



Mike Merrill:

Hello, and welcome to the Mobile Workforce Podcast, sponsored by AboutTime Technologies and WorkMax, I'm your host, Mike Merrill. And today we are sitting down with Judy Coker, who is an expert in budgeting, accounting, and technology implementations. And Judy's really good at helping companies increase efficiencies and enjoy more profits. Judy has been involved with a lot of projects that have software implementations, complexities, and different moving parts. And she's going to share with us what it takes to make projects like that successful. So welcome Judy, and we're excited to have you on today.

Judy Coker:

Well, thank you. I'm so excited to be here. Share my knowledge.

Mike Merrill:

Awesome. Well, before we get into the specifics, I just wanted to set the stage a little bit and talk about your background and maybe how we met initially, where we met. It's been over 10 years ago and maybe a little bit about that backstory, because I think that really plays into what we want to talk about today. Does that sound good?

Judy Coker:

Okay. Before I met Mike, I was at a MaxWell Conference, User Conference and I was there to learn more about the accounting software where we using at the company. And I ran into someone at the conference and they said to me, "Judy, are you going to go to this AboutTime thing on module Bubba?" And I says, "I don't know anything about it, but what is it?" And they just told me a little bit about it. So I went right away. I says I'm going to go in on that. And there was no room left in this session, but they managed to put a seat in there for me. Maybe I was just so charming that they says "We got to get this girl in there." But when

I was sitting in there, my mind was just turning. And as you were giving your presentations on things that the software could do, I basically was paralleling what you were saying and seeing it as an application at the company back home.

Judy Coker:

And after the session was over, I think I was the first one out of the room and I ran over to your booth. And I remember you telling me because I was determined, but you had told me that you saw this woman come in with force into the vendor's area, towards your booths with determination in my body posture and in my face. And just further ask a lot of questions. And I went back to the office and the president of our company and owner. I told them we had to implement this software and I explained why. And he trusted me enough that he says, "Well, if you feel strongly about it, let's do it."

So I got back with your company and I think within days you had someone on a plane coming up to the Twin Cities, so we could talk about it. And there's a whole side story about that trip, but he did make it like 10:00, 11:00 at night. And we met at the office. And from that point on, I believe it was six weeks. We were fully operational with AboutTime. For that company, I had determined working my budget, my numbers, the rate of return on our investment, and it was way shorter. So within three months, the savings that the software brought to us and mobilize having electronic time cards and doing the electronic system, we just had a return. And from that point on I saw how well it was doing with guys in the field, because one of the things that really held me back was before I found the software was the guys were spending too much time in the office when we did payroll once a week, it was like, seemed like the whole morning you had everybody from the field coming in and doing their timecards and stuff like that.

But after getting the payroll done, we were able to restructure how we manage projects. And we also

worked a lot with AboutTime Mike, with you guys. And I saw in my mind things that the software wasn't doing that I thought would help us be more efficient in the office and information did to us more timely. So it was just a wonderful experience and that was my first of rollout of the product.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, I think and I've used and described that story of yours used the analogy of a Mexican jumping bean. I don't know if you have seen those... I had them when I was in elementary school they're moving around and that's how you looked in your chair when I was presenting that session, I could just see you counting with energy and excitement because it was music to your ears. I find it interesting-

Judy Coker:

And I think that's.

Mike Merrill:

Oh, go ahead.

Judy Coker:

I was going to say for me, I have as a manager and working in my positions that I've held, I always see something and how it applies to the company I'm working for. And it was just like a big light bulb went out for me. So that's interesting. I was a jumping bean.

Mike Merrill:

Well, what I really like and appreciate about this story that you shared is that even the session, it wasn't like it was on your roadmap. It wasn't like it spoke to you from its title or description. It was just an opportunity that you took to check out what was going on. And you immediately connected those dots with the gaps that you had in your business and something that could bring more value to your accounting and payroll and job costs and budgeting systems. So I think the lesson in there is that sometimes we're just not looking under the right rocks or we think we're going to solve the problem one way when really the answer might be something else that can empower or improve upon

what you're getting from the very system that you're hoping to improve upon. Yeah.

Judy Coker:

Yeah. And one thing I want to tail onto what you just said is when you look at a software, you look at it for one purpose. And one of the things that I did once I got the payroll going, I was able to think, look at the company, see how people were functioning and say, if I could streamline say, project management and make their job a lot easier, I wanted to take that software as far as I could and use every feature that it had, or it didn't have. And I always communicated that with AboutTime so that I wanted to every inch of that company, every employee really maximizing the use. And that's really key when you look at systems is you may go in with a surface objective, but it's you got to think it's far deeper than just what's on the surface.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. And when I think of the term technology champion, you're the essence of that from what I've seen in these last 10 years in the work that you've done. And we can talk later about some of the other organizations and things that you've done, but very passionate. And I know you're very conscious of budgets, productivity metrics, trending and you just knew what you were looking for from a results standpoint and a process standpoint, and it was great that you're able to connect those dots and actually put it into place.

Judy Coker:

Well, what's really I'm thankful for, I worked for other industries before I got into construction. I was in publishing, marketing, distribution, manufacturing. And as we all know in the construction industry, it's kind of antiquated in its technological approach to running a business. So I had that advantage too, because I, especially like in publishing, we had to do things at a whole different level. Distribution was the same way and you come to construction and you see that it's just the technology is not embraced. And I think if the one big lesson I want to pass on to anybody listening to this is you have to, if you're in the construction industry, you have to embrace what technology has to offer.

Judy Coker:

And you mentioned budget. One of the things that I'm a stickler about being an accountant, of course. And then the controller is what does the dollars parallel with the work that's being saved or the processes that are being saved? And if a company does do that and tracks it, they can identify their return on the investment. And I would guarantee that it'll be a lot faster return on the investment than you initially projected.

Mike Merrill:

So what is it that drives you to think that way or to approach things the way that you do because it stands out?

Judy Coker:

I think really what's big is efficiencies. I'm an organizer and I believe in efficiencies and especially being an accountant, you learn systematic ways of approach. And I think I take that to the next level when I've been lucky that when I became controller, whatever company is that I worked with, I look at the total operation. I don't look at just accounting. So in construction, I want to know what's happening in project management, in service, in managing jobs. And I think that's really where my passion is, and it just built up over the years as I learned different. And yeah, that's it.

Mike Merrill:

Well, and I am with your marketing background and some of the other industries that you mentioned working with, it's interesting to me, how well you were able to apply your people skills to communicating technical processes, things that were specific, and technology-based with blue collar field workers that were welding something or bending metal, or putting a roof on, what's your secret to finding success in getting the field up to speed with some of these things that most companies think, "Eh, that's not really our guys' forte." They're really good at building stuff, but they're maybe not so technology driven.

Judy Coker:

Two things, first of all, I grew up in the construction industry. My father was a sheet metal worker and a foreman. So I was his first son. And he always involved me in that one way or another. Of course when I started my career, I was not in construction. It was later in my career that I got into it. Second of all, so I was able because of my father to understand, how the workforce thought. And I think another big thing is not only knowing that you have to get into their heads, in the last implementation that I did. A big example is once I got the payroll side working, I went out to the field here in Phoenix, and I went to every foreman actually throughout the country I did this, I flew to our different offices and I talked to the foreman and just ask them how it was going, what in their day seemed laborious and just let them talk and listening is a big key. I'll never forget one of the foreman's mentioned to me that, "Geez, we were talking about something" and he says, "Well, I have to call the office, get the address for the job site. And then I have to put it in Google maps and do all that."

Judy Coker:

And I said, "Well, do you know on your device, all you do is open up the job." And I showed them where the navigation key was and that spread like wildfire, in the field, they talk to each other and that became a big thing. So I was able to connect with them by finding something that was at their level and I could make more efficient. And to this day, I'll never forget how big of a deal, to me that was very simple. But for them, it was a big deal because of the time it took for them. And when we talk about budgeting, just using that example, you look at something being implemented and the guys that said of calling the office, getting a person at the office. So now you've got two people on the phone and then they're writing down the address, and then they're going into a Google Maps and typing in the address. And you know those guys aren't really good at typing. And the savings as I go through that. I want you to visualize the savings that goes on when you have 175 foremen in the field, that can make a big difference.

Mike Merrill:

Wow. What I'm gathering is that the application that they were using to track the time and labor and production already had a button to take them to the job, they just didn't realize it was there.

Judy Coker:

No. And they didn't. When we first did the trainings in the last rollout that I did one of the things I was very, because it was a large, we're talking 800 employees. And what was big for me was I wanted to train them in small groups, intimately, and then I could read how they were feeling because you have all different skill levels in the field. You have guys and a foreman and then the guys that work under them and they may not even have computers at home, but you have to identify what their level is and hone in on that and help them through that. So they build a comfort level. So that relationship grew from my vantage point where I had foreman calling me and saying, "Hey, I have this problem can AboutTime do something like, help me with this." And I had information free flowing through me to help expand the features we already use. And or maybe they in the training, they missed it because there's a lot in the training.

Judy Coker:

And that's another thing when I train them, I also, six months, a year later, I'll retrain them because there might have been things that they missed, especially the foreman that the field guys that they missed.

Mike Merrill:

Or new functionality that could have come in the app.

Judy Coker:

Oh, yeah.

Mike Merrill:

Okay. So you're dealing with all types of culture and different regions of the country, different weather, I mean, everybody has unique challenges when you're dealing with that many variables. Is that fair to say?

Judy Coker:

That is fair to say. When I traveled to the offices, one of the things that I did is I had to wipe my mind free and of my expectations and really open my listening and my visual and everything open up to what was that culture in that city. When I went to the office and listen to the people and then adapt in my own specific way, how I'm going to roll this out to fit where they're to learning.

Mike Merrill:

Well, I think that's a real pearl of wisdom right there. You've got one software system and this could be any system and it's coded, it works the way it works. And you've got settings and configuration and workflow and other things that can be adapted or adjusted, but every employee in the organization was using the same mobile software. So you're adjusting maybe the messaging more than anything else.

Judy Coker:

Yes.

It's worth the investment initially to assign one internal manager to do the rollout, which means that person, if it's a full-time person needs to be excused from their full-time job, most of it at least six months, depending upon the size of the rollout, because one of the things that I did on the second application I came and your product had changed so much, you had so many features in it than when I initially implemented it up in the Twin Cities that I had to learn about it. So I spent a little time really digging in, learning, understanding the feature. So I created in my mind the phases that needed to be rolled out in order to maximize our return on investment. And I give him the credit for really understanding and bringing someone like me into the company and really faithful to really get that return on investment.

And it was a good call on his part because we were able to take it to not only this one third of the multiple companies under this company umbrella, but other divisions around the country. And one of the things why you need someone focused on this is because it takes time to really not only understand all the features in the software, but also to prepare materials to roll it out, understand who your audience is and

prepare the materials to really help them embrace what's going on. And then, further want to learn more about it. And that's not done as a part-time or one-fourth time job.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. And when you're trying to... it's like if you're trying to land a plane or have a plane take off, the pilot can't be back serving drinks, he's got to be flying the plane, right. So when you're launching a product or when a product is taking off, or when you're landing on a rollout, or you need to have full attention of somebody who's piloting that project, is that a fair comparison?

Judy Coker:

That is a fair comparison. And when I've gone to conferences and talk to outside of the company, other company leaders, they were frustrated with rollout and all that. And when I questioned them, I'd find out that the person that's trying to do it has a full-time job. And I could tell that they couldn't really get their arms around it to really when a company spends that kind of money on technology, spending a little bit more to do it right is really to me the key. And then the second key is once that manager and I'll call it an implementation manager or a specialist, once they really have a map in their head of the software and all the features or modules, whatever, then the key is for that person to decide how they're going to roll it out.

And slowly, I think from my experience, rolling it out slowly is really key. And that's what I did here in Phoenix is I did one office at a time. And within the office, I did small groups. So you get a small group. And like, I got a small group of field people and talk to them about it, getting them to buy into it and feeling comfortable what I was talking about. And then when I started rolling it out, they were the first group I rolled it out to and then found out what my glitches were in the rollout and fix those and get that group feeling good because they're talking about it already on the field.

And then what I did was picking, I had them pick, "What would you recommend another group to be?" And then I did another small group can see how that rollout was. And then once I got the bugs, the final bugs worked out on that. Then it was just doing small groups, but boom,

boom, boom, roll in and out. I I was able, I was told five years and I got it all done within six months for that large in all the locations. Yeah. And that's before all the features, and that was a payroll thing.

Yeah. And that's what you have to think about it. If you throw too much out, it's just not going to work well, in my opinion. And then you have phase two, and I started to look at the different features in there. And I started meeting with the different departments and asking them, listening, just asking, "Now that you see the payroll working," because it was interesting, the frame of mind at the company was just the payroll system. It didn't do anything else.

So I had to educate everybody else, even though they were told this, that this is more than just payroll. And so by meeting with them individually and listening to them and saying, "This is how I can streamline what you're doing. And I do have examples of that if you'd like me to share those."

Mike Merrill:

Sure. Yeah, I think that would be nice.

Judy Coker:

For example, I talked about the foreman, how I went out to them. That was the first thing I did because the rollout was payroll field, hourly payroll. So I went out to them and I talked to them. One of the things they were saying was, "We just don't know how many hours have been budgeted to the job." So all I did was show them on the device, how they could look that up. And it was like another flood gate shut down. And the world was really good. They were so excited that they could just, by pushing the couple buttons, find out what the budget was. And I also tell them when we sync the devices, when they could identify when they could include in the numbers, today's hours work, which is the next day by the end of the day. So they were pretty thrilled about that.

And again, to show field people, they had a thing with HR forms, there are HR forms they had to fill out and they said, "Judy, this drives us crazy." So I worked with HR and we put some of the HR forms on there, so they didn't have to come to the office. And they just had, if it's employee form, they could give it to the employee,

sync that form into the office. HR had it, and that's another huge thing. They didn't have to file it. It was all under the job number. Whereas before that, the foreman had to bring those forms in and then there's chit-chat time going on there. And then they had to get the paperwork file it. And it was all done with a push of a button.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. Wasted fuel and sitting in traffic and whatever oh its 4:26, I'm not going back to the job now I'm just going to head home.

Judy Coker:

Exactly right. Another big example was I met with the safety department with the same idea. I got to find out what they were doing so that I could identify how the software would work for them. So there was a group of safety people in the room in this meeting. And one of the things we picked out, we have safety forms that have to be filled out, toolbox talks and a whole bunch of other stuff. And so when I found out what their process was, the foreman first of all, they don't want to deal with paperwork, tools is their thing. So to get them to do it was a really hard thing. So it wasn't being done, when that was done, they had to get the paperwork back to the office. Sometimes they didn't get to the office for a long time.

So then there could be piles of paper come in and the office had to sort through the paperwork, make extra copies because they kept one copy here. And another copy there. So we put like 120 some toolbox talks on the product, both in English and Spanish and all other safety forms in there. And another connection with the field, I had to train them how to do it. So what that saved is a lot of money because all they did is fill it out on the device, send it, and it was filed by job and by employee or foreman. And I know we succeeded in a that because up at our Montana office, OSHA was coming in and they wanted for a certain job all the paperwork.

So the safety director went into AboutTime, downloaded all the forms, safety forms for that job, turned it over and never heard a word from it where in the past that wasn't the case because time would have to be sent with the office to pull out the copies,

take a copy, mail it, or scan them in so that they could email it to the person that's asking for it. And it was kind of funny, Keith came to me and he said, "I love AboutTime." And I thought he was teasing me. And he told me the story. And I was so thrilled to really get the feedback that my approaching them, my listening, and coming up with a solution with the tool I had was making a big difference.

Mike Merrill:

Wow. Yeah. What a couple of great examples of exactly what you've been saying. And I can't even imagine the financial impact or benefits that the company received from that.

Judy Coker:

Well, let me tell you this, the company saved \$1.47 million in the first year, and that did include the safety forms and stuff like that. I just figured that was icing on the cake.

Mike Merrill:

Wow. So just on the time and payroll side of things?

Judy Coker:

Yeah. It was huge, it's just amazing when you take a look at the details and what goes on. And I think companies that are hesitant about using technology should try to become comfortable with it because it's going to pay for that company in the long run. And one of the things, the company in Twin Cities, we were one of the first contractors up in the Twin Cities to do something like this. And being also in marketing myself for a couple of years, we were able to use that as a selling tool in working with new clients.

Mike Merrill:

So you marketed that your company was adopting this kind of technology to track their jobs so they had more confidence in your work?

Judy Coker:

Yeah. And another big thing on the service side we always got phone calls at that company. We always got

phone calls because they fought, we were overstating our time and the billing was not getting out on time. The billing was anywhere from three weeks plus getting out because we had a nice sized service department and what we saved there, huge just on the service size, we were able to turn billing over within 48 hours. The time was to the minute and around it. I think we rounded. And one of the things about customers getting invoices early, they remember, "Okay, this company got us heat when we were freezing or this company cooled us down when it was hot. They process the invoices and one of the things," yes, right. And then what cut down is the number of phone calls service was getting in challenging the bill. I tracked up there, I tracked my collection calls and they dropped by half because they were getting the invoice, they were processing it and paying it within terms.

Mike Merrill:

Wow. So instead of an argument, you're getting a check. Would that be a fair statement?

Judy Coker:

Yeah. Big time fair statement. Yes.

Mike Merrill:

Over the years, on occasion, I'll run into somebody or hear them share similar experiences, but there's maybe aren't quite as sunny, they run into challenges. And one of the approaches that companies take on occasion is, "Well, I'm going to roll this out with my toughest team or with the guy that's maybe the least capable, or I'm going to find the lowest common denominator and start there. And then if we are successful with that, then I think anybody else can do it." What would you tell those people?

Judy Coker:

That's not good. That's really not committed to the investment and before you even spend the money, I think a company has to be committed. And that's why having someone, one person who understands the operation, so you can't get a low level person because that person may not have the skillset to really identify cost savings around a company, or look at systems and evaluate, be able to quickly evaluate how the software

can work with it. I think it's important for a company to get someone with a skillset that has management capabilities, people skills, the ability to evaluate operations and systems within the company, because you have to constantly looking at, "Maybe this is not my target right now, but I'm going to make a note of that. And this software will solve that problem there."

And in the long run, you're saying people will do this and then they walk away. When the person that implements it, the time can cut down quite a bit after everything is implemented. And a good, big portion of the features utilized are operational. But this person can get back to the daily and have this a certain percentage of their time. Because what I think is very important is a relationship with the vendor, with the software provider things are constantly changing in that world. And that person, you should have one person that's not only understands it from beginning to the current today, but looking ahead if there's any issues or any updates and anything like this, that one person is always going to be there to not bother anybody else it, and by having one person, one of the things I experienced quite a bit is becoming, I held that position and I was the expert and I made sure anybody could come to me if they needed to.

So they always know and I built their confidence. I was their motivator. They too became advocates of the software and also became my eyes and ears when I couldn't be there. But I was the focal person, even after everything was rolling really well. And it was more maintenance. There's always features that you're going to find that are new or maybe can be rolled out at a different day. But I think that one person concept is important and that's where companies, I think miss it.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. I love how you worded that. And I think it makes me think back to when we first met, I think it's important for the listeners to understand that initial system was on disconnected, PDA PalmPilot. There was no phones, no cellular, no WiFi, no Bluetooth. It was cable sync through the server, right?

Judy Coker:

That's right.

Mike Merrill:

Where you started. But before you got off the bus or switched buses, we went through Blackberry and then pretty soon it was iPhone and Android, MyPads and web-based and all these other advancements. So to your point over time, the technology is going to change underneath your feet. And it's important that you continue to stay vigilant and to keep your head up and on a swivel to be aware so that you can help make sure that the company is leveraging those tools the best way that they can with what's available.

Judy Coker:

I do have a story in my last application that I wanted to share. And this is regarding the of field operations director. By my meetings with the different departments, I got them thinking, especially as I delivered for them, got them thinking about, the product was always in the back of their head. And he ran into a situation where he was discovering that with the geo-fence, he was noticing guys clocking in the commute, clocking in, at home, drive to lunch and then clock in at lunch. Well with the... What is it called? Yeah, the geo-fence-

Mike Merrill:

Geo-fence.

Judy Coker:

... when they're outside of the geo-fence it marks where they clocked in. He started to really call the guys out on this. And within six months, that stopped completely. If he didn't have that tool because these guys are out in the field, they're on the go. If he didn't have the tool, he would have never known the money the company was spending in wrong clock outs or clock ends in clock outs. You're supposed to be at the job site when you clock in. And I tell that story because I'm so proud that something that started as just payroll was really ingrained into the minds of people within the company. And they were looking for ways to save in their own budget.

Mike Merrill:

So that efficiency tool began to affect change and behavior.

Judy Coker:

Okay. I was going to say behavior's a big thing and technology can help us with behavior. And I saw that in many areas of the company, you're going to get pushed back and you're going to get resistance, but once it's embraced, then it becomes a system that can really change behavior if you need it to be changed. That's like the safety forms, they were now the dyes, the foreman in the field were now doing safety forms because they knew we could check every day if they did it or they didn't do it. And we could react right away instead of three weeks ago. Oh, they bring their forms in and we check them and say, "Well, you missed this week. And that week," then it's too late.

Mike Merrill:

And you're potentially rewarding bad behavior, instead of good behavior and whatever behavior you're rewarding is usually what's going to continue to happen. Right? So a couple of questions. How did this impact over time, do you know?

Judy Coker:

What I did is I took the quarter before we did the rollout or as we were doing the rollout to all the offices around the country. And what I did is I took all the overtime. I calculated that. And then once I had every office on the product and doing payroll, which happened to be the next three months. So this was the fall. So the first was the summertime. The next was the fall. So we know in construction, summer is a big deal. So probably a lot of overtime. The fall, it starts ramping down still heavy, but still wrapping down. I was just for the quarter, we dropped over time by 1.2, \$2 million.

Mike Merrill:

Oh my goodness.

Judy Coker:

Just for the quarter.

Mike Merrill:

Just the overtime?

Judy Coker:

Yeah. And when you do paper, you never know what accuracy you're going to get. And I had one office, I had the guys Colin saying, "It's not fair because my pay check is short." Now of course they call me directly. Right?

Mike Merrill:

Mh-mm-hmm (affirmative).

Judy Coker:

I don't have anything to do processing payroll that's done at their office. Something must be wrong with the system. So I remember saying, "How much is it off?" Ask him a lot of questions. And then he said and this two guys called me on this separate occasions and the word got out. But anyway, so I said, "So are you telling me your foreman has been fraudulently overstating your time. And you're working really less hours than we paid you for? If you're telling me your pay check is short, do you want me to go back and verify that you haven't been overpaid in past payrolls?" After I said that in both conversations, it stopped and nobody ever called me again, the word get out nationally.

Mike Merrill:

They said, "You know what Judy, we're good."

Judy Coker:

I mean, I always tell that story because who knows? Staff, and when you're doing time count, you're going to say from 9:00 to 5:00 or 9:00 to 9:15, but when they're clocking in on a device, it's time. There's nothing to say about it.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, I love that. What about spreadsheets, how do you feel about those?

Judy Coker:

Well, I'm an accountant, so I love spreadsheets.

Mike Merrill:

What about for field reporting and other things in that way, as far as accuracy. And are they just a better piece of paper? Or I mean, there's some efficiencies gained, but what's your opinion on if someone was submitting time in a spreadsheet versus an actual clock or something accurate?

Judy Coker:

Oh, I could see that happening. We weren't into that because the field guys don't have that, but you're still exposing yourself to the same thing. It's just electronic. It doesn't mean just because it's on a piece of paper that you use a pen or pencil or a spreadsheet that it's as accurate. It's basically the same thing. I like the live clock ins. So you get an in both companies that I rolled out the product, in both companies, the real data is the actual clock in and out. And you can't get that on a spreadsheet or on a paper time card, it just doesn't happen. And if you believe it to be true, I would do some soul searching on that topic-

... is all I'm saying.

Mike Merrill:

Good word, soul searching. I think that's implies some things for people to consider.

Judy Coker:

Yeah. And another thing we're talking about the hours, one of the things that was important to me in both operations is timely reporting of hours. And when you're on a manual system, it takes two, three weeks before you really know the performance of the job. By that time, if something has gone astray, you've realized it too late. And one of the things with real time reporting, that data is downloaded and in your counting system, and in AboutTime, AboutTime doesn't do hours, but if you're a project manager, you want to know and even a foreman. I had the foreman doing this at the last company, they could go on their device or at the office they can go into the control center, take a look at how many hours have been spent versus budget because it's in there. And if it's getting close, they could go ahead and feel comfortable with it. And I've always told both the project managers and

foreman, this, for example, we know how this works in construction. Customer wants something extra done.

I've always told in support of project management. "You have to get it priced to do extra work because it's not in scope of work." So in both cases, the customer will come to the foreman and say, "Hey, can you do this?" Well, it's very easy. The foreman can call the project manager and say, "I looked at the hours, this is the budget. And this is the actual, do we have room for me to do it or are we going to have to charge and if so, what it is?" So one of the things that I talked to the foreman about and the project manager is, that gives you the play because sometimes you want to give him something. Sometimes it's too big and you're going to have to do a quote. But without that, what I found was they say, "Go ahead and do it and we'll get the numbers to them later." Well, you know what that means that you call the customer and the customer says, "I didn't expect it to be that much, and I'm not going to pay that." And then you see your job going south.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. And if you document even the gimmes, the freebies, the things that do that, you donate to them in good faith. You can document those two and then note on the invoice, no additional charge. And now you're acknowledging and you're getting credit for the generosity and the kindness that you extended to them instead of... having a conflict and a problem where you actually went out of your way to do something extra. Okay. So going back to really the beginning of the conversation where we were talking about your company using disconnected PalmPilots, no cell phone. This is before Blackberries and moving all the way forward to today, where we standardize on Apple and Android device and iPads in most software applications and then cloud technology, what are some of the efficiencies that companies can gain by moving to the cloud and by migrating off of that hardware based installed system?

Judy Coker:

Well, I think it's a huge advantage. And that's one of the things I was looking at is making that transition for the company. Because as I ran into some issues and there need to be some tweaks done by your company. There were multiple people I should say,

IT had to get involved in that kind of stuff. I'm always cost conscious and the fact of having a cloud access based system kind of eliminates all that. So if there's a problem, it doesn't affect what's going on in the day-to-day operation, it's kind of working behind the scenes, nothing gets blocked, nothing gets stopped. You don't have to reboot and stuff like this, it just happens. And one of the things when you're operating a business, like in construction, those interruptions can cause problems in the day.

And not saying that there's a lot of them, but when it happens, we're so used to having things run smoothly and all of a sudden you get a hiccup and the world ends. It's like, oh, but with the cloud-based system, what I envisioned was a lot of that would go away and it would be just a relationship between me and the AboutTime person that's handling my problem. And I had issues with devices that you got different technologies or different generations of cell phones and stuff. And that caused me a lot of problems. So you'd have one guy that was having a problem. And from what I understood, a lot of that would be eliminated because it has nothing to do with the device. It's a little bit more protective against that kind of hiccup in a day's operation.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. So with cloud technology, you're taking out the middle process of managing that hardware, whether it's you and you have people on staff or you're outsourcing and having to hire a third party, those phone calls get eliminated, Amazon Web Services or whatever cloud hosting vendors being utilized for the web-based technology. Their uptime is 99.99999, whatever percent. And if they're down, everything's down anyway, nobody's up. So to speak.

Judy Coker:

Yeah. And as a matter of fact, when I did the budget or the numbers on that and presented it, that was one of the big things I'm remembering right now is the disc space on the computers, local computers, there's a big savings in that. And the more you put on your local system, the slower it runs. And I just remember when I was looking at the technology, that was one of the things I was really putting numbers against is how much am I going to save in having cloud-base and not

having to bear down our system with the other things, the accounting software and anything else that was on there. And of course that has to be maintained.

And really here's another big key. I got the guys in the field and the managers got the guys in the field to take pictures, take pictures and that takes up a lot of space. So we were talking about having to download certain historical data in order to make room for the new staff. And each office was really ramping up job site pictures that they were taken, with a cloud-based. I wouldn't have to worry about that. And now that I'm remembering, that was another reason why our database was filling up with information and you have to pay for that and you have IT, internal IT managing it. So that's one less thing you have to do.

Mike Merrill:

Aside from the performance hit that you're taking, has that space fills up?

Judy Coker:

Yeah. Oh yeah. And we were seeing that too. That's why we had to do historical timelines and say, "We've got to take this off so that it's not slowing us down." And of course, payroll is really very important. And if you're down locally, that's going to make a big difference of processing payroll and these cloud-based systems have backups. They have backups after backups, after backups. So chances of you being down are pretty slim to none.

Mike Merrill:

Love that. Well, there's a lots of great pearls of wisdom here for sure. And I have really enjoyed having this discussion and catching up and talking a little bit more about your journey over the last decade plus with these different solutions.

Judy Coker:

Well, I enjoyed it, I had fun.

Mike Merrill:

Well, so to wrap up if I were to ask you, what is Judy Coker superpower, when you put that cape on to go to the rescue to somebody, what is it that you're about to do?

Judy Coker:

I would say determination and keeping my focus on the goal. You got to keep, and I think that's what happens when companies start implementing a system, they take their eye off the goal. When you know you have to do something, you stay on it. And I had roadblocks thrown up against me and I just had to be eloquent in going around those blocks because I knew what the goal was. And that's what I would say.

Mike Merrill:

All right. So navigate with determination, that sounds like, right?

Judy Coker:

That's right. That's right.

Mike Merrill:

Awesome. What about is there one challenge that stands out in your mind that you worked through in business that you could share, or someone might glean some wisdom from, with that determination?

Judy Coker:

This goes into different industries and it's kind of been consistent through which every company and that sabotage. There are people out there that want to, for whatever reason, they don't want something to happen. Maybe it's their personal, maybe it's a group effort, but having courage and strength stand up against that and be eloquent about it and still have your eye, your mind's eye on the goal. And as the sabotage comes your direction, you just shift to the side and work around it and pat them on the back and say, "It's going to be okay, but I'm going forward. You just stay right there. I'm going to continue going forward." I would say that, is it because it doesn't matter what you're doing. That's I think every business person runs into that in one or another.

Mike Merrill:

Finally, I just wanted to ask Judy, if there was one takeaway from our conversation today, what would you hope that the listeners walk away with after listening to us talk about all of these things?

Judy Coker:

The big thing I think is don't be afraid of change and don't be afraid of say technology. I know in the construction industry, technology can be a waste of time, but it really isn't. It takes courage and determination to really bring your company forward and bring challenges to everybody within the company to be better and stronger than what you were in the past. And you need tools to do that. And it is scary. You could talk yourself out of anything. But I would say just face it with courage and knowing that the company is going to become stronger in the long run. And so will you, because you'll learn something and walk away with it.

Mike Merrill:

Wow. I love that. Well said, Judy, thank you so much for the conversation today. I've really, really enjoyed talking with you and catching up, and I know that our listeners will enjoy what you shared as well.

Judy Coker:

Well, I really enjoyed sharing. That's always my goal. I want everybody to be better. So thank you for asking me.

Mike Merrill:

Absolutely. Well, we're all better from hearing this today. So thank you to the guests for joining us today on the Mobile Workforce Podcast, sponsored by AboutTime Technologies and WorkMax. If you enjoyed mine and Judy's conversation today, I would highly encourage you to please give us a five-star rating and a review and share this episode with your friends and colleagues in the industry. Of course, those reviews and those positive comments help us to continue to bring on valuable guests like Judy. And we want to continue to bring value not only to your business, but your life.