experience, and you question if you even know who you are.

J**Jason Duff** 0:36:34

Yeah. And you don't have a North Star, and you're just kind of Yeah, this is your identity, and if you can't do that right, then it's stripped away from you, and then you're like a hole of a person.

M**Matt Brown** 0:36:45

What is this purpose? Like, why? And I mean, there was weeks, months, um, man, some of those days, like, some days you didn't want to leave the house, you know what I mean? You know, like, where it gets so bad where— I mean, I'm talking financial. Yeah, like, where you're like, I'm not gonna meet payroll, past 60-day terms on, and you got payroll hitting, and yeah, man, um, and you're like, I don't know where this is coming from. And all I do know is, as long as you know yourself and you don't judge yourself, if you're, if you're good with you and what you're doing— and like, for me, I'm doing this for my family. This is my legacy for my family. This is going to hopefully put them in a position that— not financially, because I want them to— I don't want them to have the money. I don't care about like that part. What I really care about is that they can watch and learn from what I'm doing. And then have the ability to go and pursue what they want to do because they will see that I have done this and been through as much and be like, man, if he did that, like, I can, I can, I can go do something. Yeah. And I think that's kind of the goal. Like, I mean, everybody wants to be an entrepreneur right now, it feels like. And I really, I really am hesitant when I hear people talk. I don't know how often— I mean, I know, I know often we talked about it when I was here, but it's like, you know, I just don't know I know for a fact people don't understand what you're going to sacrifice, right?

J**Jason Duff** 0:38:13

Yeah. And I appreciate your vulnerability, vulnerability to share some of this stuff. And, um, this is why I was really excited to have you on, because we needed— we need this perspective too. It costs a lot. I mean, we, we tried to make it a point to show that, uh, it's lonely, you know, it's, it's hard, it's not easy. And I feel like a lot of times people look on and they, you know, they think it's easy. And so we, we try to make that, but it's also— there's like some very dark parts to it too, and very heavy things, um, that aren't just like, okay, you'll make it through with time. It doesn't— not always works like that. Um, so yeah, I think that's very important. And to your point of like, yes, very seriously consider whether you should even be doing it, but also know where your lines are. Like you said, know your why. That's a very, you know, the very important part to it. But know where are your limits? Like, you know, like, if it gets to this point, like, what is your— like, when you throw in the towel, like, what do you prioritize? Like, um, if you have a family, like, things like that. Like, you have to know those things. I think especially going into a partnership, things like that. Like, you have to— like, if the other person's not there with you in that same mindset, it's— I mean, it's not looking good. You're kind of building a ship. And how I've kind of looked at is that, and I'm so thankful for the DNA, just like you mentioned with your chefs and people that have been a part of this journey. Things may be a little salty when it immediately happens, when the transition happens. And then you give, and then you give time, gives perspective. And so I recognize with the ship that I run here is that there will be times where people are all on board and resonating with that. And there's times that people need to depart. That's right. And so, you know, for Matt and I, I think the taxing and heaviness of the pressure that I expected and was putting on him, the demands of that, um, while he's also trying to run his business, and then the kind of the emotional pain that I was dealing watching him go through the addiction, we just came to a realization that we, we can no longer work together.

M**Matt Brown** 0:40:22

It was just hard. And it was like taxing both of us. And truthfully, you were right. Like, what's— what I mean this because people have to have their journey. Like, you have to go through this chapter, and it is going to be a chapter. You're going to have to deal with it, and you're going to make poor decisions. I've made very poor decisions when I was at my lowest, you know. But like, everybody does. Everybody goes through—

J**Jason Duff** 0:40:47

even the most successful people hurt. And honestly, I think a lot of leaders hurt more because they take more responsibility on than most. But no one is perfect.

M**Matt Brown** 0:41:00

No. But when you're going through it and you know that the decisions you may be making are not resonating with your own self, and yet you're still just sort of like lost and you're trying to figure this out, I, I mean, for me, it's almost like growing through it and then learning to forgive yourself. It sounds cliché to say that, but it's— I mean, it's truth. It's like learning to accept, like, yeah, that was a bad period.

J**Jason Duff** 0:41:26

Yeah.

M**Matt Brown** 0:41:26

Like, my intent was not bad, right? Like, it really wasn't. But like, that was a bad period for me. And then coming out of that, and literally the last 2 years, you know, and what's fun is, or for me at this point, is like, I have such empathy for so— for anyone. Like, now it's like when you talk about employees and how, you know, people go through life, like The reason business is hard is because in most models it's completely predicated on people. And like, when you think about that and you— I just use myself as an example. Like, I go through that period of shit and like, how much turbulence did that create for your boat? You know what I mean? And then I, then I use perspective and I look at it and I'm like, how much turbulence am I feeling from certain individuals in my own ecosystem, you know, our team, that I'm like, I feel for you. Like, I get, I get you're going through life crisis right now, crisis right now. And so there really is, for me, like, what I've gotten better about is like accepting when people are like, I'm out, and they just walk out on you, you know. Or they—

J**Jason Duff** 0:42:34

you can respect that they're making a decision. They had like— they, they met their line.

M**Matt Brown** 0:42:38

Like, they've gone to what they can tolerate and do. Even if like it's unbeknownst to me at that moment, right, what I had done or what our, our company has not followed through with or fulfilled for you. And also, I'm, I'm realistic to know it's not always our fault as the company, right? Usually it's an internal thing they're dealing with, you're dealing with, and that's where the empathy comes from. And that's why like I really can't harbor a bad grudge towards any single person that's ever flexed in or flexed out.

J**Jason Duff** 0:43:08

Yeah, that's huge. And, you know, thank you for, for sharing that perspective because only by going through it did you learn it. Yeah. What advice would you give someone who is going through their darkest time on a team?

M**Matt Brown** 0:43:25

Ask you? Yeah. No, I got to ask yourself why you're doing what you're doing. If you can't— if it's about money, You ain't gonna fucking win. Like, you're not. Like, there has to be a higher reason. There has to be something. You have to drive enjoyment. Like you said, it's me accepting who I am, and I have an addict personality. I'm an addictive person, and it's about focus. It's about shifting focus. Like, I've spent a lot of time listening to audiobooks, not reading, but on this topic, and it's like, once you figure out who you are, what you're wired best to do, and what you can accomplish and not judging yourself. A lot of people say, you know, I mean, I deal with this a lot, and you talk about partnerships and stuff, and people say things like, you know, why family? I need some work-life balance, or I need time with my kids. And I understand that, and I say that's good, that's good, because you are recognizing that you otherwise would feel like a piece of shit if you weren't doing that. And I grappled with that for years when my boys were really young, and I was like— you mentioned how you get into real estate, and I started by flipping houses in Ada and then getting in some rentals, and we're doing all this in Iron City, and then you in the more— it's like, you know, at some point you just have to say, you know, if you're a professional athlete, you live a different lifestyle. Yeah. And I'm not talking about, you know, Lambos and watches and shit like that. I'm just saying your lifestyle is different. Yeah. And an entrepreneur's lifestyle is 100% different. And if you were not on board to be able to put in 14, 15-hour days, and I'm talking 26 days straight sometimes if necessary, and that means Saturdays and Sundays, then you ain't gonna make it.

J**Jason Duff** 0:45:05

And you have to find people in your life that will really sacrifice to support you 100%, and you have to acknowledge that.

M**Matt Brown** 0:45:14

And I will tell you, when it's— there's another word that gets thrown around and I hate it, but when you say fam, when people say family, like, it's like, it is family. My family is anyone who bleeds from their eyes with me. Like literally. And I, I have— I think you're wired like that. If you see someone that's like just giving their all, yeah, and then you double down on them, and yeah, and you think to yourself like, you know, and it's not even about owning something because like honestly, like Truth is like, I don't know if you want to own this shit because it's, it's not exactly like a good time. I mean, it can be wild as fuck, so it's not easy.

J**Jason Duff** 0:45:52

But the people closest to you Um, who are there with you along the journey?

M**Matt Brown** 0:45:59

Like, the— and, and putting in the hours and the reps and, and having, you know, I've had difficult conversations with the closest of closest people next to me. Um, you know, like, even, you know, it's just funny, like, how I recognize now burnout. I recognize— I'm so hyper-aware of it in our companies that I, I, I, even when I hear like a manager that's like on fire right now, when they're putting in 6 days a week, I start getting nervous. Yeah, I don't know if that's normal. I do, because like, I'm like, I don't— I'm not saying you're not strong enough inside, I'm saying I'm concerned for you to get burnt out. And then what happens is, in most cases they feel almost like they, they can't do this anymore because they're getting from home, you know, home saying— they're saying, 'You're never here.' You're— and it's like you're judging yourself, and now you're like, you feel terrible, and then you blame, you know, the company, or you just are like, 'I can't do this,' and it's overwhelming. It's like, man, I don't want that. Like, I'd almost rather just find— like, and we're finding that now. It's like, it's just finding— like, trying to be realistic enough to know when you're building a team and a company, to just know that it's not— it's never going to be perfect. But know that you have to like let your people have lives, because most, most people need to have lives. I'm not saying I don't have a life. I mean, I have— I love what I do, and I've accepted—

J**Jason Duff** 0:47:35

you can't kind of give that program and force it upon everyone else. And I'll say that that's probably something that I've reflected on with my leadership style too, because like in the beginning when it was just you, Adam, Dustin, and I, like, we were all committed on that program and we could burn really hard in our 20s committed to that program. But you do kind of wake up and like, you know, whether it's energy, whether it's health, whether it's other priorities like relationships or, or family, like, you, you, you're at a crossroads. You can't be everything to everyone. You gotta pick some priorities.

M**Matt Brown** 0:48:12

Yeah.

J**Jason Duff** 0:48:12

Yeah, you have to choose.

M**Matt Brown** 0:48:14

Yeah. You know, you said energy, and it's very true, you know, and energy comes from a lot of areas. I mean, I should be in the gym right now, you know, not right now, but like, I'm not— I'm at a place like I'm not going into the gym right now because it's just long days and you got to put in the time. But I'm getting my steps in, like, trust me. But yeah, yeah, but I will say, like, you know, sleep I don't know how I'm getting on this topic, but it's just sort of like something that's percolating in my brain about this because like I have sleep apnea, so I have a sleep machine. So I look like Darth Vader when I go to bed, basically.

J**Jason Duff** 0:48:50

But like, listen up, ladies. Yeah, right.

M**Matt Brown** 0:48:53

But you know, it's true. Like, I listen to like, you know, Joe Rogan and a bunch of other people that he talks with. And it's true, like, you know, energy really is like the lack of oxygen. I mean, it's a lack of oxygen. And when you have sleep apnea, you start to realize that. So for me, you can grind 14-hour days if you're not abusing yourself at the end of the day. Like, you know, like, you— if you— if there— I mean, I'm a living proof of it. Like, you can wake up the next morning, you can get a solid 7 hours, like, of sleep. I mean, you know what I mean? Or whatever it is, 6 hours, and be like It's good.

J**Jason Duff** 0:49:32

So, so, Matt, culture was a big theme, and then the other thing that I am so impressed with is the way that you give back to the community. Can you speak a little bit about that?

M**Matt Brown** 0:49:42

Yeah, so that's just— I've always been that way. So we backtrack, like, just real quick, Reader's Digest story. Um, when I was growing up, I had lawns that I mowed. I just started with my grandma's, and then it went from church lady to church lady, and next thing you know, you're— you got like 25 yards and 16 years old, and it's awesome. But my dad was super big as I was growing up that he would tell me, you know, put 10% aside for church to tithe, right? All right. And so that was like my form of giving back. And I remember like, whether I made \$200 a week, being like, all right, here's \$20, put in the envelope. And then on Sunday when I went to church, I put in the, you know, the tray when they passed it around. And so like, for me, I also feel like if you're if you're going to be a person— because whether you want to be or not, you go into entrepreneurship, you have a small business, you are a leader in the community, or you are put in a position to be a leader in the community. You have higher expectations from those in the community on you. I mean, it's just natural. That is what's expected. And part of me feels like you have a higher obligation. And like, these are vehicles, these are businesses. Like, I'm not romancing, right, you know, the restaurant itself. I'm saying these are vehicles to pursue what my ambitions are to get to in the next 20 years. And I don't intend to keep— like, that's just, that's just not good. Like, I like to be able to give back, and, you know, it's nice to be recognized for it. The Ohio Restaurant Association did recognize Iron City.

J**Jason Duff** 0:51:11

Yes, your award, you're the best community partner. And just to give him a few other brag points, like, when it comes to local schools or local organizations, like, Matt and Iron City is oftentimes doing 10% of proceeds to the cheerleaders, to the football team. And you have to understand, in our community we have lots of school districts, not just one. So he is very involved in all of those. And so I, I think if you talk to people, again, not only is Iron City known as a great place to get dinner or lunch or to grab a great beer or beverage, but it's like, I think out of any restaurant in our region, it's the restaurant that gives the most. And that's a, that's a special thing that that not only is it good, the good and right thing to do, but it's, it's, I think, earned you a lot of business.

M**Matt Brown** 0:51:55

It has. And it's, you know, yeah, with the schools, it just, to me, that makes sense, giving back to the actual community you're in. And you got it, you know. It's, it's been rewarding too, though, because you talk to some of the kids. Like, right now, working with, uh, Dean Wetzel on AAU, we're going to do a Dine to Donate event is what we call them. We do them every Wednesday. We donate 10% of our sales to that organization. And typically, you are right, we do a rotation with the schools for their athletic boosters. Um, but for this AAU team, for the kids, he's like, you know, AAU membership fees— my other— my— one of my sons is in an AAU team. I know there's fees, there's travel commitments. It's, it's a commitment.

J**Jason Duff** 0:52:40

Yeah.

M**Matt Brown** 0:52:40

And it's a good outlet for these youngsters. And he's like, you know, any sponsorships help, you know, pay their fees. And it's like, let's do Dine to Donate, brother. Like, let's do that. I know I can probably get \$500 raised. Like, we can, you know, that'll at least help. And like, to me, that feels good because I just— I really do mean it's like, it is, uh, something that's been impressed on me since I was able to create my own income, right? Like, where you, you have an obligation to give back if you're in that position.

J**Jason Duff** 0:53:08

And I think his employees see that, his customers see that. Like, goes into building that culture that that's what Iron City does. Yeah. Now since Iron City, because I want to mention, you now own a few more restaurants.

M**Matt Brown** 0:53:20

I do.

J**Jason Duff** 0:53:21

I was going to ask you, yeah, what was— what made you want to get back into the game and even like, you know, grow the game, double down?

M**Matt Brown** 0:53:28

You know, it's, uh, we always used to joke like, what's better than having one restaurant, two restaurants? That really was our ongoing joke because it's kind of a— I mean, because having one's a headache enough at times, right? But no, I— again, I really do like this restaurant business, and the reason I do is because if you look at restaurants, and anyone who is a restaurant person listening, you know this to be true, we are all broken people, really. And I like to— and I mean it's in the best way possible, I say it with my staff even, but we are on the island of misfit toys. Like, you know, like, that's— it really is. Like, we're, we're, we're the people that at times we've, we've been cast out. And, and I know, you know, this is common in probably other industries, but in the restaurant world, it really is. This is the way it is. Yeah. And for me, I, I have grown to love having some kind of impact with individuals like that because I can relate, I can connect. I can— I mean, with my staff, I'm 100% vulnerable and transparent about my life, about what's happening. Like, it's just the way I am. And I just think, you know, it's like holding certain information back, like, you know, it's like more like, no, like, I wear my emotions on my sleeve. Like, I am who I am.

J**Jason Duff** 0:54:49

It's an opportunity to impact someone's life.

M**Matt Brown** 0:54:53

And also, let's look at this also from the business perspective. Like, um, I think, and I know now because I'm seeing it happen on our group, is Bobber's Pizzeria at Indian Lake, for example, um, purchasing that a year ago, um, and then bought the real estate this year. That has been a good seasonal business model, but again, hard learning. Like, our oven broke down right at the beginning of season, so we had two oven decks, right? Yeah. Well, we're a pizza place and that's our oven. We spent like 8 to 10 weeks calling, getting people in, replacing the element, replacing this, trying that. It worked for a minute, die back down, do it again. And it's like we'd be on 2.5-hour wait times. People were pissed. I'm like, oh my gosh, I get it. Like, it's just another, like, falling down a flight of stairs. The difference is, is this time, like, you've, you've gone through that at such a high level of stress that, like, now I'm like, this is gonna be all right, this, this is all right. Because I also am, like, self-aware to know, like, how this local world works in terms of, you know, I've seen restaurants go through struggles and get bashed on Facebook, but you know what, they come back. Not all of them, but most, they will come back. And you, you get an opportunity to come back. And especially like the thing that has helped me is on social media is when that went viral for Iron City, and that was such a bad time, it was hand-to-hand combat on the way up out of that hole. Meaning when people were posting on like the Logan County Facebook group page, whatever it is, they're all over.

J**Jason Duff** 0:56:34

And they— I'm really popular on there.

M**Matt Brown** 0:56:36

I know, you're a weekly trending item, man.

J**Jason Duff** 0:56:40

Everyone right now, go find a Facebook group. Yeah, there's lots of really nice things.

M**Matt Brown** 0:56:45

Yeah, you know, you know what's funny is like if you listen, some, some people's some situations require you to respond, some don't. Okay, but right there, you know, but, and I've, and I've had to make that decision on what, where, and when to respond. But at the beginning of that coming out of the hole, dude, I responded to everybody.

J**Jason Duff** 0:57:07

Yeah, and you just start feeding the fire.

M**Matt Brown** 0:57:09

Oh man, I would just respond back and be like, you know what, we're not perfect, I apologize, we're gonna make that right. Send them a gift card. And a lot of people, like, you get— I get so much of this because even from like managers at times where they're like, this wasn't our fault. It wasn't even our fault. Why are we sending them a gift card and yeah, doing this? It's like, because like it's the right— it's the right answer. Like, do like less friction here. Yeah, like why are we— why are we getting an argument over whether or not like they really did have a bad experience? Because odds are they probably did if they're that worked up over it or that upset. Like, so let's just make it right.

J**Jason Duff** 0:57:43

And I mean, the same thing goes for like— I mean, it's dumb, but like Google reviews and stuff, like, uh, you people have a bad experience, they leave you at like— any like digital marketer will tell you, reach out to the person, you know, follow up with them, do what you're saying, you know, like make sure they come back and have a better experience, you know. And then they will end up respecting you more and be an ambassador for your business, even though they were the one that was, you know, driving business away.

M**Matt Brown** 0:58:09

Well, at that time, yeah. And it's— well, and then we go from Bobber's— I'll just pivot— so Skinny's in Kenton, Skinny's Tavern in Kenton. This, this is where it's like a kind of a hole-in-the-wall little place. Um, dive bar.

J**Jason Duff** 0:58:24

It's a dive bar. Yeah, yeah.

M**Matt Brown** 0:58:25

But it's like, it's known for its burgers. They're hand-pattied half-pound burgers. And, you know, it's a, it's a fun— it's a, it's just a fun little place. And I love places like that. And I grew up going there, um, with my Uncle Fred Markley, who was an attorney in Kenton and a judge at one point as well. But he took me He took me there when I was young, and I remember sitting at the bar and eating like a burger and being like, this is a fun little place. And then so like full circle, like, you know, that came about as simple as like the, uh, well, there was 4 owners, but one of the like couples, there were 2 couples, one of them lived next door to my mom and dad, and I'd known them my whole life. And so they talked to me last summer and were like, they actually reached out asking if I was, uh, if I knew anyone that would list the restaurant for sale specifically, and if they had to find someone in Columbus to do And I was like, well, I know someone that could, but like, what are you looking to do? And she was like, I'm looking to just sell and kind of move on and retire, you know, that type of next chapter. And I was like, I would love to talk to you. And the reason I love, you know, Skinny's, it's been around since 1958. Howard Thomas, Howard Thomas originally called it Thomas's Tavern. But his friends and the locals nicknamed him Skinny because he was a big dude. Yeah. And so like it just became Skinny's at some point in the '70s and it's like, and then they rebranded the name and all that. And so there's actually in the, in the restaurant we have a list of all of the times that the, the real estate and the business has changed hands. And, uh, it's very interesting.

J**Jason Duff** 1:00:09

It's just cool. Yeah. And, you know, it becomes part of the DNA of the, the city or the, the town that it's in.

M**Matt Brown** 1:00:14

Yeah. Yeah. And Kenton's my hometown. That's where I was born and raised, you know. And so like, for me, it was coming back to the community. And you know, the community, you know, the thing about that is too, and you've dealt with this, is like, you, you have supporters that are always your supporters, and then you always will have people who just aren't cheering for you, you know. And that's life, man. Yeah. So like, I knew I'm well going into my hometown, you're gonna have both sides of the fence to work.

J**Jason Duff** 1:00:42

Most of it's always rooted in jealousy. Or they maybe have a dream or an idea that they want to do something too. But as you hear, they're oftentimes not willing to make the sacrifices.

M**Matt Brown** 1:00:53

True. And just getting— I've gotten so used to getting feedback, you know, like where people give you feedback, and I'm good with it. Even if like I know like, you just don't understand what's happening in this situation, you don't have the context of what is going on.

J**Jason Duff** 1:01:09

You know, here's how you'd be more successful. I always like when they start out that way. If you just would add a special on your venue. And actually, can you do a buffet on Sundays at 11? If you would do that, I know you would be successful.

M**Matt Brown** 1:01:22

We just had breakfast.

J**Jason Duff** 1:01:23

Oh yes, just had breakfast. Yeah, that's easy.

M**Matt Brown** 1:01:26

You guys sound like you're talking about war stories. It's just, it's just part of it. But no, that's, that's been fun. And this past year also, just to dovetail on, I had an opportunity. I had been working really hard. You know Terry, you had Terry on. Terry Summers.

J**Jason Duff** 1:01:44

Terry, oh yeah, episode has dropped as well.

M**Matt Brown** 1:01:46

Yes.

J**Jason Duff** 1:01:46

Yeah, it's live.

M**Matt Brown** 1:01:47

Yeah, I thought I saw that. And, uh, I joined Terry's— I got back with Terry last year, just like building friendship, and then he was like, dude, he's like, I'm starting like a mastermind. And I was like, I'm in. Because like, for me, you know, I like, I like talking with people who are doing similar things. And Terry's focus is in the real estate game. He had a restaurant though down in—

J**Jason Duff** 1:02:07

yeah, and he talks about her, he talks about that.

M**Matt Brown** 1:02:10

Yeah, yeah. His story He had a wild story too, man. But, um, but, uh, no, like, from the real estate perspective, I know that I want to grow that residentially. Like, that's what I like. Like, I like single-family homes, I like multi-units. It's cool right now, that's kind of like what I'm interested in. And I went and joined Terry's Mastermind on literally just because I wanted to be around a group of people doing and listen to them talk. Yeah. And I wanted to just be in the room, so I spent a weekend with like 30 people and from all over, mostly in Columbus area, but we had several people from out of state. And, you know, now I have some, you know, good relationships from that. And I learned about virtual assistants and how they can be helpful for property management. God, I wish we'd had that.

J**Jason Duff** 1:03:01

It's amazing all the tips and tricks you hear from, from people who are movers and shakers, right? Like everyone's got something unique that they do. So just to be around some of that is super valuable.

M**Matt Brown** 1:03:11

There's so much good information. Yeah, stuff you're not going to learn, you know. It's almost like those are— that's the shortcut. And, and yeah, I'll pay, I'll, I'll invest the fee. Yeah, because like it's good information. Yeah, good learning. Worth it. I mean, for me it was like, I, I didn't know how to— I didn't even know how to structure a deal, you know what I mean? Like other than a basic transaction, like, well, you got to go to the bank, I get, you know, your 20% down or whatever it is, and do it that way. And then you start to realize, like, you know, with the Iron City experience, like, I got my first taste of a private money lender situation, right, Dad? Yeah. And it was like, for me, the weight of that— if I can say, I mean, that was— I, I bit off \$250,000 up front for the opening Iron City. And bro, if I can tell you, like, and I think it's like the amount of weight you feel when you, when you first, like, you're signing That's real money. Just document, you know, these agreements over and over. And like, literally knowing that I was working for you too. So I was like, I'm gonna be working the rest of my life.

J**Jason Duff** 1:04:15

This don't work.

M**Matt Brown** 1:04:18

Yeah. But you know, now it's so interesting to hear creative ways to do and structure deals. And I've got to meet so many neat people and like new capital partners and just—

J**Jason Duff** 1:04:29

we'll have to have you come back and dive in. And that was the thing when we began this episode Matt has so much knowledge and so much experience in so many different areas. Yeah, um, I hope you will come back on the episode. Yeah, but here's the thing that I want to share, is that when we first started working together, we painted a vision and dream of that ideal life. And I think that ideal life was getting you financial freedom. That ideal life, when you charted out with with Iron City is like, I want to own the real estate, I want to own the business. And even though the path that we initially set out with the various partners and managers and employees, you know, we're— you just— this place of being thankful because you still got to the end goal. Maybe it wasn't what—

M**Matt Brown** 1:05:23

and can I— you know what's funny is like this literally like at halftime. I mean, perspective, you know? And especially like with the restaurant world, dude, every day you don't know what's coming.

J**Jason Duff** 1:05:37

Like, which can be a really big high because like, it is a little bit. You're like, what's this wave gonna bring?

M**Matt Brown** 1:05:42

Well, you know, and that's what you— you know, I— and with the people that I'm most close to in my network that are my team, it's like we talk about this every day and it's like, dude, you just do get used to the waves. You do. And then you start to— you like, there's going to be scarier shit ahead, I know, but like you do start to feel like, I can handle this.

J**Jason Duff** 1:06:04

Yeah, not only can you handle it, you're doing an awesome job. And I think the people that listen today, um, you know, take time to find out about Iron City Sports Bar. I can tell you, you're gonna get some great wings, you're gonna get some great food, and then you're gonna go to Indian Lake to Bobber's, um, get a pizza there, and then you're gonna go up to Skinny's and enjoy a cold beer and a great burger. So it's all health food the entire day.

M**Matt Brown** 1:06:29

That's why you gotta have a gym membership.

J**Jason Duff** 1:06:33

But thank you, Matt. The big nugget again, um, the cost and sacrifice of entrepreneurship. And I think you hear from Matt about it's not easy. In fact, it's really hard. But he still gets up every day thinking about his family, the work ethic, the culture of the team of people that he is building around him, and is not only doing and maintaining, but he's growing it. And that's pretty darn awesome.

M **Matt Brown** 1:07:01

So nice work.

J **Jason Duff** 1:07:03

Thanks. Thanks, Matt. Thanks. Um, quickly, can you highlight, uh, you know, a couple professional development resources that have helped you along your career? I mean, you mentioned Rich Dad Poor Dad, But anything else, books, podcasts?

M **Matt Brown** 1:07:15

Yeah, I mean, it just depends on where you're at in your— sure, your journey. But like when I first started, I, uh, anything that was self-improvement, um, every Tony Robbins—

J **Jason Duff** 1:07:26

Tony Robbins CD, we listened to them.

M **Matt Brown** 1:07:28

Burn that over, man. I mean, anything that you can— honestly, if I had to baseline, it's like anything you can do to enhance your emotional intelligence, listen to that because like it is a— it is a— it is like a muscle to learn that. Yeah. And that is like probably one of the greatest skills that I've— I know that I am — if I, if I can brag about myself, is that I, I chart out very high on emotional intelligence and it serves me well. I think as leaders it is super important.

J **Jason Duff** 1:08:00

And then where can people follow you, keep up with what's happening with your business ventures?

M **Matt Brown** 1:08:04

I knew you were gonna ask this. So, you know, here's, here's the thing right now. I mean, you can follow our restaurants, like we're on Facebook, sure, we got pages we follow. And I'm on Facebook too.

J **Jason Duff** 1:08:14

And better yet, go to the restaurants.

M **Matt Brown** 1:08:15

Go to the restaurants, please. Um, but right now in this period of my life, it's head down work. And I don't have— like, it's funny, like a decade ago, 15 years ago, I had like a my own website and was trying to like be that, like, you know, person that could go talk on stage.

J**Jason Duff** 1:08:33

He can still do all of that, and someday— he's in this phase of his life right now But someday, and I think that the people are listening, they're going to be reaching out to you, want— wanting you to teach them more. Yeah, because this is the stuff that you can't read in a book. You got to go to the source and you got to hear these authentic, real stories. And, and again, see the success there. There's a lot of success. He's growing his company a lot, and that's incredible. But it's coming to sacrifice. And if people can listen so they don't make the same mistakes That is worth any check you could write him. Yeah, it's cool. Uh, I'm sure you'll take a check though too, right?

M**Matt Brown** 1:09:14

I'm happy.

J**Jason Duff** 1:09:16

Uh, cool. Well, I'll try to link a few things, you know, the restaurants and things in the show notes. But, uh, thank you so much for being on. I know I was, I was looking forward to this one. I'm glad we finally were able to get you on and, and hope to have you back someday. But appreciate it.

M**Matt Brown** 1:09:29

Yeah, good time. Good.

J**Jason Duff** 1:09:30

Thanks. Uh, you're good at podcasts too, man.

M**Matt Brown** 1:09:32

You should start one.

J**Jason Duff** 1:09:33

He's a natural. All right. Well,

E**Ethan DeLeon** 1:09:35

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