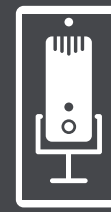Episode: 38
Eric Tucker

THE
MOBILE
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PODCAST

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 Eric Tucker. Eric is the senior business development manager at Procore Technologies. We're super excited to have Eric on today, as he leads the Tech Alliance Strategy for Procore and focuses on trade and specialty contractor markets. One of the things that Eric does, is he sources and launches partnerships to further the mission that Procore is undertaking right now in the marketplace. So, today we're going to be talking about a few different things: the first is all-in-one systems, the other thing is what's happening in the industry in general, and also tech stack strategies. Hello Eric, and welcome. And thank you for joining us today.

Eric Tucker:
Hey Mike, thanks for having me. Excited to be here.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah, this is going to be great. We've gotten to know each other more recently, as we're working together as technology partners and companies, and I'm excited to have you join us.

Eric Tucker:
Yeah. Excited to be here, and contrary to popular opinion or what some people may think about to two companies that both have a time tracking tool, that it's amazing we can sit on a podcast and talk about the future of technology, and future collaboration.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah, agreed. It's been exciting to see the advancements in the industry, not just from a technology standpoint, but also the companies and organizations, and integrations and other things that

we're excited about working on with Procore, and can't wait to deliver it to our mutual, and future customers.

Eric Tucker:
Yeah, love it.

Mike Merrill:
Awesome. So, I guess to just start the conversation out and get things rolling, I just wonder from your seat and your perspective at Procore, a large company that's out there making huge changes and innovations in the industry, what are you seeing that is taking place as we're working to come out of this COVID-19 pandemic?

Eric Tucker:
Yeah, so I think, if we back up to during the pandemic, if you look at a lot of the content that's been produced about, okay, the look backs around COVID-19 and what happened, technology adoption increased in a big way. Folks that had technology initiatives most likely accelerated those in during the COVID-19 lockdowns, because that was the only way they could stay in business. We were dealing with remote work, we needed to deal with management, servicing multiple job sites. We had workforces leave the job site and take unemployment, and it really required people to accelerate their technology investments to solve for some of these challenges around productivity.

So, I think as we come out of it, we're seeing some of these technology solutions stay in place. It's not like they're going to go back to old habits. I think in a lot of ways, the industry advanced. And the thinking around technology also advanced, and just how we work. We know this on the technology side, that we're not going to go 100% back to office anytime soon, because a lot of our companies we're able to survive remotely. And I think certain functions of the construction industry will remain that way as well, because technology exists. And I think a lot of contractors are finding that too, to

mean that they're actually more productive and they're able to do more with less, because of some of these technology solutions.

Mike Merrill:

So if I'm hearing you right, you're saying that you feel like the industry as a whole is really more warm, and warming up to the idea then than previous because of this experience. Is that right?

Eric Tucker:

Yeah, definitely. And we've always had the contractors that are on the cutting edge. I think that contractors get a bad rap that they're anti-technology, and I don't think that's necessarily true. I think there's a large scale, and I think that a lot of the folks that were maybe later adopters of technology, or hadn't committed the technology budgets before are now, yeah, they're warming up. They're waking up to, oh my gosh, this is actually a big part about how we do business. And technology is going to change everything about how these companies do business.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. I love that, and I think we would be in complete agreement on that. So, one of the things that I'm hearing a lot, and you probably are hearing the same thing, lots of these companies are looking to source or find what I would term all-in-one solutions, more like one place that they can go to for data, one place they can go to for information that they need, and that's critical to their business. What does that look like from your perspective?

Eric Tucker:

Yeah, that sort of perspective, I think came out of some of the construction ERPs positioning themselves as all-in-one. And they did things like field service management, they did things like time tracking, they did things like change order management. But they weren't mobile, they weren't in the cloud, they didn't really allow for collaboration and transparency on job sites. And so what happened was, is these were solutions that were meant to be accounting systems, and kind of became project management systems. Not

because necessarily the contractors wanted it, but because there wasn't a lot of solutions 10 years ago.

That's largely changed. And what's happening is we've seen… One of the reasons Procore exists, is that an accounting system just simply cannot do everything a project management system can do for construction, and from an operations perspective. And so what we've seen has venture capital has poured into the construction technology market over the last, especially in the last five years, but certainly the last five to 10 years, is now contractors have a lot of really good options. And there's this opportunity for different departments to use best in class solutions for their function, versus an all-in-one that really can't be good at any one thing.

So, that's sort of where things are at right now, is we have a view that the ERP and accounting systems should really be for the back office functions and the back office accounting solutions. But all of your different departments and field teams should have best in class applications for what they need. And the importance is really not around buying one system that's average at a lot of things, but buying like I said, best in class. The challenge for management and for teams is the data component. I have a saying that that different teams should use different applications, but they still rely on the same data. And that's true without technology. Teams need to share information, and I think technology can accelerate that if the integrations are in place to support it.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, much like Procore in existence for that same reason, that's what WorkMax does too. We try and collect that field data from a labor and production perspective better than anybody, and then empower the ERP, empower the payroll process, empower of the job cost system, empower project management tools with that better data.

Eric Tucker:

Yeah, exactly. And those are teams that previously were dealing with email, and spreadsheets, and attachments, and Dropbox folders at best. And every time that information doesn't get transferred well enough, if there's a gap in communication there,

that's a deterioration of trust which can really hinder progress of these companies.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. I like what you said, no one solution is going to be able to be all things to all people. And so like you mentioned, integration is the key then at that point. APIs, web connectivity, web apps that have continual touch points with sharing that data within the various systems within their ecosystem. Is that the way you see it as well?

Eric Tucker:

Absolutely. And what that means also for contractors, is the more API and integration availability there is from the existing systems, workforce management systems, from construction management solutions, from ERPs, it means that the industry can actually attract more innovation. Because in the same way that one system can't be all things to all contractors, and all departments, and all their different functions, we want to bring… More startups is good for this industry. It's going to give contractors more choice, it's going to bring new technologies to the industry that the bigger companies may not be able to build. And those APIs are going to allow them to play nicely within an existing tech stack.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. So you mentioned the word tech stack, so what is that for the listeners to understand better?

Eric Tucker:

Yep. So a tech stack, think about a stack of your technology systems. And this is something I think we're starting to see construction CIOs, and IT leaders, and operations leaders take a lot of pride in. This is the stack of solutions that is the winning stack for your particular company. And the really good companies are, are managing this as a sort of, I don't know if fluid's the right word, but there's your core stack of solutions. You have a backend platform that's connecting field, back office, and a lot of your construction functions, like Procore. You have your accounting system that's synced really well. You have your workforce management system and labor tracking solution, which

could be you guys, it could be us, it could be several others. There's some field technologies that might be really critical to that particular contractor's needs, whether it's a mid-market union electrical contractor or a large GC, those things are going to differ.

Eric Tucker:

And then wrapping that all up into an analytics solution, like Procore has a backend analytics system that brings all this data together. And so, you have those core elements, but at the same time opening yourselves up to pilot different solutions to layer on top of that stack, at a low level of risk. And managing that, that idea of managing a tech stack gives contractors the ability to try new solutions. It makes them more innovative, and it helps build an innovative culture within their companies, because they have built a way to safely try new things.

Mike Merrill:

So, you're saying nail down the core systems, and then try other pieces and components to enter into that ecosystem, is probably your recommended strategy?

Eric Tucker:

Yep, that's what we've seen. I think for the most innovative contractors, a lot of them have dedicated IT managers that are thinking about this, that are managing programs to allow for pilots of new solutions, and also educating core companies around integration. So for us, for a typical contractor, trade contractor, workforce management is absolutely critical. The construction management side, which is managing the productivity component of that, managing the costs, managing change management, RFIs, drawings, communications up to the customer, those are all things that are really core. I think ERPs are also that way. We see companies stick with an ERP for 10 or 20 years, those are really hard to displace. But the good thing is that there's so much infrastructure being built to allow for connectivity to all those systems.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. So, basically whatever trade you're in, whatever focus your business has as a core, there are solutions to specialize in those particular things. And then you're

saying, find these other complimentary solutions to customize, and tweak the needs that you have as a business. But the takeaway is that those systems, those solutions, despite what industry you're in, exist. Right?

Eric Tucker:

Absolutely. And contractors are able to survive without some of these solutions today because they have been for 20 years. But the reality is that the amount of work that there is being thrown at them with a shrinking labor workforce, is really changing the calculus of their process. And the technology has shown up to solve this. If you look at field service, there's several different really world-class cloud and mobile solutions that integrate with the ERP. Several of them integrate with Procore now. The same thing with workforce management. There's there's solutions like WorkMax that bring all these together.

There's also, you have things like labor scheduling, for example, and deeper tools that maybe the solution in Procore, or WorkMax, or the ERP is good for some, but there's a level of sophistication that another more point solution brings to market. I think point solutions can actually be really valuable to certain contractors if it solves their need. And the good thing about these newer companies, the newer construction technology companies entering this space, is that a lot of them have a freemium or pilot model. So, they'll allow you to go try before you really commit to enterprise agreements. And Procore has close to 300 API integrations in our marketplace, so we're trying to make sure that as the solutions come to market, they integrate with the backend solution of the contractor. So you can try them, the data syncs up, and it's available.

Mike Merrill:

So, you mentioned workforce management, scheduling, service-type dispatch solutions. Are there some other things that are on the horizon, that are coming down the pike as well?

Eric Tucker:

Yes. So, the other area that I think is really interesting is the materials space right now. If you were to go buy, it's summertime, I just bought a new umbrella for my outdoor patio on Amazon this week. And I can go on there, I can compare similar solutions or similar products, I can compare pricing, and I can choose a shipping route. I can actually have a choice of logistics. I have Prime, so obviously that one's easy, but there's also if I didn't, you can choose between a carrier and there's a price associated with it. And then once I buy it, I can simply go into an app and see exactly where in the world it is, whether it's out for delivery or not. And then once it's delivered, it tracks it.

That's an amazing amount of infrastructure that's available to us as consumers, that does not exist in a unified way for contractors. And we're seeing a lot of companies step up to go solve that, and it's really exciting. So, both on the materials procurement side, and suppliers are also very interested in this. And so, I think contractors should stay tuned to some of the materials management solutions that are coming to market. We're integrating with several right now.

The other area would be, that I sort of think of as the supply chain, but it's not exactly materials delivered to the job site, it's the fab shop and fabrication solutions. The coming together of BIM models, of advanced computerized machinery, and then actually just shop operations. There's manufacturing solutions for every other industry, and we've seen several pop up for construction in the last few years, and I think those are going to continue to grow. But what's so interesting about the shop function, and I know so many trade contractors especially in MEP space, are looking to build out prefab functions. You still have a workforce management function there. They rely on things in the construction project, like change management and daily logs. So, those are areas that are going to require deeper integration, and are going to require contractors to give a lot of feedback to get it right.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah, you brought up a really good analogy. I really love that, buying the umbrella through Amazon. It's true, you can't do that with a bunk of plywood easily today. And if you can, it's not widely known. I don't hear companies talking about those solutions as of yet, so exciting that you're seeing some early signs that those things are starting to hit the street, and there

are technology companies investing in those types of solutions.

Eric Tucker:
Yep, very exciting.

Mike Merrill:
So tell me, as we talk about some of these different things, I know the common component to a lot of it as it relates to construction, is just this whole idea of the innovation of mobility. How important is that today in any software solution that someone is leveraging?

Eric Tucker:
Yeah, mobility is absolutely critical. Going to a desktop solution to actually enter in information, is just too slow for construction today. The opportunity with mobile, if we go back a decade ago, the folks using technology on a job site were maybe the project managers and accountants. It was maybe a project management system, and the accounting team, and maybe some folks in the back office. But the opportunity with mobile is that we've brought technology to the field. So, now if we think about time tracking applications, if we think about forms, all of these things that used to be on clipboards and paper, we've now digitized, which is really exciting. And so, pretty much every core function of the field should really be digitized, so that we can actually roll up data and run analytics on it to drive productivity and profitability. It's just such an exciting time for that, and mobile makes that possible. That's the tip of the spear for data, is creating good mobile experiences.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah, that's a great point. It reminds me, we had James Benham recently with JBKnowledge, on the podcast. And he coined a phrase that I really liked and I'm probably going to have to steal and use. But he was talking about the old scanning solutions that would basically take a piece of paper and make it a digital PDF, and he was saying back in the 90s or early 2000s, that was a great solution because it got rid of the physical paper. But all we were doing is making that physical paper digital, we weren't getting the data from it where

we could actually have it digitized. And so, he called it a 90s solution to a 2021 problem.

Eric Tucker:
Yep. I listened to that, and I think he couldn't have been more spot on. What's what's exciting is, I talked a bit about the amount of venture capital coming into construction tech, is it's attracted user interface designers from outside the industry. So, we have this sort of renaissance of good technology design entering construction, that's really empathetic to the needs of a superintendent, or the needs of a foreman, or the needs of a worker, and how we may need to capture data from them, or to support them with data to do their jobs better. And we're hearing, there's just some really creative interfaces being built. And I think that's one of the reasons I come back to all-in-one is never going to nail it. Right?

We have in our marketplace today for Procore, we have a couple of solutions that are just interfaces for Procore. They don't do anything but provide a different layer to interact with Procore data. These are apps that we didn't build, but some of our customers wanted this functionality. Things like interacting with an inspection via a text message, for example. That's a solution that folks should really open themselves up to, that is built off understanding the needs of the field, but with the sophistication of a system like Procore. So, I think mobile is absolutely key, and it's great to have just a confluence of minds thinking about mobile. Even when you think about a backend system, like an accounting or HR system, there's so many use cases where bringing additional users into that experience can add value. And we're having those conversations with you guys, we're having those conversations with HR companies like Arcoro, we're having those conversations with accounting solutions as well.

Mike Merrill:
Well yeah, and another guest we had on was Jeff Gerardi with Proest. And he was talking about how they just changed their user model so that everybody could be in Proest. Because now it's not a game of migrating licenses, and inactivating, and reactivating, and sharing and all these things that companies try and do to try and keep the costs down. When in reality, you want all of the stakeholders within the

organization to have access to that data, should they need it. And so, I love the talk track that you're on there with that. That's great, great to see.

Eric Tucker:
Yeah. Procore's been an unlimited user model, I think forever. And that's been an interesting journey, because we've seen users of construction management technology that we would have never seen before. And I think that's where you get some of these innovations coming from, and we've seen apps launch in our marketplace that have just been directly suited to adding more value for those users.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah. And it helps you get the good word out, when people move and there's ebbs and flows in workforce, and employees move to different organizations, if they're fluent with your solution or any solution, and they enjoyed the experience and got value out of it and felt like it was a true solution for their role, then they're going to recommend it to their new organization. And that's how we all get better as an industry, not just one company or another.

Eric Tucker:
Yeah. And so, I guess to distill down your original question around mobile and why it's important, I think mobile is the starting point for collaboration. And that's what actually connects the field of the back office, you have back office and trailer functions that are working in browsers, and the field needs mobile. And not just mobile apps, but we're seeing audio devices, maybe it's the Apple Watch solution, maybe it's a robot. But that's that mobile functionality is ultimately what really connects those two, and also connects different contractors that are working together on a project.

Mike Merrill:
Yeah. True collaboration, right?

Eric Tucker:
Yep.

Mike Merrill:
So, this has been a great conversation, I really enjoyed the technical side of it. Before we wind down, I did want to ask you a couple of other more personal questions. That sound good?

Eric Tucker:
Sounds great.

Mike Merrill:
Awesome, okay. So first of all, when Eric goes to put on his cape for being a superhero, what is your superpower? What is it that you feel like you embody personally?

Eric Tucker:
Yeah, for sure. So when I take the Clark Kent glasses off.

Mike Merrill:
That's it.

Eric Tucker:
Yep. I would say, this is a tough one because I could give you a much easier list of all the things I'm bad at. But I would say building trust is a major, I think is something that I've been able to bring to Procore, both internally and externally to different technology partners. This has been a journey over the last three years, where a lot of construction technology players did not work together. Data was in silos, and especially Procore's a large company and one of the larger players, and sometimes there's an apprehension to work with a big company like that. Building trust with our technology partners, and contractors, and employees that a partnership model and integration model is something that's valuable. And that happens in a bunch of different ways, but that would be my answer, is I would say building trust.

Mike Merrill:
That's great. That's definitely a great one, and I've felt that from you in our opportunity to work together recently.

Eric Tucker:
Thanks, Mike.

Mike Merrill:
You bet. So, let's talk about maybe a challenge that you've seen either in the industry personally, that you had to overcome and work through, and maybe what helped you do that?

Eric Tucker:
Yeah. Learning construction. I spent the first half of my career at a similar company to Procore, but we were the Procore of the boutique wellness industry, so yoga studios, salons, spas, CrossFit, and helped build out their API ecosystem and a lot of the partnership connectivity there. And so, in the last three and a half years, I've had the joy of learning construction, and overcame that just by, gosh, asking a million questions. Procore does also a phenomenal job of learning and development of, like I said before, bringing technology people into this industry and getting fresh eyes on how to solve challenges. And so, we do a lot of work to train up our people on construction and construction management. And I have some amazing colleagues that have come from industry, that I just continue to learn things from every day.

Mike Merrill:
That's awesome. Yeah, we need more tech and construction. I appreciate any company that's helping bring that talent into this industry that we love so much, and that we serve every day. So last thing, if there was one takeaway that you wanted our listeners to have more conversation today, what would that be?

Eric Tucker:
So, it's really funny that you said we need more tech in construction. Because I think it's a perfect segue, because I think the inverse is true for what I'd like to leave this audience with, is that we actually need more construction in tech. There's so much tech that's shown up, and I think the reality is that on the Rogers' adoption curve of technology, most contractors are still in the late adopter or lagger phase. And we need more early adopters and more innovators to come help

technology companies think about how to innovate, how to integrate. We need feedback on integrations.

There's a lot of solutions, thousands of solutions. I think there's like 4,000 construction technology companies today. And we really need feedback to go solve for new workflows that meet the needs of the field. And so, this is a big challenge when construction IT budgets have not increased despite the influx of new technology solutions. So, I think we need more contractor input. And even if technology companies aren't asking for it, they need the input, they want your input.

Mike Merrill:
Love that. Boy, more construction in tech. What a great way to switch the words around and give a deeper meaning. Thank you for that, Eric.

Eric Tucker:
Yeah.

Mike Merrill:
All right. Well, thank you. It's been a pleasure, I've enjoyed this conversation. We're excited about our partnership with Procore, and the integration that we're providing, and anxious for the future. So, if you enjoyed the conversation that Eric and I had today, please give us a five star rating and review, and share this episode with your collea1gues and friends in the industry. Of course, our goal always is to not only help you improve in business, but in life.