

Mike Merrill:

Hello, and welcome to the mobile workforce podcast. I am your host, Mike Merrill. And today, we are sitting down with Keith Post CEO, Steve Little, President and Head Coach, and Jane Williams, the CFO and safety manager of KPost Roofing out of Dallas, Texas. With this team of leaders, we have a very special opportunity. We're going to record a two-part series with these fine folks. Today, we are excited to talk about and focus on the success of finding culture in their organization and making it a priority. With this team of leaders, to come on a very special two-part series, focusing on success and how culture and large client management plays into that success. Welcome Keith, Steven, Jayne. I'm really looking forward to the conversation today.

Keith Post:

Thank you.

Jayne Williams:

Thanks.

Steve Little:

Hey.

Mike Merrill:

So before we get too far into the conversation today, give me a little bit of a background on KPost and how each of you fit into this leadership team.

Steve Little:

You should start.

Keith Post:

Well, we started this together and they needed somebody put their name on the door and I got picked.

I had probably been in the industry the longest, so I was more of the true roofer in the group. To this day, I'm the guy that we go to as far as how we do something. You can't do it on your own. We started small and we grew fast. We both took our lanes and we all went our ways. So we could, we could bond together and create what we have today, which is pretty special.

Steve Little:

That was pretty humble because you really, you wanted to call it best roofing or some other kind of name to describe what we were going to end up being. And Jayne, I kept arguing with him that he had the highest integrity in the industry. Even when we started our company, people from around the city would still call even though we didn't have the job. They would still call Keith and ask him questions about the roofing systems or the applications or problems they were running into and things like that.

So, from a being a marketer for many, many years, it was like, how do we take the guy that has the best reputation and throw it out there and get credibility immediately to start a company? And then that's what happened. So, we call it KPost Roofing and Waterproofing. When Jayne and I would call on different clients or we would go to different events, we were mentioning KPost, I mean, immediately they knew Keith. They may have known Jayne from all her years of being involved in CFMA, but I was a business guy, so I was more behind the scenes. Jayne, you remember those days?

Jayne Williams:

Oh yeah. I sure do. It was quite the start for us on our end. We didn't have a lot but Keith has been in the industry forever and just really had a name to back up all his experience. Steve's a brilliant businessman and I just brought the financial and safety side to it and it meshed, and it worked well.

Steve Little:

Well, you brought the car because we needed it to get around],

Keith Post:

I think she had the credit card too and the car.

Jayne Williams:

I did. I had a credit card and a car.

Steve Little:

So she's in charge of the money Mike, and so we said okay well we'll use your credit card. So we use her credit card now.

Keith Post:

Yeah. Very true that first few weeks that we started in November and January where when we opened the doors. 11 people showed up on our doors and said hey. We went to work and we try to find a way to pay payroll.

Jayne Williams:

That's it. That's the biggie.

Mike Merrill:

That's amazing. Wow. Yeah, you, you have a rich and long history already, even, even though it's less than a quarter century old. I think it feels like it's a lot older than that. One of the things that when I think of KPost, and we've worked together for, gosh, I think nearly a decade now that we've known one another, I think of culture. Was that a conscious decision that you all made together in the beginning? Is that something that you adapted to? Or how, how did culture become such an important part of everything that you do in your business?

Jayne Williams:

I was just going to say from day one, it was about making a company different than what we had been with before. And we were going to make it better. We were going to take better care of our employees. Those men that are out on the roofs that are 110 degrees are

just as important as Keith and Steve, sitting there at the table. And we wanted to express to our employees that they're not a commodity. They're not, they're not, chattel. They're, they're valuable, valuable assets to us. And so from day one, it was about making them feel part of KPost and also making them realize that their safety was part of their culture. That to be safe and get themselves home to their babies and their wives that night, it was the most important thing. And I think that's where it started was from day one and wanting to make it better for everybody.

Keith Post:

Yeah. Yeah. Years ago we, we've got our senior readers together. We did cultural training. Because we're a diverse group and one of the things that we were taught was that acknowledge that. So we have flags in our warehouse of every nationality that works for us. There's about, I think there's 10? 10 different nationalities? And you know, you look at today's world and what the world's going through with all the rioting and the protests. It's something that we instilled in our people way back when it was there. You know what? You come through that door, I don't care if you're black, white, brown, yellow, whatever. You're an equal. We, anybody, can come through that door and go into our refrigerator and get a Coca-Cola. You know, we don't discriminate in any way. We treat people as your equals. And I think that goes a long way as part of our culture.

And I mean, day one, Jayne has been the leader in this world. She's, she's been mother hen and they all know that and it's spread through the company and we treat each other fair. We treat each other, like we want to be treated. We do all kinds of training in that respect, as far as how to get along with your coworkers. Respect and honesty. If you can put those two together and everybody, and know that when you come to the door, those are the two most important things when you work here, you go along way. We've done things for our employees. We're very charitable. I can go on and on about what we do. And Jayne has been at the forefront of starting all those programs.

Steve Little:

And she started to KPost charities. In our charity group, we have scholarship programs. We do back to school

backpacks. We help build homes and put on roofs for shelters, and we incorporate the entire company into doing it. So we did a men's and women's shelter for one of the developers here that pulled together the three largest general contractors in the marketplace and said, "We need to give back to the community. Go find the subs that you believe, believe in giving back" and they came to us and there was no writer. We jumped right on it. Keith led the initiative for that and we got our residential group involved, we got our roofing crews, our sheet metal crews involved. We got some of our manufacturers involved and we went and we built this, the shelter. This shelter stands today as one of the best men and women's shelters to help people get back on their feet, and to gain employment, and become confident about themselves.

So it's one thing about giving back, and it's one thing about taking care of people but we've also created a culture of winning. I think that's really important because people like to win. Even if they're not competitive, they want to be on a winning team. It doesn't go unrecognized that we run our company like a football team. So it was easy to talk in those terms and have red zone meetings, or have huddles and have those types of things. It kind of built a sense of that we're all wearing the same jersey. It doesn't matter if you're on offense, defense, or special teams. You build within the core values of whatever it takes and taking care of each other, and high integrity, and those types of things. It all came part of building a company. We didn't build a roofing company. We built a company and we built a work family. It continues today. That's why, getting Jayne back in the office, getting through all of this COVID stuff so that we all can be back together again, it's, it's hugely important.

Mike Merrill:

Wow. That's a really, really admirable and, and unique. I think you all would acknowledge that. Especially in the construction industry. I mean, why do you think, why do you think in construction, maybe struggle a little bit more with having that type of a mentality and a culture?

Keith Post:

It's not easy. It's something that you have to, you have to live it every day. You know, we, every day we wake

up and we go to work and we try and get better. Every day. You never quit learning. We have, we have a KPost University that is led by Yolanda here, increasing construction productivity. It is incredible as far as what we're doing there. We're giving back to our people. We're training them and you name it. Not, not how to put roofs on so much but how to get along with your fellow employees, life skills, how to deescalate a situation, how to manage an employee who is out of line. So these are, and we're having it done by third parties. It's probably one of our biggest initiatives we put in play in the last few years and it's really exploding. It's actually spreading beyond our walls. It's going into ABC, which is the Associated Building Contractors here locally. Their construction education foundation is wanting us to help them start apprenticeship programs for the roofing units.

So we're doing that internally. We're being a little selfish because we want to take care of our own people first and you only have so many hours in a day. We've got the foundation well on its way through some grants. So we're getting half part of the funding done to go forward with this program. The leadership skills that these kids are learning, I say kids, these kids are 50 years old, but they're kids to me and it's so cool. I love watching somebody learn something and then showing you how they can do it bigger and better than you, how they learn. So that's the energy here, it's just giving back.

Steve Little:

But this is typical that we did it as a team. So Yolanda Garcia, she's a recruiter, and our retainer, and manages our education program. We have Thomas Williams, who runs our field. We have John Barker, who's our VP of shared services. And Keith, this committee has pulled all this together and then now has executed into the marketplace. Where we were doing this, or Jayne and I were doing it one-on-one. Doing it through the various associations to bring people in, whether it be NRCA, or MRCA, or ABC, because that's where our faces were. Whether it was being involved in incubating a National Order of Roofing, or the young guns, the council of young people in the marketplace from a one-on-one type standpoint. Now we've incorporated it in and put it into an entire university program, geared to our own staff of four hundred. And it has just been, it's been very well received.

Mike Merrill:

Wow. It's truly inspiring. I've been to these industry events. National roofing expo, and around some of these seminars and sessions, and it is not uncommon to have somebody talking about KPost and the session that they just led or the technology they were utilizing. It really feels like as an organization, you've become a leader and an innovator, and you're sharing best practices. You're sharing some of these secrets with people that are companies that could be considered competitors, and you're doing it willingly. Why?

Steve Little:

Well, that's really an easy question. I mean, one of the things that, that the three of us decided when we started the company is that, we wanted to be the standard that the industry was compared to. There's a number of great contractors in the DFW market, much less than the national marketplace. So it was really tough to start that. But we knew that if we took care of our people first, that everything would just fall right in-line. And then once we got it up and running, there's a sense of pride in what you're doing. Then if everybody is sharing great business practices, then it elevates our entire industry. The ones that don't want to participate are no longer competitors because the ones that do want to participate then become the standard of the industry on which the client base wants to do business with.

Mike Merrill:

Yeah. That's, that's amazing. Jayne, with your role in all this, I mean, what, as, as "chief mother hen" also, what, what have you, from your position, what have you seen that you're proud of that you're excited about? Or that you feel like is something that, you've accomplished part of what you set out to do when you started this with Keith and Steve?

Jayne Williams:

I think what impresses me the most and what makes my heart swell, I guess the word, is seeing long-term employees. People that have been here since day one or been here for 10 years, who still enjoy their job. They still want to be here. They want to be part of the family. It's truly a family atmosphere. I have seen babies born, and quinceaneras, and everything that is a family type

atmosphere. Long-term employees that want to call me when something wonderful happens or something bad happened. And I think that really shows that we set out to make this a special place to work. You could still make good money and you can take care of your family but you could also be part of something really special.

Mike Merrill:

Wow. Yeah. What I'm, what I'm hearing is you, you invest in your employees, not just financially, although you do that too, but you invest in them as individuals, as a family member.

Jayne Williams:

Yeah, exactly.

Keith Post:

I think what's kind of cool for me is having friends who are not in our industry. Who when their kids grow up and graduate from high school or college, say, "Man, he put my guy to work", "He put my daughter to work", "I admire you guys", "You guys are doing some good things". To have their siblings come here and start a career and hearing the accolades back from the parents saying, "Man, it's the best place my kid could ever go". You can't ask for anything more than that. I mean, that really makes the world go round for me. Giving back to these kids and making our industry better. So we're doing something right when, when those things happen.

Steve Little:

I'm knocking on wood over here Mike. We got to make sure that we don't read too much of our own press because every day, every day it's hard. Every day you have to get up and start all over again. I think the thing that we share with new employees is that this needs to be the place that you can't wait to get up in the morning. It's going to be work and it's not going to be perfect. We have to work some place to be able to do great compensation, to take care of our families. We hope that we provide that type of atmosphere here KPost. I was a little surprised that Jayne also didn't include in part of what she's proud of is that we carry a point-five-o mod rate. Which is an EMR modification

rate from the insurance industry. It's a scorecard, to where we are on safety for workman's comp.

And so everybody starts off with a one-0 and like golf, if you get bogeys, your score goes up. So everybody pays a dollar for insurance. Those bogeys mean you pay a dollar 50, a dollar 25 et cetera. Your rating is a 1.25 or 1.5. The roofing industry average is just under 1.0. It's in the nineties. We've got a 0.5, a log rate on \$16 million worth of operational payroll. And it all started with Jayne's, "I'm going to get our boys and girls home every night". That was the thing that we started from the very first day. We remember those safety meetings we did in the back of the strip center. Literally strips center, where we had offices in the front and a thousand square feet in the back. That was our storage and our safety or whatever. Jayne would be back there with Perez, who's now a coach and a safety officer for our company. They would for the two crews we had, or the 12 people that we had, they would conduct weekly safety meetings.

That's one of the things that I'm so proud for us as leaders, is that it was all about getting everybody home at night and trying to make them have a better life for their family. That's a very long-term approach and you asked what's the difference in the construction industry. Construction is not long term. It's bid, bid, bid. Win the bid. Go to the next project. Win, win, win. Lose, lose, lose. We have always taken the three of us, always taken a very long-term investment. Knowing that we are going to have to give not only the dollars, but the sweat equity, and the total commitment to get something 10, 15, 20 years down the line.

Keith Post:

Yeah. I remember in our early years when we were so strong in safety and everybody was wearing a safety vest and our jobs were set up safe. Looking at other projects that worked and now today, it's the norm. So that really makes you proud because you really made it a mantra. A lot of people have followed that mantra. You know, try to lead. We don't like to be second in anything we do. I'm sorry. I try to take it off 90, but man, it just goes 90 the dang car goes 90.

Mike Merrill:

Careful going through both Springs. I've got, I got hit with a ticket there. One time coming down to visit you guys.

Keith Post:

I've been there

Mike Merrill:

A mile of freeway and oh crazy. Relentless. Wow. So really, I mean, there's, there's so much that we could unpack around that. I think, I mean, the theme that I keep hearing is you've got to give, to get. You've got to give first. And if you do, you, you seem to have faith and hope and, and confidence that it's going to come back around. What I love, that I, that I heard said is basically, you're, you're hoping to have that rising tide lift all the boats in the harbor. Now you want to be in first place and in the right position, but you're okay with others being along for that ride, as long as it makes everybody better.

Steve Little:

And our clients subscribe to that. So I think about 30% of the total business we do as a company, price is not a consideration. And we respect that. We don't take advantage of it. But because I remember a quick story about a distribution center on the beverage business, and we went and did the job because it was 17 other contractors bidding it. The General contractor that was bidding this project, it typically was from the school world. And we typically are not in the new construction school world. It's just a very price-conscious, a low bid, drive the project type of construction business that is not our specialty. So the owner was receiving the bids back from the general contractor and they said, "Where's K-Post?" And because we do all the service work and do the re-roofs for this particular client. The General didn't have an answer, they didn't bid it.

We kind of discarded that out of, we'll consider them. And so right in the middle of the meeting, the owner calls Keith and says, "Hey, Post, why didn't you bid this job? You don't want my work?" And he said, not knowing that the General head was on an open speaker, he said, "This particular general contractor had 17 people there" he says, "We're not going to

compete for that. There's no standard of roofing in that type of situation. We won't compete". He says, "Give me a bid, I want your bid". Well, we were 18th, in pricing.

Mike Merrill:

Wow.

Steve Little:

18th and they said keep the contract.

Mike Merrill:

Wow.

Steve Little:

Because it's about safety. It's about quality. And it's about the value you bring. It really doesn't matter that it's roofing. It should be that way across the board to all the trades. But when Jayne said, when we were setting our company up, that three of us are sitting around in this card table, that's got this burnt mark in it, a bowl there for clips, and pens, and sticky notes and things like that. And we went around and says, "What's the most important thing that we could possibly do to set ourselves aside from anybody else. And it was safety, quality of life.

Mike Merrill:

Wow. Amazing. It's been quite a ride and you're still on it. You're still elevating. It feels like.

Keith Post:

You know it's a blur.

Steve Little:

Yeah, Mike, if you want to get into the roofing business, you can take the three of us out of it.

Mike Merrill:

You're selling me. I'll tell you that. Even if. Yeah, it's, it's, it is fascinating. I, you may, you all may remember. My, my background was a general contractor and we all

performed. So I've worked with a lot of roofers over the years and the speech that's coming from you all is a little different than what, than one I'm used to hearing. I think it's a beacon of hope and of something that I think is a lot bigger than like you said, just roofing. I think business in general but especially in construction.

To take some of what Jayne said, it warms my heart to see contractors succeed and do well because I know how hard they work. I know the kind of risks that they take with safety and financial risks. It is a tough business as it is. It's competitive and all the things that you laid out but, I just applaud your efforts to take that higher road and play the long game and not try and hail Mary, every play. I think some companies just kind of end up doing and I think they create a culture of that. I think that's not safe and I think it's not prudent. So I think a lot of businesses could learn from your example and the way that you guys operate your organization.

Steve Little:

You know, we're blessed and we know it, as a company, and our people. But I think that you should talk a little bit about our people because one of the things that we've had to do is, when the three of us started this company and we had eight others that joined us, it was empowering the other way. It's so hard when you have this company with this trajectory, like we've had. We have great people.

Keith Post:

Great people, right? Great people. When you lose a great person, we've been very fortunate that we've had somebody step up and typically, they've done a better job. I think that we've improved. I think we've gotten younger. We've definitely gotten younger. I mean, we, our youth movement has been incredible in the last two, three years and we've had a lot of great people come through these doors. We've been known as a training grounds and on all aspects and I think that goes a long way. Anybody that has ever worked for us and has ever moved on for whatever reason, has come back and told us, personally, thank you. You gave me something that I never got anywhere else. And it's made them be a leader of wherever they go. So, people grow and there's always opportunities. We try and

keep our flock strong and growing gradually. I think we've got a great team.

Steve Little:

Did you just say growing gradually?

Jayne did you hear that? Did you just see what he said?

Jayne Williams:

I can't talk.

Steve Little:

Oh my God. Jayne, talk about our first three years. What was our plan?

Jayne Williams:

Oh, well we were, we were not going to have more than what? A hundred employees, I believe? 10 million in sales and we blew that out of the water after a year or two, and we might as well, but we never stopped growing and-

Steve Little:

Oh, I just had, I had to call you out because the difference is, is that when you're going the first few years, you want to do six, eight and 10. You do eight, 14 and 16. Then you jump right out there to 22 in your fourth year. When you get into the kind of numbers that we have now, and one of the \$70 million range, you can have those 30 to 40% gross. It's just unsustainable to be able to do it. And in today's world, and one of the other things that's made us successful, we stay in our lane. We kind of know what we do. It's got to be complicated and high profile if it's a new construction or it has to be with a partner that we've done this with in the past. It's got to be a multi-facility client if it's going to be in the remedial side of the business. So, one of the other things I think has made us successful is that we stayed in our lane.

Jayne Williams:

Sort of. I think sometimes, Steve and Keith had great ideas and have always been forward thinkers so we have added a few things to our repertoire that from

those first few days. But I think the biggest thing for us was, as we were growing, we were also growing ourselves. We were, we were changing into different types of leaders and, and different types of even just coworkers for each other. So, if Keith all of a sudden says that we were growing gradually, I don't know where that's coming from because he's never had a stop button or even an off button. I think it was just the natural flow of us just growing as people and leaders and then encouraging our employees to grow.

Mike Merrill:

I'm hearing do is because I do. Not, as I say, right?

Jayne Williams:

That's exactly right.

Mike Merrill:

Wow. So, so looking back, maybe we can start with Keith and then Steve, and then wrap up the chain on this. But looking back over everything, you've all learned in your careers to date. I know you still got, probably 20 years in the tank each. Right. Is that right?

Steve Little:

Divided by what?

Mike Merrill:

Okay. So looking back, what would you tell someone else that's either got a business up and running and really needs to fix their culture and then maybe also somebody new. What advice would you give them? Starting out as it relates to culture.

Keith Post:

Respect is huge. Honesty, that's a given. If you're, you're not going to be honest, you're not going to be in business, treat everybody with fairness. I mean, you've got to, you cannot be fair to everybody. I mean, it puts a smile on your face. Every day walk into somebody's office and make sure you're involved. Make sure you're engaged with your people. I try and go through our buildings every morning and tell everybody good morning. How you doing. Ask them about their life. We

had all of our meetings start with our best of the best. What's the best thing that's happened to you in the last week and what's the best thing that has happened to you in our business. And so I want them to share, I want them to be open. I want them to be, I want them to be engaged because if you're not engaged, you're not going to succeed and we can help you with the other stuff, but you need to be engaged.

We got a new apprentice upstairs, been here about three weeks. and he'd been sitting at his computer. I've been by when I'd met him and said hi to him every morning for about two weeks. So I went by him the other day, I says, "You want to succeed here?" He goes, "Yes sir, yes sir, yes sir" I said, "Get engaged". I said, "You need to get out of that chair and go ask for help. You need to go around and start being open because this is a fast place and you may get left behind", I said. And as soon as I was talking to him, two people came up and started getting engaged with him. And I came up there this morning and I noticed how he was in a huddle with three people and he was speaking up and the kid was engaged.

Now, this is a kid who was 21 years old, right out of college, 22 years old. If I got to do that every day, and I'll continue to do that. Hopefully, that's infectious. Hopefully, that's something that everybody else sees says, "You know what? This guy really got something". He doesn't know where the bathroom is yet, but he's starting to get engaged. And so, today for me was a success. Just seeing this kid starting to care and want to be part of the team. Yeah, that's all I can do for these people is help them. Ask lots of questions every day. Care about. I think caring is a big deal.

Mike Merrill:

That's great. Steve, how about you?

Steve Little:

I think sincerity is a keyword in here. You've got to go through the motions, but if you don't show sincerity that it becomes fake. I have to give Jayne, Keith credit that I first came on board. I'm the nuts and bolts guy and had a little less caring or sincere attitude toward the units. No matter where they are, there were units. They were construction productivity. They were processes, they were systems. Both of them

can humanize it for me and it's made me be a better person. So, I think sincerity is one. I think you have to be vulnerable. That's something that we work on every day because it's not easy. You have to empower, and invest in your people, and in your industry. I know a lot of contractors that don't participate in local, or regional, or national industry because they don't want to expose their people because they're afraid they're going to get stolen. Or that they don't want to be away from office because then that's the time that they're not being productive. We have gotten tenfold return on investment from us and our people being involved in the industry.

That's where things like our apprentice program or things like that are coming from. We invested in these years ago and now it's coming back to us on the sense. So, I think those are some keywords to our success. Commitment. You have to be committed to this whole process. It is not instantaneous. This is not a business you want to get into if you think that you have two years, you're there. You get a storm come through and you make a bunch of money, whether you're in the residential or commercial business and you have a great year. We need you to take those coins, you need to put them away because there's some dry spells that transpire in this industry. It's a long-term play, it's not a short-term play. So I think that those would be my answers there as to what helped make our culture. Find good people and invest in them.

Mike Merrill:

Sage advice. Jayne, how about you?

Jayne Williams:

I think from the very start of anybody that's starting the company needs to remember why they're doing it. If it's for just mainly the money and you don't think about your employees or your coworkers, then maybe you're doing it wrong. I really believe that every, it's basically the second commandment as far as treat others the way you want to be treated. And that's what we, I would recommend to anybody is treat everyone in your company the way you want to be treated. Finally, I said it to Steve and Keith for years but God hates cocky. You can be confident, and you can proud, and you can step out there, and really be invested in what you're doing. It's scary sometimes because you're

hoping for the best outcome but you can always be confident. I think that's what did it for us.

Mike Merrill:

Fabulous. Well, that's wonderful. Well, I guess just to wrap up one final question just for Keith. I just wonder if you were to boil it down, what's your secret sauce for success and what gets your juices flowing? Where do you feel like you're really in your zone for, for others to kind of learn from you?

Keith Post:

Caring for people is number one for me and winning. When we put a huge effort into our project and we're not successful. Cause we usually, when we put together a project, it takes four or five guys and women that all put their pieces together. We do a lot of planning and just in the securing of a project. We do presentations where we bring a team in and we do all that stuff. If we don't win, it hits me. It hits the rest of the team but I take it home and I regurgitate it three times what we did right, what we did wrong and then the next day, I forgot about it. I don't dwell on the negative. That may be a fault of mine, but we lost it. We're moving on. I'll remember what we did wrong but I love the success.

I think it's not for me. It's for those teammates that all got to put a smile on their face for all the hard work and efforts they did and feeding all the families that we take care of. 400 people requires a lot of food. So, when we secure large projects, I go around and I give all the accolades to the team. It's never one person. It's the team. I guess, you got to have losses to get better. You got to have failures to get better. If you never have losses, you're never going to get better. I've had my share what that bar is going to be. I'm going to be able to be above the middle line a lot.

Mike Merrill:

Fantastic. Well, that's, that's a great way to end. Well, thank you all so much for joining us today. This has been a very enjoyable conversation and had a lot of fun getting to know each of you a little bit better as well.

Keith Post:

Thanks, Mike.

Steve Little:

Okay, Mike. Take care.

Mike Merrill:

Thanks Jayne.

Keith Post:

That'll be good.

Mike Merrill:

All right, well thank you for joining us today on the mobile workforce podcast. Hosted by about time technologies and work max. If you enjoyed this conversation today that we had with K-Post's team, or the K-Post team, I should say, or gain anything helpful in your business, please subscribe to the podcast and give us a five-star rating and review. You can also find us on Instagram at work max underscore. Give us a follow there as well. Thank you and we'll catch you on the next one.