



## **BRAND SECRETS AND STRATEGIES PODCAST #125**

Hello and thank you for joining us today. This is the Brand Secrets and Strategies Podcast #125

Welcome to the Brand Secrets and Strategies podcast where the focus is on empowering brands and raising the bar.

I'm your host Dan Lohman. This weekly show is dedicated to getting your brand on the shelf and keeping it there.

Get ready to learn actionable insights and strategic solutions to grow your brand and save you valuable time and money.

**LETS ROLL UP OUR SLEEVES AND GET STARTED!**

Dan: Welcome. One of the biggest challenges that every founder faces is assembling a team that's going to help them achieve their objectives and to help them rocket their brand to becoming a fan favorite. Think about all the things that are involved in running a business. It's not just a matter of putting the product in a package and shipping it out the door. You've got to have people that track the shipments, people that make sure the product goes to where it needs to be, people that make sure that your product



is properly merchandised on retailer shelves, and much, much more.

But before that happens you've got to put together a sales team. You need an effective strategy and sales plan. How are you going to go to market? What stores do you want to start with? Where should you begin? What does the category look like? How can you carve out your unique niche? These are just a few of the many questions that you need to think about as a founder, and answering those questions is the focus of today's episode.

I've had the unique privilege of working with and talking to literally thousands of entrepreneurial brands. This is one of their biggest challenges. Do you hire someone right off the bat when you really don't have the money? But then if you don't hire the right person, how are you going to get your product where it needs to be? What does the right person look like, and how do you make that decision? Waiting too long can stunt your growth, and doing it too early could cause you to hire the wrong person or someone with the wrong skillset. These are all difficult questions that keep founders up at night.

And by the way, established brands have the same problems. They're just not as dramatic because you've got people that can typically fill in while you're looking for a new hire. But in a small business this could be dramatic, and this is something that you need to be thinking about well before you even launch your product. Now I'm not saying you need to have a clear roadmap with everything well defined, who's going to start what day, et



cetera, but you do need to have an idea of what you need to be thinking about. What roles do you need to fill?

Think of this also, as the founder you've got a lot of different things to be thinking about, a lot of different hats to wear. And if you're busy working on one task, that's taking you away from something else. So you need to be constantly asking yourself, "Is this project taking me away from something that's more important? Could I hire someone to do that task so that I can focus on the more important things in running a business?" For example, getting your product on more store shelves and into the hands of more shoppers.

Before I go any further I want to remind you that there's a free downloadable guide for you at the end of every podcast episode. I always try to include one easy to download, quick to digest strategy that you can instantly adopt and make your own, one that you can use to grow sustainable sales and compete more effectively. Remember, the goal here is to get your product onto more retailer shelves and into the hands of more shoppers.

I want to give a quick shout out to Lester who left a review. Tasha O. says, "This is next level. Great information on leveling up brand recognition, marketing and effective ways discussed on how to apply this knowledge. Thank you I appreciate your review."

If you want to have your review shared, then please send me an email, leave a review or leave a comment. I appreciate and read



them all. Remember that this podcast is about you and it's for you. If you like the podcast, subscribe and share it with a friend.

Now here's Josh with ForceBrands.

Dan: Josh, thank you for coming on today. Can you please start by telling us a little bit about yourself and your journey to where you're at today with ForceBrands?

Josh: Absolutely. Thank you for having me. It's a pleasure to be on with you and to share a little bit about the story. For the past 11, almost 12 years, I've had the pleasure of helping companies navigate the complexities of building their organization and building their teams, which has been a delight. When I'd started as BevForce back in 2007, it was a hiring resource specifically for the beverage alcohol industry, because that's where I had come from. I had a rum company with a couple of other guys before that, but it's really grown into ForceBrands as a parent company, and we like to think of ourselves as a consumer-product industry hiring destination with specialized divisions. We have BevForce for the beverage industry, which is both alcoholic and non-alcoholic, we have FoodForce for the national food industry, BeautyForce for the beauty, personal care and wellness industry, and HerbForce, our newest addition, for the Cannabis industry.

So, it's all consumer verticals, but food, beverage, beauty, and Cannabis is really, those are our focused areas. I've just always been fascinated with helping people, and just realized there was this pain point when I was running a business of our own, a rum



company, and there was just so few resources out there to help build organizations as emerging high-growth brands, so we decided to build a platform on our own.

Dan: Which I'm so glad you did, because that's exactly what I want to talk about next. I mentor, as a privilege, I'm mentoring and working with literally hundreds of emerging brands. And so many of them hire the wrong people, or they wait too long to hire the right people, or they hire an agency where they should do something in-house, or, a lot of different things that they struggle with. Can you start by talking about helping all the listeners understand why it matters what you do, why it's important to have the right people in the right place and get the right people vetted and so on, and what does that process look like? I know that's a pretty big question, but I guess what I'm thinking about, Josh, is if I'm an emerging brand, I know I need someone, but I really don't know who to hire or where to go, so why would I want to call you? What are my choices, what are some of the things I need to be thinking about? And then as we progress through the conversation, I want to get into specifically what's unique about BevForce.

Josh: Yeah, it's a complex question, but it's a very simplistic answer. It's understanding as an early-stage company or founder what your strengths are and your blind spots, and where your vulnerabilities are. If you're a founder, and you have a co-founder that complements all of your skillsets, it's great. If you're a single founder and you're good at sales and marketing, then you



probably need to bring someone in that's good at finance and operations. If you're good at fundraising and raising capital, and you've never really dealt with distribution omnichannel, then you're probably going to want to build around that. So, it's just like anything else in life, being very clear with yourself about your vulnerabilities and what your strong suits are, and understanding functionally where there is opportunity and how to build around that.

I mean, the smartest leaders, I believe, surround themselves with the best people. That doesn't mean you have to hire the most senior person with the most robust resume, it's finding people that have the appropriate skillset to the specific stage of the business. So early-stage, the type of people that you bring on that build the business from zero to 10 million are very often different skillsets that are going to help you scale up from 10 to 50 million. So early on, my recommendation is, before you even get into recruiting or hiring, is put yourself around other founders that have gone through this journey before, that have experienced the challenges and success, and have already walked through those landmines.

By surrounding yourself with those type of people, you can very often get the right type of advice and guidance that can be really helpful, and just like a simple org design session very often helps. And looking your business in functional areas of sales marketing, finance ops, ecom, human resources, and you figure out who should do what. So, it's a lot of what we do with entrepreneurs,



and the ones who are willing to ask for the most help and are really focused on putting the best teams around them, typically have the highest likelihood of succeeding. Because there's a lot of great brands out there, but there's a lot of them that never lived to their fullest potential because they didn't have the right people. All these great brands you hear about that grew and scaled, it's because they have great teams, really.

Dan: Well said, and this is exactly why I wanted to have you on the podcast. Because this is such a critical aspect of every component of every business, of your success. And this is one of the biggest mistakes every brand makes. And so thank you for breaking that down. So, kind of a stupid question, what if I don't know what my blind spots are? What if I don't know what I don't know, and I don't know who to look to, to get support, et cetera? I know that's kind of a strange question. What you said makes tremendous sense, but I run into a lot of entrepreneurs, Josh, that don't even know how to ask the beginning questions that you covered. So, what would you recommend they do?

Josh: Well, it's very daunting to think about it and put it on paper, and to say, "Oh, I don't know what I do, or what I'm capable of doing well," but the fact of the matter is, if they're just out of college or they've had a couple jobs beforehand, they probably leaned into a specific area where there's a higher level of comfort. Now, maybe they had a sales job. Maybe they were a finance major. Maybe they studied supply chain and operations in college. Maybe they've always been into brand marketing, loved direct to



consumer businesses, because they follow them. Just understanding if you're more on the commercial side, or more on the finance ops side.

As you start to build a business plan, you're going to lean in, in certain areas where you feel really good, and you'll just naturally and instinctively spend more time there, because it's more comfortable. When you feel discomfort in a certain area because you feel like you're out of that zone where you typically flow, or you're over your skis, those are typically the areas where you have blind spots. So, people worry about it and don't know what their blind spots when they're not doing it. But if you even talk to an entrepreneur that started building anything that has a product in market, I mean, they're usually pretty clear about, "Hey, I get really nervous around sales calls." Or, "Hey, the fundraising and the financial modeling, that's not my sweet spot. I need someone to help me."

So, I would say that really, you got to start doing it. And every entrepreneur, every founder that I've ever met, has to do everything at the beginning. Unless they just have some crazy fun being, and they're building a team before they ever get to market. But, most of the founders of these stories, they start grass roots from scratch and you got to do it. You got to do your own QuickBooks. You got to design your own label. You got to create your own product. You've got to go raise your first couple hundred thousand dollars. You have to do all that. Which ones



you feel you're well suited for, and which ones you feel you're not well suited for.

And I believe that, those are answers you can find within, and then how do you go about finding other entrepreneurs that have been through it? Well, there's industry events you can go to. There's the BevNET, and the Project NOSH, and XOS, and the Fancy Foods, and there's so many, and there's the Bob Burke seminars, and there's just a lot of cool stuff that you can really go to where you're going to have other people that extend the olive branch and are willing to help you. And the more you talk with them and the more you admit that you're a little in over your head, probably the sooner you'll start to get a feel for where you're headed and what other people have done successfully or not. So, I think it's being true to yourself and then going to over extend yourself in connecting with other people that have been through this journey.

And the industry's so supportive. Things, the shows that I mentioned, the seminars, the panels, I mean, these are great places to connect with people. That's how I started in the natural food space and now I have a lot of valuable friends there, because everyone likes to help each other.

Dan: It's true. It's what makes natural, natural. And that's exactly the answer I was hoping that you would share. It is going back to deconstructing the business. Deconstructing what you're trying to do, what brands have gone through, and you learn so much when you go to those events where you listen to industry professionals.



This podcast is designed to help brands understand the challenges and the things, the bottlenecks, et cetera, that CEOs face. I mean, for example, Stoneyfield. It didn't just show up on the shelf and become a number one brand. Gary talks about all the struggles and all the challenges that he had, et cetera, in the podcast, in both episode 42 and 100.

So, going back to that, one of the things and I'm so glad you said this, thank you for doing that, is the business plan. So many of the program's business seminars and schools and stuff like that, don't get into the importance of having a solid business plan, in my opinion. And the reason that's important is, if you don't have a target to shoot for, then how will you know when you've arrived, or better yet, how will you know when you're drifting off track? If you don't know where you're going and you don't have a road map to where you're trying to get to, it makes it exceedingly hard to know when to course correct.

And even if you're planning or keeping the business as a legacy brand, legacy business, or if you're planning to sell the business as an exit, you've got to have a plan. And if you have a solid robust business plan, then back to your earlier point, then you can map out the things that you need to be thinking about. For example, when do you hire someone for HR? When do you need to hire someone for doing the shipping and whatever else? What are your thoughts around that?

Josh: Well, I believe that building out, to your point, a business plan is so critically important, and part of that business plan is raising



capital to fuel the growth of the business, the heart of the business. So few are started without every ... there's very few RX Bar stories where they really didn't have to raise capital, which is phenomenal, phenomenal story, and kudos again, they're amazing operators and amazing entrepreneurs.

Dan: They are.

Josh: The majority of the times, people are raising capital and when you're raising capital, use of proceeds is so critically important. And that requires you to build out an organizational design, a hiring strategy and say, "At this specific point in time when I'm a sub \$1 million business, this is what the team's going to look like. When I get to a \$10 million business, this is what the team's going to look like. When I get to a 25 or 50 million dollar business, this is what the team's going to look like. And really, conditioning yourself and communicating that to investors and holding yourself accountable, so you know if I launch a natural channel or I launch conventional channel on food service, these are support mechanisms I need in place. These are sales people, these are the operations people I need to do demand planning and forecasting. I need to expand my co-packing operations.

So, all these moving parts fit together. So what we typically find is, unless you have a plan, you're just shooting from the hip. And it doesn't mean that you're not flexible and valuable and you don't shoot from the hip in certain areas, but you got to have guardrails. And the guardrails are how much money am I investing? What are the revenue thresholds I need to meet, and



what do the specific team structures look like when I hit those milestones? How do I achieve that? How do I support that? You don't want to over hire. You don't want to under hire. You just want to make sure that you've got a really good plan in place and a lot of what we do is sit down with companies and we talk about the org design structure and what that looks like. And there's roadmaps and there's blueprints that exist. You don't have to make it up from thin air.

And other entrepreneurs are willing to share with you, too, because they've been through that journey, so a lot of this information exists. It's out there in the ether. It's about connecting with people who have done it.

Dan: Well said, and thank you again for breaking that down. I agree with you completely and I have a belief also that, a CEO should not be a professional fundraiser. And why I say that is that if you don't have a plan, if you don't have a strategy, if you don't have those guardrails in place, if you're not doing your research in this area, then you tend to just be a perpetual ATM machine. A constant looking for the next dollar to fund the next distribution. Where if you can do this properly, if you have a well-defined plan, if you've got the right support at the right time to help you, like you said, make sure that you surround yourself with the right people. Then you can get more runway out of the revenue that you get. And one of the other cool things is that you are more attractive to potential investors if you have a well-designed



business plan, a well-executed business strategy. Something you can take to market. So, thank you for sharing that.

When you work with a brand and you help them with their business plan, the blueprint, how do you help them? What do you do? What does that look like?

Josh: Well, we have a group internally of client strategists who live in specific markets who really, their focus is to spend time with the human beings behind the business, or the private equity groups, or the venture capital groups that are the financial options behind the business, to understand what success looks like for them. And depending on what success looks like, some are looking for rapid growth and expansion, want to sell the business in five years. Some people want to have a legacy business for 10, 20, 50 years. There's no one size fits all approach, right? So, it's really understanding what drives them and what their motivation is. And once you get a sense for that, it usually boils down to like, "Here's how big I want the product to be, here's where I want it to live, and here's the type of revenue that we want to generate because we're running a business."

And when they're able to share that, we look at the pieces of our puzzle they have in place now and we say, "Well, based on what you've shared with us, and your skill set internally, and your leadership team, and your manager team, this is where we feel like there's some holes when you shared it with us. And these are the holes that we anticipate you might want to address plugging, and here's what people like this cost, and here's potential



companies who have done this well. And here's some people you can talk to, to maybe give you some advice." Before we ever get into recruiting, but it's really looking at their vision and understanding the why. And then you get to know the what they're building. The how, that's ... the how's execution. So once we understand the why and the what, then we can help them figure out the how because we've been through that journey many times.

But, it's more about them sharing it with us, and our team being really connected throughout the lifecycle of their businesses, all the way to liquidity or just to maturity.

Dan: And this is exactly what I wanted to talk about. Thank you so ... the resource, that's the point. So, if you can't find the resources in the market by networking, et cetera, which I think is the best way to start, then the point being that ForceBrands has the resources in place to be able to help brands evaluate some of these things and be able to help brands, help guide them, to make the right decisions, so that they can grow and realize their goals.

So, what kind of brands do you work with? Do you work with pre-revenue? Do you work with brands that are on the shelf of all sizes? What is your sweet spot?

Josh: We really, we work with brands that are pre-rev, we work with brands that have accelerators and incubators, all the way to series A, series B, series C, and we work with most of the global



strategics, too, and these big CTB companies. Well, we really work closely with them, with their emerging brand VC divisions. They'll acquire brands and say, "All right, we have to maintain the intensity of these brands. How do we keep the right people here, or bring the right people in place to deal with the integration, the migration into our corporate culture?"

So, we deal with all of them. Whether it's a emerging concept that may not even be branded yet, all the way to the company that acquired it. So, we might work with a company like barkTHINS. Before it was called barkTHINS, it was called Lakeville Brands. And we work with the company who acquired it. And there's great human beings throughout the whole journey, so we have different groups within our organization. We have 70 people who work with emerging high growth, that work with private equity backed, that work with global strategic companies, so we really serve the whole industry and help connect the dots.

Dan: Perfect. I had the privilege of working with Diane Mercer at the Innovation Center of the Rockies, who's now on your team, several times, being able to mentor brands and work with brands, in all stages of development. And she's such a tremendous resource. But the point being is that you've got a wealth of talent to be able to help support these brands. And again, this is why I wanted to have you on. So, as you're helping the brands decide what they want to be, who they want to be, like I said, the why, the what, and then you start working toward the how. At what



point do you help them or can you help them with the hiring process? With selecting and identifying the right people?

Josh: Well, I mean, we can help them whenever they're ready and they feel it's appropriate to have a partner. I mean, we've worked with many companies that are pre-revenue, or coming in from another market, and they don't have a US infrastructure yet, and we'll make the first hire for them. And sometimes, it's a little further along. Until they're cash flowing, in a different situation and they're ready to hire some executive leaders, so for us it's not ... it's picking the right partnership and making sure appropriate and that they really want to commit to the partnership of finding good people to grow the business. So, whether it's through the executive recruiting piece which is a little more of a strategic C-Suite VP level, like board building search process, or it's just the job board where you do it yourself, and ForceBrands.com, and you can just hire people and pay to post the listing, a couple hundred bucks, and the candidates will come through to you.

And sometimes that is the best approach and that's maybe not for a C-level VP executive as much, but there's a solution for everyone. For whatever stage in the company you're at, or what type of role you're looking for, so we try to really provide a resource and create a platform that really helps them across the board.

Dan: Great, and it's such a critical resource, and again, this is why I wanted to talk about this. This is one of the things that I don't think a lot of entrepreneurs really think about, when they're



trying to decide what they want to be when they grow up. Or how they want to get from point A to point B. I know one company for example, that were so worried about the budget, that they hired on the cheap, and they're still struggling to get up and running and getting any traction. Where, if they had taken some of the funds that they had back then when they got the investment and hired the right people, they would be so much further ahead. They've got an ideal, a concept that I think would be huge. I know, actually would know it would be a huge hit in the industry in their category.

So, why did you decide, when you decided to create ForceBrands, what was the impetus? What was the idea behind that? I read through your bio, where you were sipping a Majito, in Florida, and then all of a sudden, you end up in New York. We talked a little bit about this before I hit the record button. So, what caused you to want to go down this path, and what were you doing before? It sounded like you were in sales, is that correct?

Josh: So, I've always been fascinated with entrepreneurs, and building businesses, and social behavior, and connecting people. It's just, I've always really enjoyed it. I've always connected with people that have owned businesses and been fascinated by it. You don't study recruiting in college. You need to study human resources. I worked in the wine and spirits business in college for a major wine and spirits wholesaler in Nevada, and then I worked for an Italian wine importer. And then I got brought on to the VP of Sales and Distribution for a rum company with a little sweat



equity, and with building out our sales and distribution network across the country. And just naturally had the inclination of connecting people. People needed jobs or people wanted to find good people. It was just something I always really enjoyed.

And through that journey of helping to build that organization, I was tasked with hiring teams. And it was very time consuming. And this was back in the Monster Career Builder days and pre-LinkedIn, and pre-industry specific boards and recruiting agencies. When I looked out there and I was trying to hire, I had to call the major globals, the recruiting firms, and really might have been good if you had a hire a CMO for a global corporate group. But if you were an emerging high growth brand, there was really no national platform out there that could help you build across vertical and sales, marketing, finance, and ops, and comm. So, I really thought to myself, "Wow, this is a real pain point," and there was no job board out there for the beverage industry at the time. Well, in the consumer products industry, which is what we serve now, fast forward, 11. 12 years.

So, really the moment when I was at the South Beach Food and Wine Festival sipping a Majito with my feet in the sand and someone came up to me and said, "Hey, I'm looking for a job, for a specific beverage company. If you hear of anything, let me know." And literally, Steven or someone else came up and grabbed a Majito that I knew and they said, "Hey, I'm looking to make a hire. Do you know anyone that has this specific skill set?" And the light bulb kind of went off, like there really was a light



bulb. Everyone you hear talks about that moment. I had that. And that night, I drove up from South Beach to West Palm with my girlfriend, who's the wife and mother of my children now, and I went up to see her dad, who's my mentor of mine. I said, "I had this idea of creating this kind of a recruiting company for the beverage industry, and also a job board," and he said, "Ah, I think that's pretty good business. I don't know much about it, but let's take a stab at it."

And I've just always been the type of person, if you want to do something, just take a step. You get so overwhelmed by the idea of it, it's so much work. And it's like, "Yeah, it's a lot of work." Anything worth doing is a lot of work. But I just took a step and started writing a plan and started talking to other entrepreneurs and other people in the business. It turns out, everyone realized, this is a pain point.

Dan: It is.

Josh: And most companies did not know where to go. So, I got lucky. I got lucky with the timing, and yes you create your own luck. You have to work very hard, but it's all because I love building people. I love to help them discover their career passion. I'm fascinated by working with entrepreneurs. I love helping them bring their dreams and vision to life and that takes people. So, it was kind of the perfect storm for me. I just love how it makes me feel and the people around me, when we help someone get a great job that changes their quality of life. I love when a company hires a new COO, or CFO, or head of sales, and like, "This changes the



whole game for me." It just feels good, and so, I was in the space doing it, hiring for us and I said, "I could make a much bigger impact and help out a lot of companies," and now that's what we get to do.

Dan: Well, good for you. I'm so glad you did this, and by the way, kudos to you. I mean, this takes a lot of skill and it's not just luck, it is skill. I've been in that position where I've had to hire people at higher levels and when I ran teams and stuff like that. And what a pain in the butt. It was so time consuming, it was so frustrating to get the right people and identify the right talent. I think one of my frustrations being on the other side of the fence, is I think most companies spend most of their time eliminating candidates than identifying talent. What I mean by that is that, they've got so many resumes and they try to tick all the boxes. And if you don't fit, "Okay, next. This one doesn't fit, next." Instead of finding the people that are ideal for the position.

And one of the things that I've identified, or that I perceive you to be expert at, is being able to identify those people, the talent that would fit into those roles. Like you said, "This is not a cookie cutter environment. The big CBG companies, etc." These are companies where you need people who can think on their feet, think out of the box, that are going to roll up their sleeves and clean the bathroom if they need to, but at the same time, run, do the books and all that other stuff. So, when you're trying to identify that unique talent set, how do you group that into buckets? Because it's a very, I would call that a very definitive



skill in and of itself. So, how do you do that? What do you look at when you're trying to consider prospective hires for companies?

Josh: Can you repeat the last part of that question, just so that I make sure I'm accurately responding?

Dan: Sure, so when you're trying to help a company find someone, and like you said, you want to help them identify who they are, who they want to be, et cetera. How do you work with that company to identify somebody that's not a cookie cutter, off the rack, resume hire? How do you help identify somebody-

Josh: Oh, yeah.

Dan: Does that make sense?

Josh: Yeah, well I mean, most of these companies that we work with on the executive search side are definitely not working with us to get a piece of paper or resume. You know?

Dan: Yes.

Josh: They can find that on LinkedIn, there's plenty of resumes out there. We're really working with them to understand culturally how the organization works, philosophically what type of human beings and professionals align with their vision. The internal structure of the organization. What growth trajectory looks like, and they really share with us what the ... not the talent needs to be, but the skill sets that are appropriate for that specific mission and those specific roles. They got to let us in. I mean, we spend a



lot of time with our client partners. A ton of time. We don't just sign them up and send a resume. We really have to dive deep with them.

And same thing with the job seekers, the candidates. We have a team of 40 plus that just does recruiting and strategy work, and their job is to know these people that are running functions in businesses and organizations, and to get to know them on a personal level as well. To understand what drives and motivates them, and the type of companies they're looking for, at what specific growth stage, and what they want to do, and where they want to be over the next three to five, to seven years. So, it's about, it's kind of like career matchmaking in that very often, it's a soft skill. Something intangible that you'd never find on a piece of paper. And so it's a very high touch service. And it takes connecting human beings on both sides to make sure everyone's aligned.

It's almost like getting married except you spend more time at work than you do at home with your spouse a lot of times. So, think about that. And so that's really what we do. It's a combination of cultural fit, and skill set, and bending and wrapping those people around each other so they feel like it's the right marriage. There's not a one size fits all. Really, it's on a case by case basis, which is really the interesting fun part about it.

Dan: Well, and that's exactly what I was getting at, is that it's not a one size fits all. This is not something that you can go and buy off the rack. It's got to be tailored and specific, so thank you for



going down that path with me. So, you create a matchmaking service for businesses, and the right people looking for the jobs. When did you decide to split off into different divisions, BevForce, FoodForce, BeautyForce, and HerbForce?

Josh: Well, it was about three or four years after we started BevForce. We started getting calls from food companies. And they would say, "Hey, listen, we need a CMO," or, "We need someone to run sales for us," or, "A brand manager. Someone to run operations," and said, "We'd love to engage you." And we said, "We'll, we're the beverage people." And they're saying, "Well, we are, too. We came from Vitamin Water and Honest Tea, and Arizona Beverage and we became the food space." And you say, "Well, that's really interesting." And so we started to get calls from all these high growth snack companies that now are clearly market leaders and a lot of them, they're industry uses a lot of beverage people.

So, we decided we should build a specific function focused on the food space, natural foods specifically and build a team that's really passionate about food. And so that's how we got into FoodForce. And then we started getting calls from private equity groups, and strategics a few years after that saying, "We're doing a lot of investment in beauty and personal care, cosmetics, including ingredient ducts. Very much we see this to be a high growth trajectory space, very similar to what we experienced in food. Will you guys help us build the beauty, wellness, personal care brands?" So we created another brand, BeautyForce, where we brought on a team that loved beauty/personal care.



Well, Cannabis, in 2015, we started. I just always had a premonition Cannabis was going to be massive and clearly it's going to be. It'll be even, in my opinion, the highest incremental growth of jobs in the economy for the next seven to 10 years. It's massive what's happening with the job creation in Cannabis. And what we found was, in Cannabis, what they were looking to build were brand ... and I'm not just talking about THC. I mean, there's hemp derived CBD, and then there's marijuana derived CBD and THC, and what we found was the whole Cannabis space was a massive opportunity, and what they were looking to create was brands that you could eat, drink, or put on your body. And turns out that the spaces and the verticals in which the identified talent came from, food, beverage, and beauty/personal care. We just kind of found ourselves lucky that we were in the space and they were looking to bring in commercial and professionals that could help the foundation, infrastructure, and could grow the businesses.

So, we didn't launch HerbForce the brand, until the Farm Bill passed. But we've been working on it for three years. Now, we launched HerbForce recently, but it's become a significant part of our business, and it's beauty/personal care, food, and beverage, and then there's the dispensaries and the cultivation. But it's all about job creation, and it's a really special time. And we feel really fortunate because they're all very complimentary verticals.

Dan: It's interesting, I get a lot of phone calls from a lot of companies that want to know about that space. They want to know, how do



they hire, and all that other stuff. But, yeah, you said that you're opening an office so is HerbForce going to be located in my backyard, or is that also going to be located in New York?

Josh: Well, we have offices in New York, California, Philadelphia, Denver. But we're really, we're putting a bigger stake in the ground in Denver to house ForceBrands with a big focus on our HerbForce side of the business, because that's really like one of the founding markets in the US and one of the epicenters. So, we already have some people out there, but we're just going to make a bigger investment in that market, because we feel like it's a really smart decision.

Dan: It is. I mean, this is such a great place to be, and there's so many emerging brands, and so many people that are so energetic, and it's interesting. I'm a native and when I travel around the country, there's a big difference between people in Colorado than other places. And that's not to say good or bad, or whatever. But, there's a spirit, a hiking and outdoors and stuff like that. We love spending time outside. We love spending time doing things, and a big part of that is eating healthy, and healthy diets, healthy skin care, healthy whatever regimens. So, yeah, I'm glad you're coming. That'll be great.

Well, I appreciate your going through.

Josh: Yeah, we're excited.



Dan: Well, when you get to town, you'll have to say hi, that'll be great. Love to be able to see you again.

Josh: I'd love to.

Dan: In fact, actually, I didn't see you at Expo West this year. I see you every year it seems like, at every show, and I didn't see you. So, I thought, "That was really strange."

Okay, now that we've talked about what ForceBrands is and your different segments, you release a survey. And if you like, I'd love to go through some of that, because I think it's got some great insights. And so, where would you like to start, the first thing you talked about ... Well, first of all, why did you decide to do the survey, and what was your goal in trying to put this thing together?

Josh: Well, there was a massive pain point in the industry. We were dealing with companies of all sizes. Thousands over the years, and thousands on our job boards. Hundreds that we work with from executive recruiting perspectives across verticals. And these human resources leaders, and founders, and owners. It was very difficult for them to find fair market compensation package data. There was really no industry specific report, that it compiled these data points and were sharing insights. Salary.com but it wasn't really indicative of what's happening in the natural food space, market to market based on size of the company and whether or not they're institutionally backed. And same thing with beverage, alcohol, beauty, and Cannabis. We said, "Let's survey



all these organizations, because they've all told us if we could do this, it would be very valuable."

So, we had several hundred companies get involved, and I'll tell you what, the response has been amazing. And now this helps with the organizational design planning, and their ability to fairly compensate people. And to feel like they have the right tools to attract the right people. It's really created a level playing field and we're really excited about it.

Dan: It's fantastic, and I highly recommend that any ... well, where can everyone go to get it? Can they get it off your website? Do you have a web address for it, and if you want, I'll be happy to put that in the show notes and on the podcast web page.

Josh: Yeah, so Jenny who manages brand communications for us has the link on our website where you can sign up to ... you can download piece of it and if you want a more comprehensive walk through, we have one of our client strategists or career concierges do that. But there's some reports that you can download on ForceBrands.com. And then the more extensive report, and we have our copies of it and digital copies of it, too, can be shared once you personally connect with someone in the organization.

Dan: Love it. And this thing is fantastic, and I appreciate you sharing with me. The information in this is fantastic. Now, when I started in this industry many, many years ago, things were very different. Kimberly Clark and Unilever, we got packages that were



phenomenal. The matching dollar for dollar up to, I think it was \$10,000 a year or 10%, I forget what the numbers were, of full benefits. I mean, everything. And then all of a sudden, things changed in the early 2000s and companies stopped offering benefits. And I remember hearing that Kimberly Clark, for example, wasn't going to offer the kind of, anywhere near the benefits package that I was offered when I started much earlier, to future hires. And I've heard that about other companies.

One of the things I was really interested in looking at in this study, and the fact that it's natural specific, is the way things are changing where employers are starting to value, and not just value what the employee bring to the table, but rewarding them with the things that you haven't seen for quite a few years. So, would you please go through some of the key points that you've identified in this report that you think are really super relevant, that help prospective employers understand where they need to be, to attract the best talent?

Josh: Yeah. Absolutely, I'd be happy to. And opposed to talking about the specific compensation, maybe I'll get into the benefits, which are a little juicier. I mean, the reality is, and when you dive into compensation, what you can see is that based on the size of your company and the specific, from a specific market, what fair market is. And the reality is, just as long as you think fair market, you're fine. You don't need to pay above it. Don't pay below it. And you just paying fair market will enable you to attract talent, and that's on the cash side for base and bonus. But what we



found was the benefits were really interesting. And to kind of give you a little example.

From family leave like to onsite tech here, employers across the industry, I mean they're offering a variety of benefits. But when it comes to rewarding loyalty and performance, employers look to monetary incentives like bonuses. Like inflexibility. I mean, so the data that we found shows work life balance is here to stay, but maternity leave and family leave offered, that was really important. You see companies that are doing maternity and paternity leave, so valuable and so important to spend time with your babies and your children in their early stage. Bereavement leave was big. Offsite social opportunities and continuing education was huge. And I mentioned paternity leave, was at the top of the list. When it comes to retirement and health care benefits, dental insurance is actually most frequently offered to employees, while pension plans and contribution pension plans are least frequently offered. That doesn't happen as much anymore.

Dan: Why?

Josh: Used to get these golden handcuffs and pension plans. Because bigger companies aren't doing it. And just, it no longer exists. That was happening 15, 20 years ago. And that was, those were the golden handcuffs, that a lot of these larger organizations had on their employees, and in this day and age, those aren't necessarily the most secure companies. I mean, some of these mass organizations, some of them I respect a great deal. They do



a reorg, it's not based on performance. They'll eliminate thousands of jobs. And if the pension plans aren't there either, a lot of the professionals are saying interestingly, "I'd rather work for a mid-size company or smaller company that's properly funded, and I don't have to worry about massive layoffs." So, it's really an interesting thing. And they're getting equity, and they're getting profits interest, or restricted stock options, and there's a lot of wealth generation potential with these emerging high growth brands.

The millennial generation and Gen Z, it's the largest working generation to ever enter the US work force. But it ushers in new demands, like offsite social opportunities and meet ups, and flexible work hours are a thing. Continuing education's a thing. That social engagement in that really, really, matters. When we ranked the benefits that are not currently offered but will be implemented next year, it's clear that these young generations are kind of setting the tone with these unique perks. Like in office stress relief initiatives, yoga, and in vitro financial assistance. I mean, here's one thing though, 401Ks are here to stay. Across industries, the retirement savings programs, with and without company contributions consistently rank as the most popular retirement benefit. People love 401Ks. It's free money. And the wine and spirits, and food and non-alc beverage industries, life insurance is the number one benefit offered. But life insurance is in third spot across all consumer industries.



And stock options rank at the top of the list, as well. Providing that power of ownership mentality to attract and retain top talent. So, I got, I have a couple more stats if this is interesting.

Dan: Yeah, no, I think it's great, thanks.

Josh: The Cannabis industry continues to emerge and gain momentum with employers competing for talent. Cannabis is pulling from CPG, let's be clear, and pharma. To entice candidates, the Cannabis sector offers employees the most time to leave, the most maternity leave, the most paternity leave, and the most family leave. And on average, 14% more comp. So, they're being pretty aggressive to attract a lot of the most talented professionals out there. So-

Dan: Which makes sense.

Josh: ... employees with CPG ... yeah, yeah, and it does, it does. Employees with the CPG industry receive generous raises. 10% average raise across all industries. When you compare that number to the national average, it typically hovers around 3%. The raise percentages are highest across Cannabis, beauty, and beer. Not natural food. So, this is what we're seeing. And this data is real, and so there's going to be more and more unique benefits that are offered. But again, you don't have to pay over on the cash and bonus. You just got to pay fair market. That's the key.



Dan: Which is so very important, and that gets us back to where we started this conversation, is you've got to know what you're worth as an employee, and the skill set, et cetera. One of the things I notice that, like you said, that the skill is a key attribute. Is a key driver in terms of your compensation. One of the things I wanted to ask you about, I don't mean to put you on the spot. Hopefully, this is not an unfair question. But in the CPG industry, people tend to change jobs on a regular basis. Back to the golden handcuffs. So, a lot of the people that I know that have worked for big companies, tend to work for them for a short amount of time and bounce from company, to company, to company. And I was unfortunately part of one of those big layoffs, where the company got a new CEO and laid off about two, three, actually about three quarters of the workforce unfortunately. So, a lot of us were thrown into the job market at the time, but yet that's kind of the way that is with this industry, and mainstream CBG.

Would you say it's similar in natural, and or would you say that natural provides a better home? I mean, granted, it's a different opportunity. But would you say that natural is a more stable career path if you're going to stay in it, and then they're opportunities to work within the space and move up within natural, that perhaps are a lot easier in mainstream, or can you answer that question?

Josh: Yeah, absolutely. Natural's the only space that's growing in food.

Dan: True.



Josh: And it's the most impactful area within food, and in the consumer space. I mean, and it's very familial, and there's a lot of support. And people really care about each other, and it's a really tight knit group. And I do feel that, it's growth of the company builds scales and exits, or maybe they don't have the proper funding, there's lots of homes. And I think it will continue to grow. I believe that it's going to be a really healthy space for quite some time, and it is a high growth areas. You talk to most people in mainstream and that have been selling products that maybe they're not as proud to feed their family. Once they come to this natural space or better for you space, it lifts their spirit. And there's so much opportunity in the area for growth, that it's just going to continue, continue, continue. So, I would say you're really spot on and accurate. This is a really great place to be and I believe a safer space.

Dan: One of the things, since you said it, I mean I was actually able to validate this. Several years ago, I wrote a feature article for the 2016 Category Management Handbook, where I was able to use Nielsen All Outlook data, and it'll be, it's at the bottom of every podcast show. But, the gist of it is this, total dairy was up 1.5%. Organic dairy was up 12%. Organic dairy represented 9.8% of that pie. A small sliver of a multi, multi billion dollar pie, and when you remove that small sliver of organic dairy, then total dairy was only up 5%. And the point being, and by the way, the numbers were even greater when you look at gluten free, plant based, allergy free, et cetera. And the point being, these are the key drivers. This is where the industry is going.



And so yeah, if you can align yourself in this industry, that is the future. That's part of the reason why I'm here, trying to empower brands and raise the bar. What other things would you like to share from either the survey or that BevForce does that we haven't discussed yet?

Josh: Well, I think that there's a lot of community building, and there's a lot of activity on a human level, that we're most passionate about. It's not just about our core business of recruiting and getting someone a specific job. It's more about connecting entrepreneurs with other entrepreneurs, and making sure they find the right investors, or the right mentors or advisors. We do so much of this at community events, whether it's at Expo West or around Project NOSH, or around BevNet, or Fancy Food. We're just passionate about bringing people together. And we pride ourselves in giving of the humans behind the business, and having our finger on the pulse of the next rising stars. And that takes having a real personal relationship with the people that have created these businesses, and the ones who are passionate about going to work with these founders and with these businesses, so.

It's not just about us as recruiters. You don't need to just call us because you need to hire someone. We just like to meet great people that have really impactful things that they're creating, or really feel like they can contribute to business in a meaningful way. There's no transaction associated with that. It's just about, we're the people connectors, and we feel so great about being in



that position and honored, and take it really seriously that regardless of whether or not we're recruiting, we're always connecting good humans to good humans. And that's why we love what we do.

Dan: And it shows. It really does show. I met you, I don't remember how many years ago. And every time I bump into you, every time I see you, even if you see me before I see you, you always say, "Hi, Dan." The fact that you've always remembered who I am, and I see you say hi to just about everyone out there, which is great. The fact that you've got those kind of relationships. My point is that, one other thing that makes natural, natural community. Are those relationships that we've built over time, and it's all about helping each other out. It's not about ... I remember we used to joke years, and years, and years ago when I worked for a big CPG company, that if you wanted to climb the ranks, you needed to figure out a way to knock off the guy above you. And I mean, we were just kidding of course.

But the point was that, there wasn't a lot of opportunities. And then I went to work for a company, even though it was a mainstream CPG company, it was very similar in terms of the community and the culture as natural. And we were one big happy, we're all in the same, just trying to work together to try to raise the bar for the industry. And then of course, they started paying attention to Wall Street and gutted the company. But my point is that, there are good companies out there, and this industry has so many great, vibrant organizations that are such



great places to work with, to network with, et cetera. Can you talk a little bit about, if someone wanted to work with you, or if someone wanted to get started with you, where do they go? What are some of the things they need to be thinking about, and how would you encourage them to get engaged or get involved with what you're doing?

Josh: Well, I think they could just reach out. They could just jump on our website, ForceBrands.com and shoot us a note, and have a clear idea of where they could use some guidance or some advice. And just say, "Hey, listen. I'm at this stage in my career, I'm at this stage in my business. And I'd love to sit down and chat and discuss options." And it's that simple. We're very accessible. We're on LinkedIn. You can follow us on Instagram, @ForceBrands. You can get on our website. Well, there's people behind this business. There's about 70 of us. I mean, so there's a lot of smart humans that really love helping and connecting. So I would just say reach out and extend the olive branch and we'll do the same. And there's no expectation, there's no charge for connecting people and having a good cup of coffee. This is what we do and this is what we enjoy most, and we always welcome anyone to reach out or come to some of these industry events and get to know others.

Dan: I appreciate you saying that, and of course, I'll leave a link to your website in the show notes and on the podcast web page. What can I do to help support what you're doing? Again, I think this is such a critical thing that brands need to be paying



attention to and one of the things I recently did, was launch a series of mini courses, to teach brands these skills, these fundamental building block skills, you know how do you decide when you need to put people in place. And that's one of the areas I haven't covered yet and I'd love to have a conversation with you about that, it's how can I help you raise the bar in the industry?

Josh: Well, I think you're doing that by having this podcast and these educational courses, and just contributing and paying it forward. I think a lot of us just need to pay it forward more. There's so many people that just are out there, that just want to, that they're just associated with everything. Yes, you have a business to support, and yes, you have some competencies. But I just find by being supportive of others, and learning as much about their business, and listening, you learn more than they learn and it helps everyone. And those who are willing to give back usually end up having really healthy businesses. It's funny how that works.

Dan: Absolutely.

Josh: The more you give, the more you get. I think that and I truly believe that, and I think you do that as well. And we just need to continue to pay it forward because God knows people have helped us in our life, and we're lucky to have that. And as much as we can help, like one it makes you feel good, and two, it just makes everyone better. So, I think doing what you're doing is fantastic.



Dan: Thanks. I appreciate that, and that's, it goes back to why I look forward to seeing you at Expo every time. And I was actually disappointed that I didn't get to see you at Expo Wes this year, because I always enjoy, you've always got a great smile and-

Josh: I know, I'm sorry.

Dan: No, it's not your fault. I was hanging out with the wrong crowd, I guess. But no, I'm just kidding.

Josh: It's also, it's like 50 football fields now. I was on the other side of the football field than you were probably. It's like you're doing so much walking and so much talking, they're so many good friends. Like, "Man, I didn't get to see you there this year." We were all there, but it's just one of those shows, it's such a big one.

Dan: I put on almost 33,000 steps one day last year at Expo West. That's a lot of steps. So, that's a bunch.

Josh: That's crazy, yeah.

Dan: It is, that was my workout for the ... just kidding. No, it's well any, I appreciate your coming on, I appreciate your making time for me. I appreciate your insights. Thank you for what you do in the industry, and more importantly, thank you for helping me help emerging and small brands, actually brands of all sizes better understand why this is critically important. And how they can leverage a resource, a valuable resource like you, to help them so they don't struggle. So they don't flounder. So they don't color outside the lines and maybe waste capital. But more



importantly, they grow effectively, et cetera. So, again thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it, Josh.

Josh: Oh, my pleasure. Thank you, I'm really grateful for the opportunity, for you having me on here. And look forward to many more conversations in the future. But, it was a real pleasure.

Dan: Thank you, sir.

I want to thank Josh for coming on today, for sharing his wisdom, his insights, and his deep commitment to helping our natural community grow and thrive. I'll be sure to put a link to ForceBrands in the podcast show notes, and on the podcast web page. Today's free downloadable guide is My Strategic Solutions to Grow Your Brand. This guide is a top line overview of the things that you need to be thinking about, as you build your brand. It can also give you the foundational strategies to help you differentiate yourself from other brands and give you significant competitive advantage. You can get to the podcast web page and the show notes by going to [brandsecretsandstrategies.com/session125](https://brandsecretsandstrategies.com/session125). Thank you for listening, and I look forward to seeing you in the next episode.

ForceBrands <https://forcebrands.com>

**This episode's FREE downloadable guide**



This short guide levels the playing field between small brands and their more sophisticated competitors. It highlights the advanced strategies the big brands use called Category Management - what retailers want. CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD YOUR FREE STRATEGIC GUIDE: [Strategic Solutions To Grow Your Brand](#)

Thanks again for joining us today. Make sure to stop over at [brandsecretsandstrategies.com](http://brandsecretsandstrategies.com) for the show notes along with more great brand building articles and resources. Check out my free course Turnkey Sales Story Strategies, your roadmap to success. You can find that on my website or at [TurnkeySalesStoryStrategies.com/growsales](http://TurnkeySalesStoryStrategies.com/growsales). Please subscribe to the podcast, leave a review, and recommend it to your friends and colleagues.

Sign up today on my website so you don't miss out on actionable insights and strategic solutions to grow your brand and save you valuable time and money.

I appreciate all the positive feedback. Keep your suggestions coming.

Until next time, this is Dan Lohman with Brand Secrets and Strategies where the focus is on empowering brands and raising the bar.