

**Mike Merrill:**

Hello, and welcome to the Mobile Workforce Podcast. I am your host, Mike Merrill. And today we are sitting down with Karla Meador. Karla is a managing partner at NEAR Search Group. And her experience working with construction companies hiring needs for over 20 years is going to give us some really awesome insights today in helping employees and individuals improve their opportunities in their career. So thank you, Karla, for joining us today. We're excited to have you.

**Karla Meador:**

Thanks, Mike. I appreciate the invite and looking forward to a spirited conversation.

**Mike Merrill:**

I'm sure it will be. So before we jump into the dialogue too much, can you give our listeners just a little bit of your background and experience?

**Karla Meador:**

Sure. I came up through the sales side of the house and have sold a variety of things, but often with two construction firms usually tied to IT. I love technology. I'm worked my way into management in a hiring role, and then doing like an executive and as an owner, as you know, my past. And then decided I had the chance to join a partner and create our own search firm. So now we help other owners and individuals looking for better jobs. We help those folks. And we've got over, as you said, over 20 years experience and a lot of expertise in IT and construction.

**Mike Merrill:**

That's awesome. Well, I'm looking forward to the conversation today. So I guess to get things started off, the first thing I'm wondering, moving up the corporate ladder, or at least improving someone's role out a project or a job site or within a construction company

is usually everybody's goal. Everybody wants to move up and improve and grow. It used to be back in the day, you could work hard, bury your head and just do your thing. And eventually your boss would notice and you would get promoted and have new opportunities. That doesn't seem to be the case today for some reason. Why do you think that is? And maybe what's changed?

**Karla Meador:**

And that's a good insight. I do think it has changed. One, we have more turnover, even at a management level or companies buying other companies, used to have a mom and pop forever for 30 years. Then you get bought out and you have different management. So number one, it's hard to get noticed if your boss is changing every year and/or your company's getting bought out or moved, etc. And then number two, we just live in a society that's more showmanship, for maybe lack of better words, where social media things like LinkedIn, Facebook and those things are predominant. And we're just a society now that catches bits and glimpses. And you want to make sure that you're part of that new way and that you're capturing bits and glimpses of your best and able to present that to whoever is your new team lead or owner.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. That's interesting. So it sounds almost like people need to be more aware of marketing themselves aside from just working hard. Is that what you're saying?

**Karla Meador:**

Absolutely. We tell people to market themselves, like for a small business, actually in looking to garner a new client. Put the same amount of emphasis and detail into what you want and how to present yourself. It's no longer, "Head down, work hard. They'll see me and they'll reward me." It's almost like the squeaky wheel gets the grease.

**Mike Merrill:**

Okay. Well, that's a valuable insight and I think you're really onto something there. So what can an employee do within an organization to align themselves with that success and make themselves more refreshed in that light that you're talking about?

**Karla Meador:**

There's a lot there and I'll just hit the highlights and certainly dive in anywhere you want. Number one, I always, me personally, find a coach or a mentor in the group. Most folks feel like it's a compliment or an honor to have somebody come up and say, "Hey, you mind teaching me a few things." You have to be able to humble yourself to work with somebody and gets some tips from them. And if they're in your tutelage, if you will, they can often help you get up the ladder. And that's worked for me as well. I think social media, things like LinkedIn. Pay attention to your background, the picture. Make sure you get a lot of references, long before you're looking. Get them along the way. As soon as you finish a great project and you have a really happy customer, get that reference then. Don't ask 10 years later.

Build your portfolio, if you will, your marketing material. We always caution folks too, to be careful what you put on Facebook, if you're looking to get new customers, or if you're looking to get a new job. And also in work, it's just being a cultural fit and being able to show where you add value. And I really thought about this. There's several ways, but it can be you can raise revenue. You can have ad-ons and produce more. You can help cost efficiencies and improvement. But you can also just be a great morale person. That time when the power went out and you ran and bought up a bunch of extra battery packs and gave it to the crew. What are you doing? And how do you showcase that? And let people know without looking like you're always bragging, and there's a fine line and it takes practice.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. Lots of great points in that bit of information you shared there. So as far as really impressing management or doing those little things, are there some little tips or secrets that you think somebody could utilize to do that, if they're not already actively or proactively doing those things?

**Karla Meador:**

Absolutely. I think one, mirror your audience. So if you're in front of a manager who, let's say, likes to golf, maybe make that a little bit of your interest. You're going to have to look for something connection. It has been proven people tend to hire people that are like them. Notice, I didn't say, "They like." I said, "That are like them." So if you're a curmudgeon and a grumpy personality, they tend to hire that. So we always tell people to mirror their environment. If they're a jokester, you and I are very outgoing and talkative, that's a plus. Some places, telling jokes isn't. So I think the biggest thing is that you fit into the culture.

And then again, to be seen is to make sure that when you're doing something that you find a way to highlight it. And that can be verbally. Maybe a peer gives you kudos. "This is what happened, and this is how I solved it." That's not cocky. "This happened, this broke. I stepped in and this is how I fixed it." And you can always at the end, "Could I do anything better?" Managers are like, if I get something like that, I'm like, "Wow. This person really takes this company seriously, their job and wants to improve."

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. I love... Earlier you mentioned LinkedIn and some of these other tools, and I know on LinkedIn, you can recommend somebody or you can request a recommendation. So that might be a way from what you're saying.

**Karla Meador:**

Oh, absolutely. I think it's an underutilized tool. Understand as companies get bigger, HR departments and a lot of companies now always look at your LinkedIn and always look to see if they can find your Facebook. That's 80% of the companies now from the data that I read. So make sure you have a great background picture. You have a great picture of yourself, whatever that might mean for whatever job that you have, as well as that you have detail. And to me, other than the relevant pictures would be the references. As you do accomplishments, it can be your resume. "Mike closed this project under budget and early. Mike did this and this," and you're showing that trajectory of your career. And it's extremely valuable. LinkedIn is used by so many people now, and there's

still people that aren't on it in our industry. And even at the beginning level, the entry-level, I would encourage everyone to get on LinkedIn and really spruce it up.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. Lots of great advice there. So what I'm also hearing is you're saying strike while the iron's hot. Document. Make sure that there's a trail of the goodness that you've helped provide for your employer.

**Karla Meador:**

Probably a lot of things I'm going to say are obvious today, but that's probably the least obvious. And you're absolutely right, because you will forget. You don't remember some of the brilliance you did 10 years ago, but it may be applicable to a new job. That again, a lot of the questions they ask are what do you do in a tough circumstance? That's a great question. I would ask people, what if this happened, what would you do? And what a great example of our systems crash and our buildings fell apart, and this individual stepped in, but you need to capture while they're there and they're happy. When you try to go back and collect this information, it's stale. It's dated. And often people forget. It's not until I start interviewing and bringing these pieces out that I've see that they've done some incredible things. But most of us have never been instructed or taught how to showcase our strengths.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. That's a very underutilized from my view as well. What do you think the role is for maybe employees to, I guess, showcase themselves even to other businesses within their industry? Is that a part of this, where you're making sure you're visible to other potential employers?

**Mike Merrill:**

Of course, we want to be loyal, but that can come into play, right?

**Karla Meador:**

Absolutely. Well, if things change, you might want to move. You might want a different career and you've

hit the ceiling. Absolutely, LinkedIn is a great way. A lot of people don't know there's a little button that you can click that says, "Seeking employment," but generally other people don't see it, but recruiters do. You can give signals that way. I think other things you can do are join user groups. I know on LinkedIn, there's a lot of great construction groups. Find what is in your niche particularly, and where you want to go. Always remember, it's not where you've been and not necessarily what you're doing now.

If you want to grow, it's what you want to grow into. So if you want to grow into a project manager, I would suggest, obviously, joining that forum and learning about that. I find the user groups, whether they're in person or virtual, that matters. And again, finding that person that you make a connection with, that's willing to help. Or you ask a network and I'm finally always networking is the biggest piece. And I've even been able to network off LinkedIn. It's like Facebook, you develop a friendship, if you will. And just say, "Hey. Help me out." And I help you out.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. I love that. And I think to your same point, if you're sharing valuable content on LinkedIn that's additive and inspiring or helpful in some way, that also adds to your resume. Just like a personal social media post, that is something positive and encouraging and something that you're proud of, and that you'd be okay with your grandmother to see, so to speak. Is that what you're saying?

**Karla Meador:**

Absolutely. Again, sometimes what you put can hurt you, so just make sure it is showcasing your professionalism. And I would always say your niche. What I'm seeing in all industries is things are becoming more, you're less of a generalist. If you're a bricklayer, you're a bricklayer. And you want to show that you are the subject matter expert in what you do. And it could be shoveling, doing a ditch, but what is it that you do better than anyone else on your crew? And showcase that and get references for and join a forum.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah, that's great. So what about somebody who maybe they are laying bricks or digging ditches, but they have an aspiration to move into the office eventually? What can somebody like that do to try and create an opportunity where they can upgrade their position in their view?

**Karla Meador:**

Okay. Great question. Number one, let your manager know and let HR know if they have an HR department. I can say, as a manager and you might concur, sometimes we just forget. We just think they're happy laying bricks 10 years down the road, that maybe their back's starting to hurt and they would like a change. And understanding as well, people are allowed to change. Maybe they were happy three months ago, but now the onus is on that person to say, "Hey, Mike. I've been laying bricks for you for 10 years. You're my manager. I would like to do estimates, take calls and do estimates and go out in the job site. Do estimates, come back and write them up. Can you teach me how? Let me shadow or give me a mentor." So I think understanding what it is you want to do and being able to articulate that, and then reaching out to your manager and, like I said, HR makes the best sense for the quickest path, if you want to stay in the company that you're in.

**Mike Merrill:**

Oh, that's great. So what about, let's say somebody moves from the field to the office and maybe they lean technically in one regard or another. They like computers. They like IT. What can they do to stand out in a more technical role?

**Karla Meador:**

And if they like computers and technology, I always encourage everyone, one, on your own time to show initiative. Learn, maybe it's AutoCAD. Learn more about the computer, social media. There's a lot of classes, often free or near free that you can take now. A lot of companies offer that as part of their HR employment package and people don't even know it. There are free online classes for the betterment of you and your career. So always be learning and be soaking up that knowledge. And technology, it's doubling itself every

six months. So what are you doing to stay relevant and current? Walk in and say, "Hey Mike. Why aren't we using Zoom meetings more during COVID?" Those types of things, so you're on the cutting edge of that.

And you do not have to be with the company long or a technical expert to find a couple of neat little apps or tools that can really make a difference. And people are all the time bringing something to me that I've never heard of. And it's so cool and can help the business. And I think things like that and IT, that don't take a team. It's not a huge software conversion of hardware. It's something simple that can be effective for the company.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. So you're very experienced in this field. Obviously, you've been a recruiter and helped hire and find talent for decades now, even at the young age of 28, is that right?

**Karla Meador:**

That's correct. I'm 29 in July.

**Mike Merrill:**

Good for you. Wow.

**Karla Meador:**

Yep.

**Mike Merrill:**

We'll get your card out for sure. So-

**Karla Meador:**

Awesome.

**Mike Merrill:**

But having said that, I can imagine there are times when you look at a resume or you look at somebody's portfolio and there are things that really stand out and you think, "Wow. This person is very hireable." What are some of those things that you look for that really seemed to be a no-brainer for placing?

**Karla Meador:**

Great question. And obviously, it depends on the job. But if it's at a certain level, a degree. That does still matter when we're talking more inside the office. A degree in ideally your field of engineering, if you're an architect, what have you. Tenure, stability, a rule now is about three years or more. It used to be five or 10, but if you stay with a job every three years or so, or more, that shows stability. Then I know another thing that we're looking for is progression. So if I am at WorkMax, and I've been there five years and oftentimes we are doing the same role. But what have I been doing to show progression in that role? An example might be winning a contest, winning an award, added responsibility. It's not always a promotion or a job, a title change, but people are looking for someone that shows that they're learning and gaining a new territory, or they learned a new skill. Those things are really important.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. And in our current environment, obviously, some industries are really struggling. If you're in the hospitality or other areas where business is just down, what do people in those positions or situations have to do to remain employed? Are there any tips or tricks or things that you would recommend?

**Karla Meador:**

Well, in hospitality, you're right. That is a downmarket, but our group's part of SRA. And that is one of the top 10 search firms in the country. And hospitality's killing it. And they've found ways to repurpose those folks and put them in different jobs. And again, not an expert in that and what all that they do, but there are companies that doing quite well. So you have to, in times like this, you have to look at what skills that you have and how that can be transferable into a booming business, whether that's delivering, whether that's doing banquets, whether just... I don't know. There's just all kinds of different things that people are looking for.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. So what... So how does that translate to construction or engineering or architecture? What are the differences there?

**Karla Meador:**

I'm sorry, I missed that. How about to construction? So if it's down how you want to... If you're being laid off, et cetera, obviously you're going to look for the company's hiring. I would recommend two things immediately. LinkedIn and hooking up with a great recruiter or head hunting firm. The reason LinkedIn, it shows a lot of jobs. It'll show... And a lot of people don't know this, but it does show if you can click on jobs, you can search on location and what your field is. And also another good thing, I like Indeed. I'm not sponsored by any of these companies, but indeed.com is free. You can sign up and it will gather all the jobs within the parameters that you set and deliver it to you. So you don't have to go on every website.

But obviously, you're going to look at competitors. Look at your network, but to technology-wise, Indeed and LinkedIn. And then I would hook up with a good recruiter, because as we know, some of the best jobs are never advertised or put on the website. They want it on the down low. Especially, we've got a search now where we are probably replacing someone. So even HR doesn't have that role. So if you do all these things and you have a good resume, there's still a lot of great jobs out there.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. We use Indeed here and it is a great tool. We make sure every position gets posted there. And actually I got feedback. I was doing an interview just the other day for a new position we're hiring. And this candidate said that they were getting notices from Indeed as if it was us saying, "Hey. We're potentially interested in you coming in for an interview." And basically, they took them through... It was a bot basically-

**Karla Meador:**

A pre-interview.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. Basically, the system was pre-interviewing them to see if they're a qualified candidate. And what that did is that encouraged this person to apply. And so even though we didn't intentionally do that, his skills matched some of the requirements we had. And so



Indeed automated that. And actually, I just sent an offer. Letter out this morning. So it worked.

**Karla Meador:**

Well, that's a great testament to you using that technology as a business owner to increase your hiring pool. And they all are doing which... A lot of these different sites are doing pre-interviews. They're screening. They're looking for key words. They're searching on key words. They're looking at the salary ranges. If you have a max of say 70K and somebody wants 90, it's already filtering out things for you and ideally delivering in a tunnel, the cream of the crop that are the best fits for you.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah, that's great. I think some of the points you've nailed down, the three years, that's an interesting thing. And I would agree with that. It makes sense to me. If they're eight months or a year, a year and a half at eight different positions, I know we probably got a challenge with this individual knitting and sticking with something. So, and then as far as... So we talked about hospitality, construction also and the up and down market, different challenges that we have, when you're interviewing or trying to find or fill positions for candidates in construction, can you just step through that process, what you're looking at, what types of things that you're doing? So that maybe somebody is looking to apply for a position might how to peek into what a recruiter like yourself might be looking for.

**Karla Meador:**

Absolutely. So some of it we hit on, but it's good to reiterate we're here. One, obviously, a resume that showcases their talent. Shows that progression, that they haven't job hopped. If they've had a couple of reasons that they had to move on, I like a little quick blip in the resume. Because we only get about 10 seconds, if you can believe, that's the studies. 10 seconds for a hiring manager that's going to look at your resume. So that summary must sing your praises and succinctly to say what job you're going for as well as again, that progression and adding value to the current organizations that you're at. I think that's huge. Another thing is key words. I oddly, probably one of the

most things that I do is tell people, "You do this, but it's not in your resume throughout."

So making sure whatever the key words are, whatever programs you use, whatever equipment, tools, if you're traveling and locations, put all of those things in, because a lot of us do keyword searches. So make sure those key words are in there. Then when I actually talk to the person, we're looking for the obvious things, cultural fit, and again, that can be different at different organizations. We like to use tools like Zoom. We listen very closely to our clients and what culture they're building and need. And some are more particular than others, but we find... We try to get to know them and warm up and get that right cultural fit as well. And obviously, LinkedIn, and any of your extracurricular activities, throw in there somewhere. But I think a LinkedIn presence is important.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. Lots of great pointers there. So I hope the listeners are taking notes. If they're in a position or possibly going to be in a position where they want to change or move to a new organization, I think, like you mentioned, Karla, at least three years at a job shows stability. So I think in this day and age, for sure, people do tend to move around quite a bit more than historically. You don't hear very many 30, 40 year ways anymore.

**Karla Meador:**

No. And if they have, the name of the company's changed three times.

**Mike Merrill:**

That could be very true. So winding things up a little bit, just like to ask a few questions here at the end of you personally. So what's the one skill, Karla, that you feel like you've mastered in your professional career that served you well?

**Karla Meador:**

I would say in what I do and almost anything, staying in touch with people. I'm a people person. I've stayed in touch with you. Stayed in touch with others. You reach out and you genuinely make a connection and

you care, so staying in touch. It may be once a year, but I feel like if I was there with you right now, it would be as if no time had changed. Go out to lunch and have a good time. So I think that's made that connection and staying in touch with people that I resonate with.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. Relationships matter, don't they?

**Karla Meador:**

Absolutely.

**Mike Merrill:**

So what about Karla's superpower? Is there something else besides relationships that you feel like you really have in your wheelhouse and you just lick your chops every time you get an opportunity to do this certain thing?

**Karla Meador:**

I think just on a broader scope, I listen to what other people say, my energy level. And you can probably attest to that. People are like, "Wow. If you've met her or been in the room with her, you know it." There is some cultivating to that. And just like you exercise or meditation, prayer, eating right, being healthy, positive aspects, but I've always had a lot of energy. And so when I see something, I get excited because I have energy. Even if something good comes your way, but you don't have the energy to deal with it, it's hard. So I think energy I hope.

**Mike Merrill:**

Love that. Yeah. I would completely agree. You are a firecracker.

**Karla Meador:**

Yeah. It's hard for me to just sit still in this chair for 30 minutes.

**Mike Merrill:**

Well, you're doing a great job, so thanks for putting your best foot forward on this. So another thing, what

is the importance of data in your business? What does it do for you and why is data so important?

**Karla Meador:**

I think for any business of any size, it is now the business analytics, using data to help make future better decisions. A couple of things I've mentioned during this interview, we know that the average hiring manager spends 10 seconds on a resume, decide they're going on, and they rarely get to page two. We know that job hoppers in anything less than three years. An older person reading it might think it's five or 10, but it's three. So we use these things to understand and educate sometimes our customers what's the market, what's real and what's to be expected? So data helps you predict what's happening and what's going to happen in the future, what we're going to see more of. And of course, and all of that allows you to build your business and build your revenue.

**Mike Merrill:**

Oh, that's great. Yeah. Lots of great stuff here. Great pointers again. I hope everyone's taking notes. What about... Are there any mistakes you've made that you wish you could go back and change in business? Something that you have since learned from and think, "Oh, man. Why did I do that?" Is there anything you want to share with us?

**Karla Meador:**

Sure. For the most part, like everybody, it happens for a reason and you have to be okay with that. But for me and for others often, I think it's garnering and getting input from others and accepting that, being open, especially when you're younger, it's a little hard to humble yourself and ask, "Hey, Mike. What could I do better?" But it is getting input from the outside. And maybe that's even outside your organization. If you're having trouble with somebody in the office, maybe talk to a coach, a life coach, professional level. But it is seeking outside input and not thinking that you have to fix everything on your own.

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. So I'm hearing being vulnerable is okay.

**Karla Meador:**

Yes. And that is hard for some of us. And I think that was harder for me when I was younger. And as you get older, not so much. You actually have to be very secure to ask another person for help or how can I be better? What can I do to be better in this role?

**Mike Merrill:**

Yeah. I love that. Love that. So just to wrap up, last question. So if there's one thing that you want listeners to walk away from this conversation today with, what would that be?

**Karla Meador:**

It's going to be motivational. If you want it, it's there. You can find it. In this market, in any market, that we are always seeing jobs for good people. So if you see that job that you want or that client that you want, you want a huge client, you keep at it and try different things. Use social media. Send them an interesting link. Tout yourself. Tout your company. But you've got to be your own small business, if you will, and showcase your talents. And if you do that and do it enough to the right people, it will happen. You've just got to continue to, again, market yourself well.

**Mike Merrill:**

I love that. I've heard others say, "We are all CEOs of ourself, the business."

**Karla Meador:**

Yep.

**Mike Merrill:**

And so it's like, what you're saying.

**Karla Meador:**

Absolutely.

**Mike Merrill:**

Love it. Well, thank you, Karla, for the conversation today. Had so much fun, and hoping to connect again down the road as we continue our long-term

friendship. And again, you've made an impression on me and our organization, and that's why even after 10 or 12 years or whatever it's been, we can pick up a conversation like this, nice and easy.

**Karla Meador:**

Absolutely. And I do want to add this, that I appreciate it too. Same thing we could get in a room and it would be like time hasn't stopped, hasn't moved forward at all. I think that what you have is a great product, knowing IT and construction. I was always impressed with WorkMax and AboutTime and what y'all were doing and what you're about. And I do think that's going to be, we all know, technology is key. And I think you heard that a lot for all my points today with LinkedIn and social media, et cetera. It's going to be technology.

**Mike Merrill:**

Well, thank you. That's fantastic. So thanks, Karla. And thanks again for the listeners for joining us on the Mobile Workforce Podcast. Today sponsored by AboutTime Technologies and WorkMax. If you enjoyed the conversation Karla and I had today, and were able to gain some helpful tips and insights, please give us a rating and a review on iTunes or your favorite podcast platform. Those ratings and reviews help us a great deal to continue to bring these valuable conversations to our listeners, to help you improve your business and your life.