

**[00:00:02] Norm Potter:** Back in the early 2000s, my dad was diagnosed with Lewy body dementia. I became one of his primary caregivers, learned a lot about Alzheimer's and those types of issues. After he died, it became a passion of mine because I looked at the care for people and the care was all over the place. And I thought, there's got to be a better way to take care of an individual who chooses to be in their home with their family so that they can live their life the way they want to live.

**[00:00:37] Ryan Newman:** This is Dare to Disrupt, 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 Norm Potter. Norm is the co-founder and co-owner of Allegiance transportation, as well as the owner and executive director of the Winston Salem branch of Griswold Home Care. Allegiance transportation is a non-emergency medical transportation provider specializing in wheelchair and ambulatory transport services. Griswold Home Care provides non-medical care to elderly adults by referring professional caregivers for personal care, homemaking and companionship services. Norm graduated from Penn State with a degree in Finance and Economics.

Norm, I'd like to welcome you to the Dare to Disrupt podcast. This is a first for us. You are the first guest that has had not one, but two businesses that you've launched in the non medical home care and transport business. And I really want to thank you for taking the time today.

**[00:01:46] Norm Potter:** Well, I'm looking forward to it, Ryan, without a doubt.

**[00:01:48] Ryan Newman:** Well, Norm, as we always do, I like to start at the beginning, which is where you grew up. And I think right from the onset, I detect, as I'm sure our listeners will, a southern drawl. And so I think what we want to know is how did somebody with ties to the South end up at a place like Penn State? So why don't we start with your journey in your early formative years and what led you ultimately to come into Penn State?

**[00:02:10] Norm Potter:** Well, sure, it's quite a journey. I was born in Jackson, Mississippi. And from Jackson, Mississippi, I went to Charlotte, North Carolina, Atlanta, Georgia, Shreveport, Louisiana. Went over to Baltimore, Maryland, went to Philadelphia, came back to Oklahoma, moved to Pittsburgh. So it's been around. But I ended up in Philadelphia for high school. And at that time, my accent was actually much heavier. In fact, most people call me Gomer Pyle in my high school because my accent was so southern heavy. But at that time, around my junior year in high school, we began, you know, Dad and I talking about college and what I wanted to do, and that ranged from med school to engineering to business, all of those kinds of things. And he said, well, Where do you want to go? And I said, well, I want to go to Ole Miss or I want to go to LSU. Down to my roots. And so, you know, I remember one night at dinner, he just kind of looked at me and he said, well, I've got a customer up in State College, Pennsylvania. And I just toured the Penn State campus yesterday and here's your application, because this is where I want you to go. You know, long story short, I ended up at Penn State.

Loved it, loved it, loved it. Felt like I was at home literally within days of my freshman year at Penn State, all of my dorm mates learned to love my mom, who is a true traditional Southern cook who would bring fried chicken and all kinds of things up to feed all the guys on my dorm. So she became quite popular in my freshman year. But that's a little of the story of how I got up there.

**[00:03:44] Ryan Newman:** Love hearing that. Can you talk a little bit about your parents a little more? You mentioned your mom and her cooking and the influences of your dad, clearly very persuasive. What were some of the lasting impressions that your parents growing up left upon you as you sort of went off to Penn State as a young man?

**[00:04:00] Norm Potter:** You know, my dad was of the greatest generation. He served in the Merchant Marines. He was a homeless kid in Wilmington, North Carolina. And my dad spent World War II traveling from various ports through the North Atlantic, taking supplies and that type of thing to Europe throughout World War II. And so, he came from a very unique background of being homeless as a kid, was raised at sea and then came out and started his life. He was the kind of guy that was always very, very driven. He ended up working for a company called City Service Oil Company, which is now SITGO. His expertise was going into areas of the company in different geographic regions that were having problems, and they would move us every two years somewhere that was having problems. And my dad was the kind of guy that could go in, size it up, fire people that needed to be terminated, fix things, get it running, and bring new people in, and then move on. So I learned a lot about business from him, and he didn't have a college degree till later in life. So this is a guy that just was natural. It was just genetic for him.

**[00:05:08] Ryan Newman:** Amazing. So, you go off to Penn State. What were some of your early formative experiences like at Penn State, and what did you ultimately major in and how'd you make that major selection?

**[00:05:17] Norm Potter:** Well, I ended up living in North Halls for all four years in the Business Interest House, which was all business majors, and most of us became very, very close and just decided to stay there. I just have memories of just all of the crazy fun that we would have in the middle of the night, snowball fights happening out in the quad, getting involved in Penn State football. Joe Paterno lived about two blocks from North Halls, and he would walk by my dorm every day, walking to practice. And I remember walking out and going, hey, Coach, how you doing, you know? And seeing that in my early years and then just sort of falling in love with the tradition of the university. As a freshman, I was all over the place. I thought, well, do I want to be electrical engineer? Do I want to be a geologist? I was just all over the place. I will tell you that my freshman year was not the most honorable year of my life from a grade perspective, because getting up there and enjoying the life outside academia became pretty important to me at that time, like a lot of students. But then came back in my sophomore year and really jumped into it, made the decision that finance and economics was really the area that I loved. For some reason, econ spoke to me. Most people hated blue book exams. I loved a blue book exam. I could explain things in econ on blue book exams.

**[00:06:36] Ryan Newman:** So, you have this amazing Penn State experience, and as you approach graduation, what did you think about doing after you graduated and what did you ultimately start to do?

**[00:06:44] Norm Potter:** Well, I began the interview process early in my senior year and talked to a lot of corporations. Most that seemed to marry with me would be in some aspect of the banking role. I interviewed at Mellon Bank in Pittsburgh and received an offer from the bank. I ended up going and accepting and going into their training program, which was, at the time, one of the best training programs in the country.

**[00:07:07] Ryan Newman:** Great. So, you joined Mellon Bank. You start to get into the banking sector.

Eventually your path took you back to North Carolina and Winston Salem. So take us through how you ended up back there.

**[00:07:16] Norm Potter:** Yeah, I was in what was called the community banking side. So, I was learning, really, the commercial lending, the retail lending, how to sell products on the branch side for about three years. And my parents had moved to Oklahoma with my dad's job, and they kept pressuring me, saying, why don't you come closer to home, you know your brother and sister are out here. And all of a sudden, a recruiter called me from a bank in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which to this day, I believe my parents put him up to calling me. And I got recruited to First National Bank of Tulsa into wealth management and small business. And this was the year before Penn Square. If you're familiar with your economic history of the bank in Oklahoma City that created all of these loan participations to banks all over the country based on the oil industry. And it collapsed. The oil industry collapsed, and it pulled the banking system literally underwater in no time. And so seeing a thriving economy that was primarily oil driven, because I was doing energy production loans with high net worth borrowers out there. And our collateral was the oil sitting hundreds or thousands of feet under the ground. And it was valued at one price one day. And then when sweet crude collapsed, then you couldn't pull it out of the ground and have a return on it. So it completely imploded. So I watched a bank go through really tough times, watched two runs on the bank, people coming and pulling their money out, my clients coming in and having me wire all of their money out in \$100,000 increments all over the country. It was frightening as a 22 year old watching the economy go down the drain and the pressure on the bank. And then back in 1913, my grandfather, Edwin Guy, started a bank in the mountains of North Carolina called Avery County Bank. And Avery County Bank ended up becoming one of the most profitable banks in the state of North Carolina. And my aunt was the CEO, my other aunt was the chairwoman. My uncle was the chief lending officer. And she called and she said, I really need you to come out and become our chief financial officer. So I left and went out there. The promise had been that we'll let you become the president of the bank at some point, but it was the best learning experience I ever had, because it was a bank that had not fully automated. The first day, I said, Where's the general ledger? And my aunt walks back to a book vault and brings out a Boston Ledger book, lays it on the desk and says, here it is. You're going to have to hand post this. And then, by the way, we want to automate the bank, and you're in charge of doing that. So it was flying a plane while you were building the plane, because I was learning as I went. I spent six years there doing this, and it was absolutely one of the best experiences I ever had. So I stayed there.

That's where I met my wife. And then we made the decision to pursue a position in Winston Salem, North Carolina, for a startup bank to be the chief financial officer. Spent ten years there, had a wonderful experience learning, and then got recruited into BB&T at the time, which is now Truist, to run their wealth management division in the Southeast. And that was where I stayed until I ended my banking career and then jumped into a completely different world.

**[00:10:42] Ryan Newman:** Well, that's what's so incredible, because, Norm, when I first met you, you were at the top of your game at BB&T, you were basically running wealth management. You were coming up to Penn State for board meetings, and you were in your traditional banker suit with Banker tie, and I thought for sure this is where you were going to be for the rest of your career. And what's so incredible is that at that apex of your career in banking, you ultimately made the decision to switch to something else. But I want to stick with that for a moment. I know from our conversations back then that it was very gratifying for you in that role. You got to have some really personal conversations, really got to know your clients in a very meaningful way. And that was something that offered you great value. And so just talk for a moment about your

experiences sort of sitting at the perch of running that business for BB&T.

**[00:11:33] Norm Potter:** Well, I guess you could say in some ways I was a little bit old school because I was driven on total relationship management. And it was, you know the old movie of the guy that builds the baseball field in his yard, you know, if you build it, they will come. And I used to train my trainees, if you build the right relationship, the business is going to come. And had a lot of success from a relationship side of building that, knowing my client, knowing their family, knowing what they needed and bringing solutions. And as the bank began expanding and acquired banks in Georgia and Florida, they asked me to set up wealth management in Georgia and Florida. So that's where I spent my last years of building teams out in those states. It was thrilling, but I got tired of the role of running that because my client interactions had dropped way off. I was a team leader. They gave me a hybrid position where I was able to take a portfolio back. But at the end of the day, my love of financial services, it was the people. It was really getting to know the person across the desk from me and how I could bring value to that person.

**[00:12:45] Ryan Newman:** So, you found a way to sort of have your cake and eat it too, to get sort of what you were looking for, but still contributing at a leadership level. But at a certain point, it basically still was not enough to satiate your need for something else. And so take us through what came next.

**[00:13:04] Norm Potter:** I began to look at what I did outside work, my volunteer activities. Everything that I've done in the volunteer world has been around part of organizations that help individuals, or I've been in programs where I mentor people, service organizations to the community. And I found that my passion was being able to have a direct input into making a difference in people's lives. That's really where my heart was and is today. Out of the clear blue, one of my wealth management clients was the CEO at Wake Forest Baptist medical center. And he said, "I'm looking to hire a new chief development officer for our enterprise, would you be interested in being a candidate?" And I said, well, I've never run a philanthropic operation. He said, "I don't care. You've got a business background, and you understand people." So, we went through six months of this, and every time I went for a follow up interview, it was reaffirming. In my world, my faith is extremely important. That's the filter I live my life through. And it was just like God kept reaffirming for us that this was the right direction to go. The recruiter called me, and he said, "I can't believe it, but they want you." And that began this journey into higher education, into medicine, and into an environment that was structured, but not structured, because academic medicine is really kind of this free spirit, free moving environment where people are inquisitive trying to understand things. So as part of my job, trying to get out and build the case for support for the medical center, I was welcomed into meetings with researchers and clinicians. And all of a sudden, I began seeing that what I was doing was providing direct support for people. And I was giving donors an opportunity to meet a need in their life. Being able to pair up their desire to support a passion into an area that is going to create a difference in a positive way for a patient became really powerful for me.

**[00:15:09] Ryan Newman:** So, Norm, as you made this transition from running this large wealth management unit and also having your own book of business at BB&T over to now in this development role, did you have any second thoughts or any regrets or concerns about the transition initially? And if so, how did you overcome those as you got into the role?

**[00:15:31] Norm Potter:** Actually, in the first couple of weeks, it was frightening to jump out of wealth management that operates one way into an academic environment and a healthcare environment, which are totally two different worlds. It really frightened me. But I sat down with

the team that I inherited. I had 50 people that I inherited in this role, and I remember just looking at them saying, listen, I've been brought in as your leader. I don't know what you do, and I don't necessarily understand what you do on a daily basis. What I bring to the table is my understanding of business and process and marketing. And my goal is for all of us to work together to find a better way to raise the support that we need to raise for this place. And I need you to help me. And I'm going to interview each of you and ask you four questions, and I want your answers to be honest. And then we're going to find a way to work together in this.

**[00:16:26] Ryan Newman:** Norm, how did you come up with the four questions that you wanted to ask each of your development staff?

**[00:16:30] Norm Potter:** I was thinking, what would I want to be asked if my new boss didn't come from the world that I came from? I asked them, what are you afraid that I might do? What would you like to see me do? And the answers were just amazing. People were brutally honest with me, and I just gave them free will to just throw anything at me, and it was a great experience.

**[00:16:52] Ryan Newman:** And did this role end with you leaving academia or did you continue on?

**[00:16:56] Norm Potter:** I stayed in that role for twelve years, and during that period ten years ago, we started our business. When I left Wake Forest, Appalachian State called me and said, we really want to bring you in on a contract to help us rebuild our foundation and our fundraising. So I entered into a contract with Appalachian State to come on board and help them redo their development operations. Spent two years there, and that was absolutely a wonderful experience.

**[00:17:27] Ryan Newman:** In some ways. You may not have had your mom's Southern cooking being brought in to you, but I'm sure you had ample ways to get your own Southern home cooking nearby.

**[00:17:34] Norm Potter:** Oh, yeah, there was no question about that. Plenty of good Southern cooking at that point.

**[00:17:40] Ryan Newman:** So really what you're saying is that you had this career in banking, then transitioned into career in development and higher education, academia, which then led for you to actually be recruited to run and build basically an entire development operation for another university after that first role.

**[00:17:57] Norm Potter:** Yes.

**[00:17:57] Ryan Newman:** Really incredible.

**[00:17:58] Norm Potter:** And it was just a lot of fun.

**[00:18:00] Ryan Newman:** So, along the way, you get this entrepreneurial itch. Talk to us about where that entrepreneur interest came from and what spurred the initial foray into becoming an entrepreneur in an entrepreneurial family.

**[00:18:15] Norm Potter:** It probably started when I was eight years old because I was always the kid selling lemonade in front of the house, or I would sell my brother and sister's toys out in front of the house. I'd always had a little business, and I started my first business back in the 80s,

which was video inventory systems, and it came about as a result of a comment that an insurance agent made to me one night. And from that point, I really got interested in finding different ways to meet different problems, and that began our process getting into entrepreneurial projects. Back in the early 2000s, my dad was diagnosed with Lewy Body Dementia. I became one of his primary caregivers, learned a lot about Alzheimer's and those types of issues. After he died, it became a passion of mine because I looked at the care for people and the care was all over the place. And I thought, there's got to be a better way to take care of an individual who chooses to be in their home with their family so that they can live their life the way they want to live. And that began a search about ten years ago of, is there a business that we can get into that we can make a difference in other people's lives? That led us to finding this franchise here in Winston that was just sort of flailing along, and I negotiated for it and bought it. Over the last ten years, we built it into one of the highest rated agencies here in Winston Salem, serving primarily people that have dementia. End of life. We do a fair amount of hospice work, post hospital stays. While I worked simultaneously at Wake, it was really being able to get inside the science behind Alzheimer's clinical care and then how can I take some of those things that I was learning in academics and bring it into a business model and how we care for individuals. My son, James, had always wanted to have a business with me, and we always noticed when he was younger how well he did with older people, know his grandparents, and he's got this native protective element. So we agreed to go into business.

And so, he's been with me in Griswold Home Care since he graduated from Appalachian State. So he's been there about nine years now.

**[00:20:32] Ryan Newman:** Incredible. And you're primarily an agency doing in-home care. And so just talk to us for a minute about how the business model works, how the payment model works in terms of insurance, non insurance.

**[00:20:41] Norm Potter:** The business model in this thing, it's changing pretty dramatically. Ten years ago, we were in the 100% private pay market. So the issue is we work in a segment of the population that can afford to pay for this type of care. It's changed pretty dramatically now that our payer mix is probably 60% private pay, 30% VA, and then some other long term care and that type of thing are in our payer mix. So it continues to change. This industry is in the verge of a disruption, to be honest. Across the country, there's a high demand for this type of care because the population is getting older. The desire is to keep people out of the hospital. There's a lot of factors at play in this industry right now, from payer mix to how do you meet the care, how do you recruit enough staff to be able to do this? It's a challenging business to be in. Typical profile, someone will call us and say mom or dad has Alzheimer's, they're at a point we can't provide care anymore. Would you come in and assess them? So our RN goes in, provides an assessment, we determine what their needs are, we create a care plan. We present back to them on what we think it will take to care for the individuals. And if they agree to the care plan, then we structure individuals that are trained specifically for whatever that client needs. And then we structure teams around them that run from we have live in caregivers to 24/7 teams to just multiple hours at different intervals. So, it's all over the place. So, we try to meet our clients where they are.

**[0:22:17] Ryan Newman:** Well, it's certainly a great service and need that needs to be met. And so it's amazing that your family and your business ultimately is dedicated to that. It's been a great journey for you. And along the way, you've also discovered another opportunity for an additional business maybe we could refer to as an adjacent business. Can you talk to us about Allegiance Transport?

**[00:22:37] Norm Potter:** Over the years, we've seen an increasing demand and need for transportation. So when I was working in the hospital systems, one of the greatest problems you have there are getting people discharged that don't have transportation because if they have to retain them and they're under Medicaid or Medicare, they might not get reimbursed for having to retain the patient. So that was growing into a bigger problem. Then the growing acuity of people in the community of having health related issues that were missing appointments because they didn't have reliable transportation. So we began seeing a huge need for transportation. We also saw that the people involved in the transportation were and I'll just call it what it is, fly by night. We saw terrible equipment on the roads. We saw staff that I wouldn't put my mom in the same unit. And so my son and another partner began meeting. That was right before COVID. And we just kind of said, okay, we want to differentiate ourselves. So what do we think is kind of a market breaker? We don't want the industry to define us. We want to define ourselves. And so that's where the concept of Allegiance Transportation came together, which was really highly focused on creating a service that was not only extremely client focused, it was also focused on the referring party, hospitals or whatever, having the best equipment on the road, having the best trained people on the road, but having drivers that are extreme customer service people.

And so we came back into the market fully about a year ago at this point, and we're continuing to grow pretty dramatically. And we're trying to perfect the model at this point that we may either be able to franchise it or license it, because I've got a list of people that have already contacted me saying, we would like to do Allegiance. Can you sell us the model?

**[00:24:35] Ryan Newman:** Well, what's very interesting is that you essentially are benefiting as a franchisee as it relates to Griswold Home Care, and then you become the franchiser. So, I'm sure you can take the learning that you've had as a franchisee as you're looking to become a franchisor and under that idea. What are some of the main themes you think that make for a really good franchisable business?

**[00:24:56] Norm Potter:** One of the things that, as we look at what we're trying to do is build a model that if somebody franchises with us, it's economical to them on the franchise fee basis. But what they're paying for, we're delivering the services that exceed their expectations so that we can help them create a business they can be successful with. Because we've worked out the bugs on the IT side, the service side. How do you contract the legal issues, the type of equipment you need, all of that type of thing. And then really what they have to do is go out and build the connections in the market to get the contracts to support the business.

**[00:25:32] Ryan Newman:** Well, it makes for an interesting case study, but hopefully also business success, and we look forward to continuing along that. You've also, Norm, been very public recently in a LinkedIn post in terms of your own health struggles. And while certainly not something I know you don't want to necessarily dwell on, I think it does sort of speak to kind of the complete picture as you think about the various different challenges you wake up every day to fight and pursue. Would you mind just elaborating with us on your health journey and some of the reflections you've had from that?

**[00:26:02] Norm Potter:** Sure. Back in the spring of 2021, I began sensing that my energy levels were going way down to a serious level. Went to the doctor, found that I had a GI bleed. After testing, I found out that I had stage four colon cancer in August of 2021 that had spread to my

liver at the time. I was given two years to live. Nasty cancer. I had my colonoscopies three years before. It would appear that they missed the cancer three years ago. So that's water over the dam. August '21, I began a very aggressive regimen of treatment. I have been cancer free on three different occasions. I've had 13 operations. I've had, as of the week before Christmas, I will have had 2200 hours of chemo treatment. Just finished chemo last week. I'm on my off week with this. Start chemo again next Monday for 56 straight hours. But I feel great. Other than chemo making me tired, I feel good, I'm happy. My faith has been so very important to getting me through this that I've actually become a chaplain in the cancer center in the infusion unit. So, I go up and work with cancer patients that are struggling with their cancer diagnosis because I can relate to them, and I feel like I'm in a good situation at this point. But God knows, who knows when that day comes. None of us are promised tomorrow. But I'm in complete peace with where I am. And it's taught me a lot about how to suffer, but also how to find joy in life and how to really look at each day and take each day and make an absolute best out of that day and then start fresh the next day. So cancer for me has been a wake up call. I don't wish it on anyone to have to go through what I have to go through with this, but I've got an incredibly supportive group of friends and family that have been there, and I just go about living life. It's pretty much the way I always live life. I stay pretty busy just trying to get where I'm not in the cancer. Center once a week so that we can travel a little bit, but we're hoping to get to January and see what the scans say and see if that gives me a little more freedom. But we've got some great options at the end of Chemo to deal with this. So as my oncologist said, you might be one of those that we find the cure for in this, but I'm at peace with whatever it is at this stage.

**[00:28:40] Ryan Newman:** It's really incredible. First of all, I appreciate your candor and sharing all of that, but it's really incredible because no one knows what the future holds. But you also have this expectation that we're all going to live a long time and have a long life, and then when you realize that there's a chance that things may get cut short, it certainly gives us a change in perspective. I know you're a very spiritual person. You're also a very reflective person. Any insights or learnings or reflections that you've had having gone through this that in some ways, perhaps you wish you could have told or shared or passed on to your sort of non cancer self 20 years ago or ten years ago based on the learnings you've had from where you're living now?

**[00:29:22] Norm Potter:** Ryan, I appreciate the question. I get asked this question a lot, actually. When you get the phone call that I got on August 6 at 1:20 in the afternoon telling me that I had stage four cancer, I thought my life had ended at that moment. I can't even begin to tell you what the cascade of feelings and regrets and things that immediately hit you, and here I'm a pretty strong guy, but I could be walking someplace and just start crying because the nature of the cancer was so overwhelming to me. And I just remember my wife looking at me saying, you've always been a man of character with your faith. You need to lean into your faith. For me, leaning into my faith and understanding what the Bible talks about of being able to deal with these struggles, because none of us are promised a perfect life. All of us are going to have struggles. All of us are going to suffer. I can get up every day and say, maybe the news is going to be bad on January 4, but I can deal with it.

And it's made me better in business, it's made me better in relationships, because I have the certainty of what my faith brings to me. And I don't mean to be given a sermon, but you ask, and that is the last two years that has been absolutely the most important thing. If I could have looked back over my previous years, could that have affected me in different ways? And I would say, yeah, I think definitely. It's basically been a kick in the tail end about a lot of issues in life



that have just really changed me and that's why I'm doing what I do now as a chaplain, of helping those that are looking at their faith as a means to deal with their cancer and helping them understand. That's why I'm actually working on master's courses at Dallas Theological Seminary, too, and to try to help me be better at what I do.

**[00:31:18] Ryan Newman:** In all your free time, of course.

**[00:31:20] Norm Potter:** All my free time.

**[00:31:22] Ryan Newman:** Well, Norm, when you asked if you could become a chaplain, and they obviously knew that you were a patient yourself. Did that kind of catch some people by surprise, I'm sure if they knew you, it wouldn't catch you by surprise. But I'd imagine the poor person that didn't know that Norm Potter was coming didn't know what to expect when they heard you say that you wanted to do that.

**[00:31:42] Norm Potter:** They had learned who in my first year of chemo, after I got used to how you deal with this, I'm very much a people person. I have to talk to people. And so rather than sit in my infusion chair, I would just grab my pole with my chemo on it, and I'd walk around. We have 30 nurses. I'd go meet them, I'd talk to patients, and my nurses have become family to me. I have 35 nurses, and they're like sisters and brothers to me at this point. And so when I said, Can I do this as a volunteer? They looked at me and said, well, yes.

And so I get to spend shifts up there where I have 90 patients. They can't go anywhere because they're in their chairs getting chemo. And I go around and I talk to them, and it might be all they need is a blanket or a drink, or they need to have a deep spiritual conversation about death, because maybe they're close to that. I've had four of my patients die in the last month that I was very close with. But helping them through very difficult times has just been highly rewarding to me. It's where I know I'm supposed to be. I never thought that that would be the case, but it's where I know I'm supposed to be.

**[00:32:59] Ryan Newman:** Well, that's incredible, Norman. I just think back to when I mentioned you back in that banker suit 20 years ago, and something just told me that you had a higher calling and more left to do than what you were doing. And it's really incredible to see that the path that you've been on and what you've been able to do, and obviously, I along with I'm sure after they have the chance to hear this conversation, our guests will just be really all rooting for you in terms of your recovery and what lies next for you.

**[00:33:27] Norm Potter:** Well, I appreciate that.

**[00:33:28] Ryan Newman:** Thank you, Norm, for taking the time today to share your entrepreneurial journey with me. Now I'd like to hand things over to a current Penn State student, Josh Reynolds. Josh Reynolds is a biomedical engineering PhD candidate at Penn State. His startup, Atlas Biotech, is striving to overcome drug resistance and accelerate drug discovery efforts in the fight against cancer. He recently participated in the Penn State NSF-I Corp's Short Course program and the Happy Valley launchbox powered by PNC Bank FastTrack accelerator. Josh, I now hand the interview over to you.

**[00:34:06] Norm Potter:** Josh, it's an honor.

**[00:34:07] Josh Reynolds:** Thank you so much. It's an honor to meet you.

**[00:34:10] Norm Potter:** I worked with a lot of biomedical engineering students in the Wake Forest Virginia Tech program on football helmets, trying to reduce the concussion issues. So got to know a lot of your brethren in that space.

**[00:34:24] Josh Reynolds:** It is a very broad field, and people are doing a lot of cool stuff.

**[00:34:28] Norm Potter:** But yeah.

**[00:34:29] Josh Reynolds:** So, I think my experience with kind of the research side of cancer is going to inform some of my questions. So the first one I have is really kind of based on your personal experiences with the standard of care for cancer. And you mentioned you also have talked to a lot of cancer patients and work with them very closely. So where do you see the biggest opportunities for improvement? Is it on kind of the options for treatment or is it access to clinical trials, health providers and their education on rare cancer types and stuff? Where do you see the biggest need for us to get better?

**[00:35:03] Norm Potter:** Well, and I'm on a board at Wake Forest with the Cancer Center right now that looks at quality delivery and patient delivery, and I'm very vocal about this issue. So, you've hit on a number of key components. The standard of care and cancer varies by cancer center. I'm in an NCI cancer center also, I'm at Duke. That's an NCI cancer center. But the standard of care differs everywhere. And what I found after two and a half years of this process is my expectation would have been more of a 360 approach around me as the patient and my family. In the middle of looking at the psychosocial issues, the financial issues, the wellness issues, the nutritional issues, the alternative issues, and also looking at new innovative therapies that are out there. What I have found, you have to bring that to the table as the patient. And most patients are either too sick or don't have the experience to sit back and go, okay, is there somebody that will talk to me about products over the counter that will reduce my nausea from the chemo? Well, we went out and found them, my wife and I, and we now promote these at the cancer center. The cancer center doesn't do it. The standard of care needs to go from I've got cancer, we're going to start you on chemo or radiation or whatever it is to we need you in the middle, and we're going to put this doughnut around you that takes care of all these issues. Does it make sense to be taking curcumin and high dose vitamin C as part of what you're doing. These are things that most cancer patients have to go find on their own and the care delivery needs to bring that to the table.

**[00:36:45] Josh Reynolds:** Wow. Yeah. I have personal experience with cancer that my grandfather passed away a few years ago from it, but that was kind of peripheral for me to see that and then watch it happen. So being able to hear kind of how it was for you and where you need you see that need for help with patients is really enlightening for me. I also have some questions about your entrepreneurial journey and kind of how that worked for you. So, if you could change one decision in your path to entrepreneurship, maybe when you started or the trajectory of the businesses you took, what would that be?

**[00:37:18] Norm Potter:** Well, I am a high-risk taker, and so the way that I'm wired is I don't necessarily have to have all the I's dotted and the T's crossed. When I look back at early days of several projects that I got involved in, was more emotionally driven rather than looking at the facts and really thinking it through. And that got me into trouble because it's like, oh, my goodness, this is exciting, I want to do it. And people would ask me questions. I'd go, oh, no, we don't need to worry about that. We're going to get these figured out as we go. Well, you got to have risk. You've got to be willing to eat risk and take it and be willing to lose, because I have. You can talk to my CPA, and we're writing off losses on

some of the things I've done, which is okay because I've got more gains than losses, so that's a good thing.

But I would say for me, it was being a little less enthusiastic and emotional because I'm an emotionally wired person. And when I would get behind an idea, it would be, well, I'm going to go ahead and put my money into this. I'm going to go ahead and roll the dice on this thing and we'll figure out as we go. And that was a mistake. And you get down to Allegiance, which is our most current model that we've done. It was like, pull back, take the emotion out of this thing, look at it objectively, and let's make a decision about what we're doing, and that way we've been able to head off a lot of the issues I would have dealt with before.

The other thing is, how do you fund an entrepreneurial startup? I've bootstrapped. That's mostly what I've done because I've had bad experiences with investors coming into the business. And if you bring an investor into the business because you're eager to get started, you better darn well understand that the investor has the best interest of the business in you, in their mind, and they're not just waiting on a return in this and it's finding the right person to invest. I got into several situations where I just had to go and say, I want to buy you out. You and I don't G haul, as we say in the south, you're stressing me out. You paid X, I'm going to go ahead and pay you Y, so that you've got a little bit of profit on this, and I want you out of the business. That's very stressful type of thing. And so that's why I've gotten very selective. Like Allegiance. I'm bootstrapping that I'm funding that and I don't have to worry about all these other people and I don't have to worry about a bank worrying about a startup business. So I've got a little bit of an advantage there.

**[00:39:58] Josh Reynolds:** Yeah. This is really useful for me as someone who's trying to start a business right now and looking for how to do that initial round, find money, find some funding to start the business and keep it viable. Yeah. So let me ask you maybe one more little selfish question. So, what advice do you have? You mentioned a little bit about seeking funding and maybe not, I guess, focusing on finding the right partner to find that funding. But what would be your advice for people trying to take the first step towards entrepreneurship?

**[00:40:24] Norm Potter:** Yeah, the best thing, and I would encourage anybody to do it because I'm doing it now. I'm a counselor for two young entrepreneur that are looking to buy an existing business here in Winston Salem and I'm helping them learn how to think about acquiring this. And the best thing that you can do is find somebody, whether they're going to be involved in the business or that you can trust, that would be willing to sit down and just be brutally honest with you, that you can air out the concept and they can feel comfortable and look at you and go, Josh, that ain't going to work. And even though you might believe it is, you need to be able to have somebody that can look at you and go, listen, Josh, love you to death. That aspect isn't going to work. You've got to have somebody on the front end who can be a partner in that regard, a mentor. I've always had somebody like that in my life where I could sit down and say, here's what I'm trying to do. Be honest with me. I think a lot of entrepreneurs blind themselves because they're looking to the end result.

They see what they're trying to do and they're trying to get to the end result. Well, there's multiple steps that you've got to get through to get to that and to create a successful business. And I think that is imperative is finding somebody that's probably not related, but has business experience that you have a relationship with or could build one where they can just be a brutally honest advisor to you.

**[00:41:53] Josh Reynolds:** Yeah, that's great advice and Penn State does provide a lot of good connections for people here. I will say I've taken advantage of some through the LaunchBox program and the Small Business Development Center. There are great people here, too, to help out. Well, that's all the questions I had prepared. Thank you so much, Norm.

**[00:42:07] Norm Potter:** Thank you, Josh. I enjoyed it. And best of luck with what you're doing. Stay in touch with me. I'd love to hear about it.

**[00:42:12] Josh Reynolds:** Yeah, absolutely.

**[00:42:16] Ryan Newman:** That was Norm Potter, co-owner and co-founder of Allegiance Transportation and owner and executive director of Griswold Home Care at Winston Salem. 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. This podcast was produced and edited by Katie DeFiore. Thanks for listening.