

**Ryan Newman 00:00:00** Hi, dare to disrupt listeners, Ryan here. Before we jump into Doug Leach's incredible story of recovery and success, we want to pause to provide a warning to listeners who may find the following topics to be distressing. This episode contains detailed discussions on depression, anxiety, suicide, and drug abuse. We encourage listener discretion. For anyone who may be struggling with these challenges, we encourage you to contact your local mental health and substance abuse recovery services.

**Doug Leech 00:00:32** It was so shocking to me as I moved forward and was opening up programs, two things. One, the lack of resources across the entire continuum of care. And number two, it wasn't just about starting a business, which is hard enough, it was starting a business that everybody in the community pushed and bought against you. Opening. It all comes down to the stigma.

**Ryan Newman 00:01:02** This is Dare to Disrupt a podcast about Penn State alumni who are innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders, and the stories behind their success. I'm your host, Ryan Newman, and on the show today is Doug Leach. Doug is the founder and CEO of Ascension Recovery Services, one of the fastest growing healthcare companies in the country, as well as a national leader in behavioral health consulting, management and program development. Field Ascension Recovery Services aims to expand access to substance abuse treatment services across the country. Doug is also the founder and CEO of West Virginia, sober living, a network of recovery residences and reintegration programs for people in early recovery from substance abuse disorders. He graduated from Penn State in 2005 with a degree in accounting. Doug, thank you so much for joining us on the Dare to Disrupt podcast. Uh, this is a first for us. You're the first guest we've had that's been able to give some insight into a topic that's affecting so many, which is substance abuse. Thank you so much for joining us today.

**Doug Leech 00:02:09** Thanks for having me, Ryan. I appreciate it.

**Ryan Newman 00:02:11** Doug, I'd like to start as we normally do, which is at the beginning. Would you mind sharing with our listeners where you grew up and, and what some of your early formative years were like as a, as a young boy growing up?

**Doug Leech 00:02:21** Sure. I, uh, grew up in Morgantown, West Virginia. Was born in, in Morgantown, lived right across the border in southwestern pa, small town called Smithville, Pennsylvania. And, uh, moved to Morgantown when I was in sixth grade. Really good family, very loving. Dad was a banker, mom was a school teacher, and have one sister who's about a year and a half older than me. I, I was good kid, good grades in school, you know, very, very good student and active in sports. I played pretty much every sport, or moving into my high school years. It was tennis and golf were my primary sports. It was also a big skier. Never really got into too much trouble. Um, my senior year in high school, I started, uh, going to parties, drinking beer, just like many of us do. And still wasn't really getting into trouble. It just started, started to, to to drink socially.

**Ryan Newman 00:03:12** Doug, what brought you to Penn State?

**Doug Leech 00:03:14** I always had a dream of going to Penn State. My dad was a Penn State alum. He was an accounting major. Went on to become a CPA and eventually a banker. And, and he founded, uh, a bank in West Virginia. So I was always following in his footsteps. And I got into Penn State, went up to University Park in fall of 2000, lived in Gary Halls, and just couldn't have been happier. Uh, I was so happy with the choice I made with, with Penn State and coming up on the campus freshman year was, was, uh, just a pretty incredible experience. Something that's important about my story. Uh, and I didn't realize it at the time. I, I do now and I can reflect and look back on my childhood years and, and growing up. But I always had underlying anxiety. You know, I just had lots of doomsday scenario thoughts in my head that played out from the age of 5, 6, 7, 8 years old, all the way through high school and, and to, uh, you know, independent state. Lots of worry, you know, over things that a kid shouldn't worry about. Doesn't mean that these worries were were real, but in my mind, they were very real. So lots of anxiety, never talked about it. Go back into, you know, in the nineties people just didn't --

-- 't talk about mental illness like, like they do today. So I can now look back and say I had some depression and very high degree of anxiety throughout my childhood, uh, high school and, and going into Penn State.

**Ryan Newman 00:04:42** What role did alcohol play in your early Penn State experience?

**Doug Leech 00:04:47** For me, uh, when I got to Penn State, it was focused on school and then have fun. And whenever I consumed alcohol, all of that anxiety went away. So I really looked forward to Friday nights, Saturday nights. It was a time that I could unwind, relax, and, and alcohol helped me do that. In my mind at that time, that's what everybody used alcohol for. You know, it's, oh, I'll take the edge off. And it was, you know, have fun. But it was, it was different for me. While this was a social activity for most folks, for me it was solving a problem. You know, I I I realized pretty quickly when I was at Penn State that my drinking was different than, you know, how other people drank. And now in the profession, uh, that I'm in and all, all the work that I do, and, you know, long-term sobriety, you know, I understand so much more than I did back then.

**Doug Leech 00:05:41** But this is a, it's a progressive disease. It's, it's an insidious disease, and it affects not only the person who's, um, addicted to drugs or alcohol, but also family, friends, and really everybody in their, in their family and friends system. So, you know, other folks would go

to dinner, have a glass of wine and stop. I would go have a glass of wine followed by another 10 glasses of wine. You know, it was, it was never for me something that just, you know, one drink and, and that was it. If I was drinking, I wanted to drink to get a buzz or to get drunk. That was, that was my purpose. Throughout my time at Penn State, my anxiety continued to get worse, and my drinking, uh, increased to, to, to more days out of the week. So, you know, it was, uh, pretty shocking for me to, you know, growing up, good family. I had heard about alcoholism and addiction. I thought that that was folks that did not look like me. These are folks that had no education, you know, experiencing homelessness, severe mental illness. I did not think that I had mental illness or, or anything else. I could point things in my life that were going well. Uh, and that was evidence for me that I was not, you know, somewhat affected by this.

**Ryan Newman 00:06:53** And so you're, you're at Penn State. You're having this struggle, uh, with which you've spoken so passionately and eloquently about, and at a certain point, did it get so bad to the point that you had to leave? Or did you sort of, were you able to sustain it through your four years at Penn State as a student and graduate?

**Doug Leech 00:07:10** Yeah, Ryan, it was, uh, it, it progressed. So freshman year, by my second semester, it was getting pretty bad. You know, I had lots of friends. I was always outgoing, so I was the guy in the group that you would expect, had no anxiety or depression or anything like that. Very outgoing. Had lots of friends and was very active socially in, in classes. So no one knew this. And further, I would portray on the outside that everything was fine. So it was, keeping up this image and, and carrying on without sharing and saying I'm struggling was really difficult. Second semester freshman year, it was getting pretty bad. I was having trouble sleeping. I was constantly anxious, even to the point of having panic attacks in class. I, I would go sit down in class at Penn State and it would just rush over me.

**Doug Leech 00:07:58** This, this fear that I'm not gonna be able to get out of this classroom. Almost like a claustrophobia type thing. I'd be, you know, so I'd have to sit by a door in every class that I went to, constantly worrying about things. It got to the point that, you know, if you were in a class and the teacher was going around the room, starting at one side and coming to the other side of the room and everybody was giving feedback on something, I would just sit there and watch that, you know, kind of weave through the class and was getting closer to me and almost blackout. It was, it was crazy. And this is someone, you know, coming from someone who has been social, had, you know, very comfortable throughout my years, being in front of large groups of people. Hindsight, I wasn't actually that comfortable, but it was starting to, you know, this anxiety --

-- was starting to grow, but I had just had so much experience being around people with my parents, being in business in town, and my dad starting the bank, and, you know, at functions all the time.

**Doug Leech 00:08:50** I was, I was, you know, always interacting with, with adults and lot, lot, lots of situations like that. So it was very strange. And I didn't know what was going on. The one thing that I did know is it wasn't normal, and I did not wanna tell anybody. I was so embarrassed to tell people, Hey, I go to class and I, I've gotta sit by a door because I might have to get out of there. You know? It's like, I, I was just afraid. Well, if I say that to somebody, they're gonna think I'm absolutely insane. So it built, I left for the summer, left Penn State, after freshman year, came back to Morgantown, West Virginia. Lived with my parents at home. Worked a job, and had a pretty good summer. You know, going out with friends on Fridays, Saturdays. Tried not to drink, uh, throughout the week, you know how I, how I think of it now, Ryan, is, I was just treading water in the middle of the ocean, you know, so I was pretty unhappy, but I just kept going through the motions.

**Doug Leech 00:09:40** And there was some fun and enjoyment. It wasn't all terrible, but just that anxiety continued to increase. Uh, my mental health continued to deteriorate. Went back up to school, uh, for my sophomore year. It would just ebb and flow. You know, I'd have good, you know, good month, bad month, but just underlying was all of this worry. I was never talking about it. I'd never gone to a therapist. I thought going to a therapist was admitting you were a flawed human being. And, and I just, just, all the stigma that surrounds mental illness and, and addiction, you know, just kept me from, you know, raising my hand and saying, I'm having a hard time. So what was interesting is at the end of my sophomore year, I started to, you know, break out, get pimples in. It was right around the time that Accutane came out, and it was a very popular medicine.

**Doug Leech 00:10:29** We had heard some things about, you know, this medicine caused, you know, depression and anxiety, severe, you know, things like that. So I wanted to, I wanted to take it, got pimples, take Accutane, they go away. What, what's the problem? And my parents had started to notice that I was having some of these struggles, you know, we didn't really know what to call it. We didn't know what was going on. But they knew that I was, that I was struggling and they were worried about me taking the medicine. And, you know, it's so funny that that medicine, the big push with Accutane was, you know, pregnancy testing and then also testing liver enzymes. It's hard on your liver. Well, I didn't care about that cuz I, you know, I, you know, drank. And so I thought my liver's fine. So these were the two things that they talked about, pregnancy and, and liver enzymes.

**Doug Leech 00:11:15** That medicine was, you know, whether it, you know, had something to do with it or not. That was right at the time that my mental health deteriorated terribly. So, started taking that medicine about four to six weeks in. I became so depressed. I was in my room at Penn State in my sophomore year, and I would not leave my room. I was in my room for about, I think going on about five days. Had not left my room. Um, I had a case of Gatorade and a massive box of neu NutriGrain bars that I lived off of. And I was terrified. I could not leave my room. My mental health was so, so bad. People started calling my parents. They didn't know where I was. My parents were calling me. And I remember I finally just said, I haven't left my room in five days, and I don't know what's wrong with me, but I, I can't even leave my room.

**Doug Leech 00:12:09** And my mom, she said, I'm gonna drive up there right now. Uh, she drove up to Penn State and I came outta my room whenever she got there. Went out and got to my car. And then we, we drove back to, uh, to Morgantown, and I withdrew for the semester. I wanted help desperately. I didn't know how to ask for help. But then, you know, my parents, once they realized I was, you know, kind of held up in my room, they came to my rescue. So, you know, it was, it, it was really strange, Ryan. Like, I, I just, I didn't know what was going on. I wasn't drinking all day every day. I mean, I probably hadn't drank in weeks at that point, was not taking any drugs. Uh, it w --

-- as just purely mental illness. So, came back to Morgantown. My parents had psychiatrist appointments set up for me.

**Doug Leech 00:12:56** I got involved with, uh, WVU Medicine's, Chestnut Ridge program, that's their psychiatric, uh, outpatient practice. And got on antidepressants. And I remember getting on that medicine. I was embarrassed to go to the pharmacy and pick it up. I thought everybody at the pharmacy's gonna be talking about me. And, and, uh, you know, looking back, it was just all the stigma that I learned from, from being out in the world. Just that someone struggling with mental illness is a bad person or a flawed human being. That's kind of just what I believed. And it's just so not true. But I was so embarrassed to say that I was struggling. And, and so I kept it all inside. But anyway, that, that started my beginnings of getting involved in counseling, therapy, seeing a psychiatrist.

**Ryan Newman 00:13:39** So after that, uh, experience where you sort of had a reset in Morgantown, presumably you came back to Penn State and then were able to finish your degree. And, and if so, what was your mindset like when you returned? More importantly, you got to the point of graduation. What were you thinking after graduation at that point?

**Doug Leech 00:13:54** Yeah, so, so I was, I, I, I got better. Uh, the medicine helped and I went back up to Penn State. The antidepressants were working. I was off the Accutane, so I was starting to do better. And like any 20 year old, uh, it was working really well. So I quit doing it. I quit taking the medicine. I don't need this. Go back to, you know, I'm feeling better. So you don't, uh, I, I didn't think that I need needed to, uh, take it anymore for the rest of my time at Penn State. The remaining two years, it was just kind of up and down. You know, I would take the antidepressants cause I was feeling down, taken for a period of time. I'd start feeling better, and then I would quit taking them. Before I graduated Penn State, uh, I had an injury and was prescribed pain medication.

**Doug Leech 00:14:36** The doctor gave me like 90 Percocet, five milligram pills. I had never taken pain medication, knew nothing about it. But whenever I took that medication, I felt actually at peace for the first time in my entire life. So, since I was, you know, as long as I could remember, I always had this underlying worry and anxiety and fear. And, uh, when I took that pain medication, it did for me, what therapy, what antidepressants, you know, anything else. Never did. It made me feel relaxed and at ease and comfortable in my own skin. I used all 90 pills. This will last me however long a month. Uh, they were gone in about a week called Doctor back up and said, these five milligram Percocets aren't strong enough. I need something more. They prescribed me more. Ended up getting three different prescriptions, uh, from this stock. And my parents had noticed just bizarre behavior in me.

**Doug Leech 00:15:32** You know, I, I thought no one could tell, thought this was a safe alternative to drinking. Whenever I drank, I could, you know, it was unpredictable. I didn't know what I was gonna do, but taking pain pills, I was more relaxed, chill. And I really thought, well, I'm not hurting anybody and these things are making me feel better. What's, you know, what's the problem? So where alcohol helped me, um, get over some of those fears, anxieties, social anxiety, things like that. When I was younger, this was a solution that was far better than alcohol. So whenever I ran out of those pills, I didn't take anymore. You know, they were gone. I had no idea where to get them from, but I knew that I loved them. So I went through the rest of Penn State. I would have some episodes where I would drink too much, get into trouble, um, recover, not drink for, you know, two or three weeks, then I would do it again, you know. But I was able to graduate, had a good internship at Ernst Young in Pittsburgh this summer before my senior year. They extended a job offer to me. So when I graduated Penn State, I went right to Pittsburgh and, and had a full-time job.

**Ryan Newman 00:16:37** What was it like managing your anxiety while working at Ernst Young in those early years?

**Doug Leech 00:16:41** Working at Ernst Young in Pittsburgh was, it was just a dream of mine to work at a big four c p a firm. I absolutely loved the company, and I still do. I had this job that I knew was gonna set --

-- me on a, on a great career trajectory and, and be able to accomplish some of the goals that I'd always had for myself. Uh, and I also knew that drinking alcohol could probably disrupt all those plans. You know, I, I could embarrass myself at work, get into trouble, get a DUI, you know, something would happen. So I just, I just limited my drinking and tried to, you know, if I was gonna drink, don't do it around anybody from work that lasted for maybe a year. And then I'd be out with coworkers, start to drink. I would have episodes in my first few years at work where I would, you know, get drunk at a company event, embarrass myself, and then I would play damage control and try to, you know, fix everything and piece things back together.

**Doug Leech 00:17:36** But my mental health started to deteriorate once again. You know, all the while I was not doing therapy, I may or may not be taking my antidepressants, uh, and just really, really struggling. But I was able to hold on and keep things somewhat together. The perfect storm for me happened when I was working in Pittsburgh a few years into my career at Ernst Young. And I met some folks in Pittsburgh that had access to pain pills just purchased on the street, and really it, you know, an unlimited quantity. So I had access to the drugs that I knew, made me feel like a whole person and comfortable in my own skin, and I had the resources to buy 'em. So, and honestly, Ryan, at that time, you know, you gotta remember, this is 2006, 2007, there wasn't much talk about an opioid epidemic. You know, it was, it was, you know, pain medication and Oxycontin are safe.

**Doug Leech 00:18:34** They're doctor prescribed, they're non-addictive, all this stuff. And so, to me, I truly believed that taking a Percocet or an Oxycontin was far safer and better than drinking a beer. You know, I keep referring to it as a solution, you know, and it was at the time, it fixed the problem that I had inside. So, got the pills, I started taking them and just pretty much quit drinking. And I had no idea that it would ever result in being physically dependent on, uh, uh, on these drugs. I struggled to even think that it was drugs. I mean, this was just medicine I was taking. So, uh, which is silly now in hindsight, but I remember going to work at, at Ernst and Young on a client, and I was in the audit room. Everybody went to lunch, and I said, I just don't feel good.

**Doug Leech 00:19:31** I'm gonna stay back. I was so sick, had to go to the bathroom, was throwing up. And I thought, you know, I've got the flu. I'm, you know, just sick. And what I realized, and I, I remember talking to one of my friends and said, Hey, can you come down and pick me up? I'm really, I'm sick. I just, I need to go home. And this was a co-conspirator of mine, someone that was, you know, taking these calls with me. And they said, did you take any pills today? I said, no, I'm out. I ran out yesterday. And they said, you're in withdrawal. You need to get a pill. And I remember just like, kind of like the light bulb went on, like, is that really what this is? I didn't really believe it. I went, bought more, took one. And I instant, instantly felt better.

**Doug Leech 00:20:12** 20 minutes after taking the pill, all that flu-like symptoms and just, you know, being terribly sick, it just completely went away. At that point, Brian is when I knew I was in trouble, you know, I was like, you know, how did this happen to me? How did I get to this point? And I knew then this was a problem. And all of these emotions, it's like, well, geez, I, you know, I'm not gonna call family and say, Hey, you, you've probably watched me struggle. And, and now I'm physically dependent on drugs. You know, wasn't gonna say that. I, I kept it inside and thought, you know, I need to figure this out, um, and figure out what's going on, um, and how to fix it. This, I would not go to a doctor and talk about, because I was just so afraid if people knew that I was, you know, an addict and an alcoholic, you know, I just thought that would be the end of the world.

**Doug Leech 00:21:02** Whenever that happened. That was in 2008. By the end of that year, you know, I wasn't even showing up to work in ERNs and Young. They met with me, one of the partners, and said, you know, we've seen you go from, uh, you know, moving up in your career, getting put on better jobs, doing really good work, and you plateaued about a year ago, and now you're not e --

-- ven showing up to work. We're really concerned about you. Is something going on? Is there anything that we can help you with? This partner knew exactly what was going on with me. I, I thought nobody knew. I made up a story that there's, you know, family members have some health issues, you know, I'm okay, thanks for asking. Don't need any help. And I remember, uh, the partner said, well, if you don't need any help and there's nothing we can do to help you, it really comes down to your job performance.

**Doug Leech 00:21:48** And your job performance is very poor. You know, so like, this isn't working out. Are you sure there's nothing that you need help with? Cause whatever it is, we can help you with it. I said, appreciate the concern. I'm all good. Thanks. And so I thought, you know, the walls are closing in on me here at Ernest Young. I better go get another job. And I did at a CPA firm in Pittsburgh. I went to work there. I was there for about 13 months. At that point, I'm leaving s and Young cause I couldn't even show up to work. So just imagine what my performance was like at this other firm. I mean, I worked there 13 months and really didn't accomplish anything. I think it was about two weeks. I hadn't even shown up to work. They couldn't get ahold of me. They, they fired me, and no one else was gonna hire me.

**Doug Leech 00:22:30** You know, at this point, Ryan, I was showering once every two weeks, not brushing my teeth. I mean, it was just pretty gnarly and nasty. Um, not communicating with family, not showing up at Christmas. If I did show up at Christmas, I had stitches in my forehead or a cast on, I mean, it was just really, really, really bad. I was at that time, taking pain pills all day, every day. I drained my 401k. I sold everything I had. Every dollar that I had was gone towards pain pills. So my whole world was, was kind of crashing down on me. And I went for a period of nine, 10 months without working. I couldn't pay for my apartment and lost my apartment. I was bouncing around from couch to couch, had no place to live, would pop back up in Morgantown and stay at my mom's house and then disappear for three months. I mean, it was just really, really bad. The mental health continued to deteriorate. So at this point in 2010, I was thinking about suicide almost daily. You know, I, I just looked at my life and thought I was a good kid, good person. So I thought, now I'm believing that I'm not a good person. I've hurt so many different people, family, people worried about me. I'm failing at jobs. I mean, I just felt like a total incomplete failure.

**Doug Leech 00:23:52** I would've killed myself if not for my family. You know, I just thought, I can't do this to them. They still seem to love me. I don't know why. If not for them, I, I'm sure that I would've done it. Eventually I got arrested, and the arrest is truly what saved my life. I, I can tell you all about that. But that was, you know, it was just a steady decline. And after having some, uh, forward movement in my life, it all came crashing down.

**Ryan Newman 00:24:21** So you, you get arrested. Sounds like that was sort of rock bottom for you, or the sort of the true wake up call that perhaps you needed. And what was that, what was that turning point for you? What was that pivot that occurred as a result of the following their arrest?

**Doug Leech 00:24:35** Yeah, so the arrest happened in Morgantown. I was, I was out one night, drinking, had been taking pills all day. I was in a complete blackout. And I woke up in the regional jail. I vividly remember being in a video arraignment at the regional jail. And the judge is telling me that I was arrested on felony malicious wounding and d u i with injury charges. These charges carried two to 10 years on the felony, and the misdemeanor carried another two years. And I, I remember just feeling terror and panic that I had never felt. And what that was is, you know, not only was it just devastating to be in a blackout and then come to, and they're talking about 10 years in prison. But the biggest part was that I had hurt somebody and I had no idea what I did. So I'm trying to piece it together.

**Doug Leech 00:25:27** I'm in this, um, pod at the, at the regional jail, and my story's running on the news about, you know, three times a day. And I just was a absolutely broken. So I was there for a few weeks. I had family that came down and visited me in the jail. I can't even begin to te --

-- If you want that's like, to have your mom and dad come and sit on the other side of the glass window and, and talk to you. I remember my dad came down and visited me and said, you've got a drug problem. You need to go to treatment, and I'm willing to help you with bond and getting out of jail. Can't do anything about the outcome of your trial. And what's gonna happen here? Who knows, but I believe that I can get you out on bond and allow you to go to treatment before coming back and having a sentencing hearing and all that.

**Doug Leech 00:26:13** I remember telling him, I, I appreciate the concern, but I don't have a drug problem. So I don't know what treatment would do for me, but, you know, thanks, but no thanks. And, uh, he said, okay, I'm really sad to hear that. And, and he left. I was so crazy. I'm, I'm arrested this nasty arrest. I hurt somebody I hadn't worked in a year, was showering and brushing my teeth once a month. I mean, it was just as bad as bad could be. And at that moment, in an orange jumpsuit, shackled talking through the glass wall, I could not say I've got a drug problem. That was, that was, it was just the ultimate chain. I was like, well, at least I have one little shred of dignity left. Which, you know, I, I hadn't none, but I, I wasn't willing to do that over the next week.

**Doug Leech 00:26:56** You know, man, should I have just said, yes, I do, so I can get outta here, you know? But, uh, uh, but I didn't, he came back again about a week later and said, this is the last time I'm ever gonna offer this. I'm willing to post your bond and let you go to drug and alcohol treatment. And if, if you don't wanna do that, then there's not really anything I can do to help you. And I said, I will go. Didn't say I have a problem. I said, I will go. And what I believe time is, you know, spending after three weeks in the regional felony pod, I thought, you know, well, treatment can't be worse than this, so let's go do that. At least it's, you know, I'm, I'm not in jail. So I went to treatment in Minnesota, a place called Hazelden.

**Doug Leech 00:27:37** It's now Hazelden, Betty Ford Foundation. I had no idea why I was going to Minnesota and not West Virginia. I had no clue about 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. I knew nothing about recovery. I knew nothing about addiction. I, you know, I knew that I was dependent on these pills, but didn't really understand much more than that. When I got to Hazelden in Minnesota, the lady that was doing my intake was asking me about my drug use. And you can imagine how that went. I mean, I'm like, well, you know, once in a while I'll take a pain pill, but it's not really a problem. Dad's on my back, you know, harassing me. And, you know, really, it's just this pressure in life and, and everything. So I went through all of this story, and then they did another assessment, and I had a meeting with the psychiatrist and did an assessment, had a meeting with my, um, primary counselor.

**Doug Leech 00:28:26** They went through and did this assessment. So all four of these assessments that I did there initially were completely different. You know, one of 'em, I'm saying, I take pills. The other one, I say, I've never taken any, you know, and I thought I was being slick and telling them, you know, I like, well, you know, I want to say enough to have them keep me, but I don't want them to keep me too long and think I'm too bad off. So anyway, they saw breakthrough, all that, and, and they, they knew, I mean, people just don't show up in treatment that don't have a problem. You know what I mean? And, and further all my stories being different, uh, one of the first breakthroughs I had was the psychiatrist that I saw this lady was, uh, talking to me and I said I was minimizing and, you know, giving all these BS stories.

**Doug Leech 00:29:07** And she said, I remember her looking at me and said, let me just tell you a little bit about myself. I'm in recovery long term, been sober for 25 years, and she went through, you know, drugs, alcohol. And I'm like, this is a doctor at an awesome facility like this, this place seems great. She's got a, you know, it's a great job. She's just so presentable and highly respected here. This person had a drug problem. I, I mean, I was like, no way. And I started opening up. I'm like, well, you know, I have that too, and this is what, you know, I do. And then she would share some things. It, it was for the first time, I mean, I'm talki --

-- ng to someone who's admitting that they had this terrible problem that you should never, ever speak about. And they hadn't done this in years.

**Doug Leech 00:29:54** And, and like she had, you know, a wonderful wife and family and job. And she was showering more than once a month. Uh, you know, so I was like, man, like can I have sobriety too? Like is it, do you think that what worked for you will work for me? And she said, you know, everybody can I have hope for everybody if they follow the simple program. So that was the first time I opened up and said what was going on? It took me a while, but over the course of my first month there at treatment, I was opening up more and more and more. The men that were on the unit with me were really, really good people that were struggling, just like I struggled. I was not looking at them as bad people that were, uh, defective human beings, you know? And I just got more comfortable with talking about my story.

**Doug Leech 00:30:40** At the end of, uh, my 30 day treatment, they made a recommendation that I go onto a halfway house for, for four months. And, you know, at that point I thought, my way at life is not working. Everything that I tried to do, just, you know, I just crashed and burned. It's time I start listening to a suggestion. So I went on to the, uh, to the halfway house there in St. Paul, Minnesota. Really at that point, Ryan, my focus was, let's stay clean and sober. I felt accomplished for the first time in my life. Not because of anything material. I had nothing, not because of work accolades. I mean, I was working a part-time minimum wage job out there. But I would go to an AA meeting in the morning, meet my sponsor afterwards, aa meeting at noon, counseling in the afternoon, work and evening shift, come back, go to bed. And I felt like I had accomplished so much. Eventually, after completing treatment in Minnesota, I came back to Morgantown, went through all of my court stuff.

**Ryan Newman 00:31:36** So you had your arraignment, but now you have to see whether or not you're gonna have tendency or not. So what connection at all did you have with the person with whom you were involved in the dui?

**Doug Leech 00:31:45** So, whenever I had, uh, come back from treatment, I had a year of sobriety in, I just felt it was the right thing to do to write this person a letter, cuz it just weighed on me so much. You know, if, if, like I said, I was thinking about killing myself on a daily basis, but I never wanted to hurt somebody else, you know? So that was just so devastating to me. So I wrote a letter. First part of this letter was, I am not writing this for asking you for anything. No favors, no nothing. There's no expectation. You don't need to accept an apology. And I, I just kind of reiterated this like six times, and then I started my letter and said, I have no recollection of that night. My knowledge of what happened that evening was from police reports, witness statements. So the one thing that I'm sure of is that I did everything that they're saying, because I have a history of this.

**Doug Leech 00:32:30** I've been arrested before. I just constantly, when I drank, who knew what happened. My life is a mess. I've been thinking about killing myself on a daily basis, but I, I never wanted to hurt somebody else. And for that, I am so terribly sorry. And I wrote in there, I cannot promise you that this will not happen again unless I get and stay clean and sober. That's the only way that I can be sure that this won't happen again. If I don't stay clean and sober, I am sure that this will happen again. And what I'm doing to make this better is on a daily basis, I'm going to 12 step recovery meetings. I'm meeting with a counselor, and recovery is just a part of my life. And that's my commitment to never doing this again. And, and truly Ryan, like there was no expectation of anything.

**Doug Leech 00:33:17** But that letter touched the gentleman whenever it came to court. They actually were supportive. I never asked for this. We never communicated nothing. But they wrote letters and support and said, we want this guy to stay on the track that he's in. And the judge saw everything that I was doing for my recovery. The it, it ended up really helping me in the court. And the courts looked at this and said, well, we want you to continue on this path in lieu of going to jail. I was able to be on home confinement so long as I didn't screw anything



**Doug Leech 00:33:47** Up. And at what point does your initial instincts of, uh, entrepreneurialism start to take hold?

**Doug Leech 00:33:54** So I had quite a while on home confinement, but while I was on home confinement, I was allowed to go to aa. I was allowed to go to church, I was allowed to go to work, that's it. But I did that and I stayed sober. I was sponsoring guys in aa, I had a sponsor, and that's when my entrepreneurial spirit kicked in. So I'm doing all this felt like a failure my entire life until now. I felt accomplished. I mean, I got an ankle bracelet on, I can't leave my apartment, but I felt like really, really good about myself. I also got familiar with, with West Virginia. I'm back in Morgantown. And I realized the reason I went to treatment in Minnesota is because there were no options in West Virginia. There were two residential programs. Both of them had at least a six month wait to get into treatment.

**Doug Leech 00:34:38** And I'm one of the few in West Virginia that has a family that has the resources to pay for you to go outstate to treatment. So I did, and I had this wonderful experience. When I came back to Morgantown, there was no detox, no residential treatment, no sober living homes. I mean, we had pretty much nothing in our state. And my mission became, I wanna provide the options that I had outta Minnesota. Two people in West Virginia, like, why can't we have that here? So I was working in an accounting firm, cuz that's what I knew. And I started working on putting together a nonprofit called Morgantown Sober Living, which is now West Virginia Sober Living. And that's where my career in this industry started. First thing I started was this 501 nonprofit. It's now statewide, and it's considered the premier provider of services for addiction in, in the state of West Virginia.

**Doug Leech 00:35:29** And it was so shocking to me as I moved forward and was opening up programs, two things. One, the lack of resources across the entire continuum of care. And number two, it wasn't just about starting a business, which is hard enough. It was starting a business that everybody in the community pushed and fought against you opening. It all comes down to the stigma. The same reason I couldn't admit that I had a drug or alcohol problem, uh, is because the perceptions around this disease are so negative. When I opened a first sober home in, in Morgantown, I got sued by eight different people. Some of these folks are now on city council and mayor of the city and, and things like that. And, and I don't fault these folks for this. They, they just did not know. So little was known about recovery, that people just assumed that you have this problem. You were just a defective human being for the rest of your life. And that's just not the case. That pushback that I got made me fight even that much harder. I started opening up programs and then being an advocate for, you know, other groups in the region that were opening up programs whenever they would get pushback. And eventually, I, I stopped doing the accounting work and was solely doing this expanding access to care for, for addiction and mental illness.

**AD 00:36:48** The Invent Penn State Launch Box and Innovation Network is comprised of 21 launch boxes and innovation spaces embedded within Commonwealth Campus communities across Pennsylvania. Each innovation space provides entrepreneurs and innovators a wide array of no-cost resources. The spaces are open to Penn State students, faculty, staff, and community members alike to learn more about or get involved with our statewide network visit [invent.psu.edu/innovation\\_hubs](http://invent.psu.edu/innovation_hubs).

**Ryan Newman 00:37:23** And so you start initially with this nonprofit, you basically have this West Virginia sober living, but then eventually that is the launching pad in some way for ECE recovery services. So can you talk about how you went from the nonprofit model to the for-profit model?

**Doug Leech 00:37:38** So I always wanted to, the recovery homes and, and, and the stuff that I was doing through the nonprofit were, were really great, but we needed licensed behavioral health facilities in the state of West Virginia. I desperately wanted to open up detox and residential treatment like I had been to out in Minnesota. Uh, the stuff I was currently opening in the nonprofit was all the kind of aftercare and community support type programs. So as I started to think how do we open up a lic --

-- ended behavioral health facility, what was so shocking to me was no one knew how to do this. You know, there were so few resources all over the country, meaning had big institutions like Hazelden and Betty Ford that had treatment centers. They know how to do it, but everybody kept all their secrets so guarded. And we got hired by a doc in Morgantown named Kevin Blankenship to help him open up, uh, Jacob's Ladder.

**Doug Leech 00:38:27** Jacob's Ladder is the first treatment center that I worked on opening, it's, uh, in Aurora, West Virginia. And it was featured in a Netflix original documentary called Recovery Boys. Throughout that process, you know, I'm calling on people that I knew from Minnesota, my counselor or the counselor supervisor or administrator at the treatment center I went to and said, how do we start a center? How do we get a behavioral health license? How do you bill insurance companies? How do you get, you know, your providers credentialed? And everybody had a little tiny sliver of the information, but nobody knew from from A to Z how to open up one of these centers. So what I thought, Ryan was, it's, it's so difficult to figure out how to start one of these centers and, and how do you put together a business plan for a substance use disorder treatment center?

**Doug Leech 00:39:11** So I said, I'm gonna start a business. This business is going to help other community organizations, hospitals, health systems, investor groups, community nonprofits, open up treatment centers. We're gonna take you from a all the way to Z had no money starting this business. So I had to pull in folks that, that knew the payer contracting piece, that knew the medical billing piece, that knew policies and procedures. And I pulled this network of folks together, hired 'em as 10 99 contractors to, to work for me, uh, only paid if we had a job. And we put together this team and a process and we mapped out from planning to opening and then operating a center. What's everything that you need to do? I was really the kind of the connector. I, you know, and I was learning this whole process. Formed the company, made the website, started doing search engine optimization, and I would, I would tag my pages, how to start an addiction treatment center, how to start an intensive outpatient program, how to start a sober living home.

**Doug Leech 00:40:11** And within weeks, there were so many people googling this, but nothing would come up. Now mine came up, I'm now at the top of every Google search. Doesn't matter where in the country you are, if you're searching how to start a treatment center, you're finding my articles and, and about our process. I started the company in January of 2016. Throughout 2016, we were getting calls from OUTTA state just all over the place. We had opened up the Jacob Platter program and I got a contract with WVU Medicine to open up what is now the Center for Hope and Healing. We were developing these projects, getting 'em behavioral health license, getting 'em open staffed and, and treating patients. And patients were having really good outcomes. And we grew and grew. Every year we doubled in revenue and, and profitability. We were hiring folks in recovery to work at our company.

**Doug Leech 00:41:00** You know, Ascension was started in my basement. We were in my basement until 2018. We were now doing projects from coast to coast. Really what it is, Ryan, is that everybody that's on my team is an entrepreneur. You know, we're a group of folks that don't take no for an answer. We expect to hear you can't do that. We expect to face barriers. We, we expect to face community opposition, but we believe in what we're doing. We know that everybody deserves a right to enter high quality treatment and recover from this disease. And nothing was gonna stop us.

**Ryan Newman 00:41:30** And when you think about the business today, what percentage of, of your time or what percentage of the business resources is spent on the project, uh, program development that you just spoke of versus the actual providing of clinical services in those, in those different regions?

**Doug Leech 00:41:43** That's great. So now the business, we are developing and opening lots of programs. So that's the program development and then we manage these centers long term to keep up with the growth of, of my company. I started looking for a strategic partner. I went out to market, took my company to market, uh, and I did a transac --

-- tion with a private equity firm out of Philadelphia called Renova Capital Partners. Uh, within Renova Capital Partners, they have a division called rcap in our cap looks for unique businesses that are effectively disruptors in the industry. The business had had evolved so much from 2016 to 2021. When I completed that transaction, kept getting into bigger office space and expanding. We had at this point, partnerships with the city of Boston to develop the world's largest behavioral health campus projects from California, that Washington State, Florida, you name it.

**Doug Leech 00:42:35** So we were, we were growing, we were building up our capabilities. We were developing our internal playbook for how to start these centers and manage them. And we had lots of media attention and we're doing really great things. So at that point, we were just developing and then managing centers. So throughout the management of these centers, we were, you know, had patients coming in and treating them, but we didn't own any treatment centers of our own. That was always my mission and, and, and plan. I wanted to have my own centers. The best way that I can ensure that the care stays top-notch was if we had involvement long term, for me, the the best way to do that would be for us to have our own centers and, and own these centers. So completed that private equity transaction March of 2021. Over the first, uh, 12 months.

**Doug Leech 00:43:18** This group helped me just improve every facet of the business, putting in whole IT infrastructure, building out our accounting and finance department, adding human resources to the business. The second 12 months of, of, uh, being in partnership with, with them, we started looking on what is our future growth plan. I said, I want own centers. It's the best way that we can ensure that this quality stays the way that, that we want it to. And so we started looking at, you know, starting de Novo centers ourselves, doing acquisitions. We're actually in the middle of a transaction right now to acquire five treatment centers that Ascension developed and manages for another client. So it's very exciting times at Ascension. There's so much work to be done. You can take any state in the country and there's just a vast number of resources that are still needed. You know, I, I've had people ask me throughout the years, you know, when will you retire? When will you quit? And it's just like, that's the farthest thing from, from my mind. And I always say in the US when everybody that needs treatment can get it right, then, you know, treatment on demand, that's when we'll slow down. And we're still quite a ways away from that

**Ryan Newman 00:44:23** To take us back to where we started. Um, when you think about your own recovery and the fact that you're actually employing people who are on, on their own path of recovery, what is it today that sustained you and gives you the belief that you can continue in your own recovery? And how do you provide that support to the others around you who serve on your team?

**Doug Leech 00:44:40** That's one of the most important things to me. Uh, the, the, you know, one of the guys that, that works for me, his name's Joe Mitro. He was the first patient in the first sober home. I opened in Morgantown, sober living in downtown Morgantown. He was there, uh, I was gonna open on a Wednesday. He was there Wednesday at like 5:45 AM on the front porch. Uh, this guy, Joe Mitro, he went through that program, had a job after he had about a year and a half, two years of sobriety. I employed him on a part-time basis. He's now, you know, been full-time with me for eight, nine years. Joe is one of my closest friends. We have a, you know, it's my wife's birthday party. Joe's there if it's, uh, a kid's birthday party. Joe's there. I go with Joe out to see his mom in Cleveland.

**Doug Leech 00:45:25** We're we're thickest thieves. Uh, he, he is a, uh, he's just a best friend of mine. And, and that just highlights, you know, what, what's so special and meaningful to me, someone that comes through the program, you know, this guy, Joe Mitro at the time had 30 years crack addiction, lived in every homeless shelter on the east coast of the United States, could not string together any meaningful sobriety. You know, he didn't have a dollar to enter, to enter the, the, the treatment. And I, I took him and gave him an opportunity, surrounded him with a life of recovery, people in support. So --

-- to me, that is the most important thing. You know, folks that go through treatment and then come work in a facility, not the week after they, you know, leave the program, but, you know, go out and get a job, but come back and work in this field.

**Doug Leech 00:46:10** So part of my mission is employing people in recovery. We employ so many people in long-term recovery, and we just see those people go out and help hundreds of other individuals. So you're effectively, you know, building an army that's gone out to solve this, this big problem. So my recovery is the most important thing in my life. Without that, I have nothing else. Uh, I'm not ever gonna graduate from, from this, uh, you know, disease of addiction. I always have it. I am not bashful about it. I talk about it everywhere I go. And, and, you know, it's just so important for me to, to get the message out that, that we do recover. Hiring someone that's in recovery is one of the best investments that you can make. Creating a good place of employment for folks that are in recovery from addiction or mental illness doesn't mean that's the only people that will hire, you know, but everybody that we hire has a big heart for helping people with mental illness and addiction. So.

**Ryan Newman 00:47:06** Well, thank you, Doug, for taking time to share your, uh, path to, to recovery and also your entrepreneurial journey with me. I'd now like to hand things over to a current Penn State student, Elise Johnson. Elise is a fifth year student studying general science at Penn State. She's a current participant in the Happy Value Launch box, powered by PNC Fast Track Accelerator program. With her startup life boxes, the startup recycles shipping containers to provide customizable and scalable housing solutions. She was also recently a finalist in the Penn State and in the AI challenge. Elise, I hand the interview over to you.

**Elyse Johnson 00:47:45** Thank you, Ryan. I am grateful to be a part of this podcast and learn more about the ascension recovery origins. Um, Doug and I have a lot in common from our anxiety leave of absences and above all resiliency and entrepreneurial spirit. This interview is perfect timing as I just returned from the community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America's National Leadership Forum in Washington, dc When I got back, I watched Recovery Boys on Netflix, and I saw the struggles individuals had transitioning from Jacob's Ladders Farm to their sober living housing options and other options like West Virginia Sober Living. Doug, what is your vision for the future of sober living communities and do you see multi-generational permanent residents?

**Doug Leech 00:48:29** I do Elise, and thanks for, thanks for joining Sober Living Homes are, are so vital. I see that becoming just a, uh, a permanent fixture in every community. You know, at this point, if I, uh, 10 years ago there was all this fight and pushback. It, it's starting to turn now. Communities are welcoming these homes, but really, it's, it's all about stigma, you know, and it's folks understanding that, you know, why would you fight a, a group of folks that are trying to get their lives back on track? These are folks that are not drinking, doing drugs. They're all working. They're gone to bed early, you know what I mean? They're, there's like, these are the neighbors that you want. And so I think over time with advocates, um, you know, out there getting the word out, people being more open about their recovery, we see that shift.

**Doug Leech 00:49:14** So my hope and vision for the future is that the recovery system that I had in St. Paul, Minnesota, it was so robust. You go to a coffee shop, a caribou coffee, Starbucks, there's, you know, 10 people out in the patio reading an AA big book, you know, and meeting with their sponsor. And, and now, you know, in, in Morgantown, West Virginia, it's like that. There's so much recovery. I opened the first recovery home in the area. There's a dozen there now, you know, uh, probably more. So, my hope is that in every community, especially rural parts of the country, have these options. I just firmly believe that if people know about it, they don't feel ashamed to admit that they've got a problem. And then they can get into a system that is a full continuum of care. People will recover. You know, people do recover if given a really good opportunity. But it, it's not just the treatment providers. We need local employment partners to recogni --

-- ze, Hey, here's a group of folks in recovery. I wanna hire those folks. You know? And mostly what we see, Elise, in a community, people want to be a part of the solution. They just dunno how. So, provide a job.

**Elyse Johnson 00:50:21** Awesome. Thank you. And speaking on the battle against stigma and advocacy, I have recently in the past year been developing a neurodiversity peer support group through the Local Acres Project nonprofit, which is adults creating Residential and Employment solutions. And we are, we have a Discord server connecting Penn State students, um, who have a D H D, autism, ot, O C D, et cetera. That's the peer support community I really wish would've been around and, you know, lack that stigma when you would've needed that back whenever you were battling your struggles at Penn State. My question for you is, for those who have not yet found their footing, what advice would you give to someone who struggled with addiction, who aspires to help others, but feels that they lack the money and support to move forward?

**Doug Leech 00:51:06** Well, Elise, first, congrats on what you're doing. That's pretty incredible. I wish that that was around and you, you, uh, uh, were born, you know, 20 years sooner so that this program would've been available whenever I was up at, uh, Penn State. So, so kudos to you and I would love to, to learn more. I, I do hear a lot of that and, and, uh, folks that get into recovery and they, you know, wanna start a business. How I got into this business, kind of, if we were to, you know, backtrack, I got involved in Rotary in my community. I got involved on committees doing, you know, public work and, and anti-stigma and things like that. I was just everywhere in the community that there was anybody trying to help people that were, you know, experiencing homelessness, mental illness, addiction, whatever the case might be.

**Doug Leech 00:51:54** If it was, if it was people struggling, I wanted to be there and help. So, you know, I, I have a lot of people that come and say, Hey, I wanna get into business, help me find an investor, da da da da. And I started the business with, with with No Money, you know, and, and just kind of organically, but even before I started Essential Recovery Services in 2016, or Morgantown Sober Living in 2013, I was doing this stuff for years, and I continued to, so the message that I have to folks that are, you know, entrepreneurial in spirit, is get out there and do all of this stuff. You know, like, you don't, you know, we don't need 5,000 people starting a new program in the same area. You know, like join in with others and help amplify that program and build on the supports that are there.

**Doug Leech 00:52:39** Then you'll find your niche and what's really, really needed. So, kind of like the, the, uh, the misnomer is the folks think, okay, I want to do this now someone give me money and let me go do it. Now I invest in projects. I, I think it's great. I, you know, they're certainly, but I do think that some people think there's this shortcut, you know, and you don't have to do all that hard grassroots work. Well, that grassroots work is what builds you and your platform and mission and everything. So, like, people that hire Ascension, you know, they, they go raise capital. They come and say, we wanna, let's start a center, develop it for us, and they expect us to run it and make it successful. It's never gonna be successful, you know, so a true entrepreneur needs to get in and make their presence known in a community, be out and about.

**Doug Leech 00:53:24** You don't need to get, get paid to do everything. In fact, get out and offer support. That's how you're gonna make your connections, be a part of the solution, and then you'll figure out your niche. So, uh, anyway, I, I do see lots of that, I think, and it's not a race to finish, it's a marathon. So some people wanna, you know, you know, do community activities for six months and then start their business and be successful. Well, I, I'm still volunteering and helping in my communities and participating on committees and things like that. There just, there's no substitution for that.

**Elyse Johnson 00:53:52** Awesome. Yeah. That definitely echoes my journey with all these aspirations. And then thinking you're alone, but then through customer discovery, finding that there's people who are having the same struggles, are having the same aspirations and teamwork really makes the --

-- dream work.

**Doug Leech 00:54:07** Yes, it does.

**Elyse Johnson 00:54:07** Another question that I have for you, um, is that I've noticed your work with Ascension Recovery and West Virginia Sober Living prides itself on a sustainable business model. What does sustainability mean to you in the world of substance use disorder prevention?

**Doug Leech 00:54:23** Yeah, so, uh, it's so critical, uh, and we see in the days of grant funding from the feds and the states to, to start programs, we see people start a program. The business is not sustainable. It's totally dependent on that grant. Grant runs out, so does the program. So whenever we start a program, and let's talk about West Virginia sober living, there's recovery housing, it generates some revenue for people paying program fees. But folks like Joe come into the program, we wanna come in house, you feed you, help you with support, get you to and from doctor's appointments, but he had no money to pay. You know, and so we wanna bring people in. So obviously you gotta keep the lights on, you gotta pay all the utilities, you gotta pay your rent on a house, you know, a space. You got staffing. It's, it's finding charitable donations as well.

**Doug Leech 00:55:10** But first you gotta have something that people believe in before they do that. Next it is get a behavioral health license and provide counseling services so we can build Medicaid, you know, and generate another stream of revenue, another facet to, to diversify this business and, and create a sustainable enterprise. Have a social enterprise that people can work at that are in the program that generates revenue. So we have, uh, w VSL works, it's called, and it's formal program name is Reintegrate Appalachia. We have a contractor's license. Folks come in, they do home remodels, they remodel and work on treatment centers that are getting built. So they're, they're helping build resources in the community. They're getting paid for that work. So it's providing jobs for people in recovery, and it's producing some margin that helps offset the charity care that West Virginia Sober Living does. You know, building that business out.

**Doug Leech 00:56:03** And it's been for, you know, a 10 year process. We're continuing to grow. Uh, but it's, it's balancing adding more homes and more resources with making sure you got the cash flows to support that and provide the right amount of charity care. You know, if you tighten up and provide no charity care and say, we're just gonna expand and open up 10 more, you know, programs, we're kind of missing the mark cause we're, we're getting away from our mission. So it's a balance of growth and expansion with providing that care that is so desperately needed. So to make the business sustainable in, in, you know, my, my belief is how diversified revenue, if you're focused on one stream of revenue and that's, you know, grant dollars or program fees for people living in recovery housing, when you get a whole wave of folks coming in that have no money and can't pay, you're in trouble. You know what I mean? So it's having these diversified revenue streams, uh, being very practical when you're hiring folks and, you know, paying people, you know, living wage and an opportunity to increase. But, but making sure everyone's working really, really hard on the mission. And that's how we do that.

**Elyse Johnson 00:57:07** Yeah. That's awesome. And I had mentioned, uh, the community anti-Drug coalitions of America. I've learned a lot about the different resources that are available to diversify, to provide recovery options or to provide prevention solutions. Um, have you been a part of that network or are you familiar with their resources?

**Doug Leech 00:57:26** Yes, I am familiar. I've never, I, I've not done too, uh, much with them. But some of the folks on my team have, to your point about community resources, that's, that's another thing that makes Ascension very unique. Whenever we go into a community, we're not looking to recreate the wheel. Most communities have assets, you know, they have recovery housing, they've got psychiatry, they've got a wonderful hospital system and emergency department. We go in and connect the resources. Like, we don't wanna provide everything. Let's fill the gap and then connect resources. So that's a big contributor to ascension success and growth, is that we don't reinvent the wheel everywhere we go. We are a connector and we pull people t --

-- ogether. And so then you have three, cause this is every community, you'll have organizations, well, we need more detox. You got three different people trying to start detox.

**Doug Leech 00:58:13** Well, we need more outpatient. Well, if you connect everybody and everyone's working together towards a common goal, that's how we solve the problem. Not 12 different siloed systems of care in one community. So breaking that down and having, you know, we're, we're just good collaborators and you have to be in this space. So that's another thing. As entrepreneurs get going, you don't have to, uh, you know, own everything and, you know, competition and, you know, working together, your business can do so much better. You can focus on what you're good at. The other community partner can focus on. They're good at, which has led us to many partnerships, especially with, uh, WVU all throughout, you know, on the university side and the hospital side, uh, collaborative relationships that have helped us grow immensely.

**Elyse Johnson 00:58:56** Awesome. Well, thank you very much for your time, and I definitely look forward to being in touch in the future.

**Doug Leech 00:59:02** Sounds great. Thanks, Elise.

**Ryan Newman 00:59:04** That was Doug Leach, founder and c e o of Ascension Recovery Services. If you haven't already, be sure to subscribe to Dare to Disrupt wherever you listen to podcasts. And look out for next month's episode. Thanks for listening.

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