

Lucas: Welcome to Bridge the Gap podcast on a special series of COVID-19. We're bringing on thought leaders all around the industry to come on and give their insights and their tips and their encouragement to those that are working in this industry so tirelessly right now. And today we have our a BTG contributor, we've got James Lee on the program once again an alumni. Welcome.

James: Good morning, good morning. And happy to be supporting the swag this morning for Bridge the Gap.

Josh: Love it.

Lucas: Absolutely. Yeah, man. Well we enjoyed meeting you and spending some time with you last year at the Argentum conference we had you on and we talked about all different aspects and one of the big takeaways was life harmony and you know, golly, if that's not, you know, one of the most relevant topics even today and all of all that is taking place. We're going to be going over some aspects of that as it pertains to the new life and this new normal that the senior living industry and the globe has found themselves in. James, talk to us about what is like right now, I know that your wife is also a healthcare worker too.

James: Yeah, no, that's right, Lucas. So my wife Piper, she's a nurse anesthetist. So you know, when you hear all those stories about intubations and respirators and all of that, you know, she's literally the person doing that. You know, she came home the other day talking to me about intubating a patient that was suspected of COVID-19, and just kind of the anxieties around that her coworkers and you know, the atmosphere in the hospital. When you talk about the front line, she's in the front of that front line, you know, and people like her. So it's just an incredible time to hear about what it's actually like on those front lines.

And you know, she did her nursing education and training in New York City. So a lot of her classmates and colleagues are actually, you know, at the epicenter of all of that. So, you know, she's hearing stories directly from people who are living, I think the most concentrated form of that stress. It helps put some things in perspective, but truth be told but it, but it's also, it's a daily exercise to remain positive in the face of all of that information. And I think that's really where we're all at. You know, we have to on a daily basis commit to that exercise of positivity. And it's okay that, that's not easy. It's okay that, you know, we, we talked about anxiety. We, it's okay. And we should, especially as leaders, we should talk to our, our teams and our colleagues about, hey, you know, I'm feeling a little anxious right now. How are you feeling? And just, just have a human conversation and not just be focused around what's the right message, what's the you know, what's the PC message? It's, it's okay to have human conversations.

And I think that's one of the things that I kind of look back to as an executive director is people, you know, when you start as an executive director, you think that you have to have all of the right things to say to, to show that you, you have a command of the situation. But I've found more and more times that it's important that you show that you're human. You show people that I feel the same anxiety that you're

feeling. I've got loved ones that I'm worried about. How are you guys dealing with it? So sometimes as a leader asking the right question is so much more important than having the right answer.

Josh: Wow, that's a, that's powerful stuff. James, you know, and, and please send your thanks our thanks to your, your wife for what she's doing. I've actually as probably you all have seen some videos posting, some of which have gone viral of caregivers, healthcare workers that are on the front lines coming in from a shift. And you know, even how the families have to engage sometimes there's apprehension about getting too close until there's a process of even coming into the house. Has that process changed or a lot of apprehension for you guys through this process?

James: Yeah, it's definitely changed us. So she changes out of her uniform at the hospital, so she takes a change of clothes with her. We have a one year old at home which is crazy to think about. When I was talking to you guys at Argentum last year, I think either Evelyn was just born or she was about to be.

But yeah, my, my wife changes at, at the hospital when she gets home, she hits the shower directly. So, you know, if I'm at home holding Evelyn you know, feeding her or something, she bypasses us, goes to the shower and then comes back. So yeah, there's a little bit of a protocol now around honey, I'm home.

Josh: Yeah. I can only imagine. I can only imagine. Well thanks for sharing a little bit of that story with us. One of the things we were talking about with you, James, just before we went online was what a spotlight our industry has on it right now. You kinda gave a fresh perspective, which is why we wanted to talk to you that we need. But give us some of your thoughts on just, kind of, the spotlight that we have on our industry and how should we be thinking, like, how should we be approaching this situation?

James: You know I think that what's a really amazing byproduct of what's going on right now is that the senior living industry is spotlighted, you know, in the midst of this COVID-19, you know, situation along with healthcare. And what we have to be very careful about, I think it's an industry, is that the stories that we are telling right now are authentic. More than anything, they just have to be authentic. I think people can feel right away if it's kind of overly produced or if there's kind of a specific intention behind creating a video or a message. But you know, the, and there's plenty of examples of authentic stories out there where people are just, are just doing the right thing for their employees or they're just expressing concern, you know, for their loved ones and their, and their colleagues across the industry. That's the, that's the right stuff.

You know, I've been thinking a lot about you know, and I'm sure you guys have as well, but what's, it gonna feel like once we're out of this? You know, when you're in the midst of a crisis, it's hard really to remove yourself from that timeline to consider, hey, I'm not going to be in this, in this part of the timeline forever. I'm going to be looking back on this. And whether that's six months, a year or five years from now, we have to have the sense of calm right now that we are going to be there. You know, if you think about, this thought has helped me get through a lot of tough times and that's, you know, there is no option except this is going to be okay. You know, whatever that means. Humans are resilient. You know, and we will be looking back on this time and we will have gotten through it.

But I think it's important that we're doing all of the actions today that future selves will be proud of. Right? How did we utilize this time? Did we cut, you know, people from our workforce that we didn't have to, you know, did we make the right investments in human relationships? Do we make the right investments in training and development? I know it's a tough time and, and I have no judgment about how, you know, different leaders, different operators are choosing to, to kind of move their business forward. I think that's a huge responsibility. It's not an easy responsibility. You're going to have to make some tough decisions without all of the, all of the cards on the table. But, with that said you know, we can't be afraid to make long term decisions based on what's going on in the short term. Does that make sense?

Lucas: Yes.

Josh: Yeah, it really, really does. Well, you know, I think you hit on a point that probably everyone that's listening or watching this is it's near and dear to home because regardless of what your position or even what industry, there's probably some people listening to this that are not even in senior living or healthcare. For many of us, we now know what two weeks and somewhat of isolation feels like and that two weeks, you know, the days can feel like years especially when you've got kids at home and, and spouses at home and you're trying to get used to this new norm and, and figuring out technology and things like that to continue to try to conduct business. So I think it is difficult to put your mind in a position of unique perspective of looking forward and kind of rise up out of the weeds and think, okay, the decisions I am making today, my emotions, my outlook, those, whether I like it or not, are still going to impact tomorrow and a year from now and two years from now. So having that kind of thought process, framing that for us and our audience I think is a very unique perspective that you've challenged us with.

James: Yeah, I think a lot about, I think in metaphors and, you know, every time we talk we get together and talk I have to be mindful of that, stick with one metaphor. James, you know, don't go with like four different metaphors to talk about one thing. But the one thing that I'm thinking of right now as a lot of people have this, have this kind of conversation around are you working like it's a sprint or you're working like it's a marathon. I actually don't think it's either, you know both, both of those presume that there's an end, you know, a sprint, it's, there's an end right away and a marathon, I get the analogy of it, but that also presumes there's an end to that marathon. You know, we're on a perpetual journey, you know, w there is no end to senior living. So we have to think with that kind of calmness right now is that it's not pacing yourself. It's, are you journeying well, you know, are you journeying well in this process? And this is just the leg of the venture journey.

Josh: I totally agree. Lucas, you know, one of the things if you apply that even to us, I think in our businesses we've been way out of our comfort zones, right? On this podcast we've been forced out of our comfort zone. Normally we would be doing this interview in person with you. And so I think as we've kind of been discussing, I can only imagine that everyone is out of their comfort zone. Probably many feel like their hands are tied behind their back and like sitting on the sidelines. Like, what can I be doing?

I think an important thing that you are touching on, and I think you mentioned this just a few moments ago, is what can I be doing to kind of refine my skills for what might be the new norm? And I think about even getting used to virtual meetings. I know that there's even been some funny videos and on social posted about everyone trying to do business virtually and that's pushing us out of our comfort zone.

James: Yeah, absolutely. You know, this, I keep thinking about what the new normal is going to be after, you know, we've gone through this and I know there's a lot of thought leaders and experts talking about how to navigate the current situation. So you know, and I'll leave those commentaries to those experts.

So, you know, in the context of thinking out, thinking further out from, from the moment right now. I think if we, if we take a look at salespeople, for example, a lot of sales teams, sales managers, they're thinking, what do I do right now besides, you know keeping in touch with people, moving the relationship forward. Of course, you know, we can focus on that. But I think this is an excellent time for industry to focus on. Building new skill sets like virtual training as an example. Regional sales directors are used to doing a phone call, right? Everybody gets on a Monday morning phone call or Tuesday morning phone call. But as we're, I think we're seeing that virtual teams can work, you know, we're forced into that situation right now. But after two more weeks of this, or two more months of this you know, we're going to realize, hey, we actually got through this time without everybody having to come to you know, a central location to do this. So let's get better at this. Let's get better at Zoom. Let's get better at instructional design. How do I put PowerPoints together so that it's engaging for people? I've always thought the regional leaders in our industry should be the best instructors in any field. So this is, this is an excellent time for people to invest in those skill sets.

Josh: Gosh, I so agree. And you know, I was talking with someone the other day about that was a regional and I was a regional at one point and I remember I basically lived out of a suitcase and I felt like all my time was either an airplane, train, bus, Uber, you know, you name it. And how much we can actually get accomplished even through video even more than just traveling all the time. So I think it will force us to look at ways to be more efficient but still very impactful as you, as you mentioned. Lucas, you're sitting there nodding. What are your thoughts on all?

Lucas: Well, I think this goes back to just as we round out this conversation to give our audience just a quick insight and some encouragement and some education today as they're going into, into battle, so to speak. Going back to the opportunity at hand, we're, the industry is being forced into these new norms, things that you just outlined: remote calls, video conferencing calls, FaceTime, Zoom. Utilizing and leveraging modern technology into an industry that candidly has been slow to adopt new technologies. How do you see this disruption actually ending up being a positive on the, on the bigger scale for the future of the industry?

James: Well I think, again, thinking forward more than one step. Right now, I think we can see the tangible benefits of how this will serve our workforce. But I think, I think about the value of doing something like this with our prospects. I think about the value of doing you know, a zoom type conference with family members to help them learn about, you know, Alzheimer's. I think if we're really

thinking forward and adopting technology in a way to engage more than just our workforce, we're thinking ahead about how do we make this happen for all of the people that we want to help?

And Josh, you, you were mentioning like what this feels like for us after two weeks. And so we have to kind of think about, okay, let's keep in mind that this could be the new normal for two more months or however long. So you're just kinda settling into it. But I've, it struck me that this is how seniors have felt for a long time. You know, this feeling of social distancing is not new, a lot of seniors. And so it's a true moment of building empathy for the people we're supposed to be serving, right? And so if we can kind of lean into that and kind of take note of how are we feeling right now? What does this feel like to be the prospect, you know, on the other end? And so the next time we make that kind of sales call to move the relationship forward, let's not just talk about, do you want to come into the happy hour? Let's talk about, you know, how has it felt for you being in your home for, you know, two years since, since Mary's passed away? This really is an inflection point for teaching us empathy. So I think technology doesn't have to be cold. It brings these wonderful connections together. So we should start mapping that out now.

Josh: I love that perspective, James. Thanks for kind of bringing us out of the weeds this morning. Sometimes it's good to get some clarity and kind of elevate the thought to a future position and what that looks like potentially in hindsight. So thanks for the time this morning.

James: Yeah, well you guys are doing a lot of important work right now and you know, positivity doesn't it's not just one note. You know, it doesn't, encouragement isn't just, you know, saying everything's going to be okay. It's also saying, you know, I don't, I don't know how I feel, write it down. So even when we got on just before recording here, I think we were all just kind of shaking off our, you know, our Monday feeling and that's okay, let's talk about that. Let's help people get through all of the normal feelings of what this is like. So that's what encouragement is, you know we believe in you, I believe in you guys. And you know, we will get through this, but let's, let's think about what it'll be five years from now and not just five weeks from now.

Lucas: Great insights from our buddy James Lee, a BTG contributor and a little teaser to our audience. You will be seeing more of James in the future. He aligns with us so well. We're looking forward to that once we get past so much of what's going on, some great encouragement. Just know that our thoughts and prayers are with you, James and your wife and your family and your extended family as well as to all our listeners in the industry.

This is a challenging time, but we've never been more confident in all of you to do the hard work of caring for a very, you know, a very delicate population of older adults. So thank you for listening today. We hope you have a great day here from Bridge the Gap.