

John Bernstein:

Welcome to PNC C-Speak, the Language of Executives. I'm John Bernstein, regional president of PNC Bank in New England, alongside my co-host, Carolyn Jones, publisher of the Boston Business Journal.

Carolyn Jones:

Thanks, John. It's great to be with you on PNC C-Speak. Each podcast features local executives talking about relevant and timely business topics. This knowledge-sharing platform showcases leaders with forward-thinking approaches that disrupt the status quo, and cause us to think differently.

John Bernstein:

Our guest today is Paul Ayoub, chair and partner of the law firm, Nutter. Paul is also one of the BBI's 2023 PowerFifty movement makers. Congratulations to that recognition, Paul, and welcome to PNC C-Speak.

Paul Ayoub:

It's great to be with both of you, and thank you very much.

John Bernstein:

Let's start with a question about you. Please, tell us a bit about yourself, and some of the experiences that have shaped your career trajectory.

Paul Ayoub:

So let me start by zooming out a bit, and tell you about where I grew up and a bit about my family. Because that really is what has shaped me. I grew up in West Roxbury. For those of you who have lived in Boston, you would refer to that as Ward 20. It's the most heavily populated democratic ward in the city. And my parents were first generation Syrian and Lebanese Americans. They had grown up in Boston as well, in a section of Chinatown called Little Syria at the time. My father and my mother in Union Park. So really, we have family settled in the city back in the turn of the last century when my grandparents came here. And so we're very much Bostonians, through and through. My mother and father had 13 siblings between the two of them. And among the 15 of them, my dad was the only one to go beyond high school.

So when he eventually went to law school, practiced law privately in the city, as well as being an assistant attorney general for 17 years with five attorneys, General McCormick, Brooke, Richardson, Quinn, and Boatti. So I grew up in a family that never took anything for granted. We as kids realized, and my parents realized, how fortunate they were.

Most of my aunts and uncles remained in the city as really proud to be first generation, have jobs here and contribute back to the community. Those are the values I grew up with, as sort of a passion, a purity, and a sense of purpose in whatever you do.

And so I watched my mother and father, and especially my father in his practice of law. As a solo practitioner, he obviously loved the practice and thought it was both a privilege and a profession. But two things I remember most: one is how many times he would never turn down a client from our church or our neighborhood in need, knowing he would never get paid.

And sure enough, more times than I can remember after a matter had ended, the doorbell would ring and there would be a tray of baklava, or grape leaves, or pastries, and that would be his payment. And I'd say, "Dad, why is that okay?"

And he said, "Because the payment is the reward I have for helping someone, and the rest takes care of itself." So that's the spirit and the value system in which I grew up in.

And learning how to give back is, the privilege of whatever you receive is to give it back. So I went to Boston Public Schools through sixth grade, and then went to Noble Greenhouse School, and then college and law school. And have been in the city, except for my years in college, my entire life.

Carolyn Jones:

Paul, that's an amazing and fascinating history. I didn't know all that about you, so it's great to learn that. So this really integrates into my next question, because I think it also relates to your family, especially your father. You've been involved with St. Jude's Research Hospital for many, many years.

So can you share with us a story or two about how that got started? And then I guess how that work at St. Jude's really does integrate into your work and your personal philosophy.

Paul Ayoub:

So my dad, being a Syrian-American, and my mother being Lebanese-American, in the early 1950s, put together a group of men and women called the Syrian Child Welfare Organization. And their goal was to build a camp and fund it in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

And people describe my dad in many ways, but the word shy was never one of the adjectives. And so he got this idea to bring Danny Thomas, who for those who don't know, was a very prominent actor and entertainer at the time, and he was going to be in Boston doing his performance. And he also was a Lebanese-American. So my dad got this great idea to have him do one more performance as a fundraiser for this camp.

So he called him, and he continued to call him for days, and days, and days, until Danny finally called him back and agreed to do this one benefit. And it raised so much money that my father and the group bought land in Plymouth, and the money they raised funded the camp for two years.

My father, in addition to being an attorney, also ran the camp. And it went on for years and years. In fact, my brother and I, at one point, were campers at this overnight camp in Plymouth. And it started out for inner city kids, but it had a broader scope over years.

So when Danny Thomas was fulfilling his promise to Saint Jude, in the Catholic Church, the Saint of Hopeless causes, he called on a number of Syrian and Lebanese Americans to come together. And he had this dream of building a hospital where no child would ever be charged, and they take on the sickest and the most hopeless of cases, and help to cure them.

Because when Danny was a kid, he was one of 11 children. And he grew up in Toledo, Ohio, so poor that his parents had to give him up to his aunt and uncle to raise him. And he saw kids die from rat bites or from infections because he, and they, did not have access to healthcare. So his dream was to change that and to give back. And he thought this would be a great gift of immigrant population back to this country.

So my dad went out to a meeting. He called my dad and said, "It's payback time. I helped you. I'd like you to help me."

And in 1957, my dad with two kids, five and two years old, new law practice, flew out to Chicago. And not only did he agree to help Danny Thomas build this dream, but that weekend he helped draft the

bylaws with Danny Thomas that formed what is now St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the largest healthcare nonprofit in the United States of America.

Carolyn Jones:

That's amazing.

Paul Ayoub:

So the dream of one man has become the reality of the world. And so how did I get involved? I was born into this.

Carolyn Jones:

That's an amazing story. I did not realize the depth of your involvement. That's unbelievable. It's a great story.

Paul Ayoub:

So my father came back and informed my mother that he had made this commitment. And the reaction was, "How can you do this? We have two young kids, you have a new practice."

And he said, "How can't I do it?" And that really has been sort of how I grew up, and how I've approached my practice, and the civic and the charitable organizations in which I'm involved.

People often say, how do you have time for this? I say, how do I not have time? I have the capacity to do it and the privilege of my background. So I feel it's a privilege, and it motivates me to do more, but it's I think what we all should do in some way. In some way.

Carolyn Jones:

Yeah.

John Bernstein:

So what's your involvement with St. Jude today?

Paul Ayoub:

So as a little kid in West Roxbury, I collected nickels and dimes and quarters, and then sent them to Memphis Tennessee. When I was in my late twenties, I joined one of the national committees of the board, of which my father was on the National Board of Directors. And then I was a board member starting in 1991, along with my dad, who was at that time an Emeritus Board member.

And I just in June completed my 32nd year serving on the board. 11 of those has been as chair or vice chair of either St. Jude or ALSAC, which is our fundraising and awareness organization. And so I'm still on the board, and still involved in many of the committees, and will be for as long as I am able to do it. But that's what my involvement has been.

So ever since I was, I think 29, I've been on the national committees or on the board itself. And really carried out the legacy of my father and of Danny, but also watching the hospital grow into what is now a global healthcare institution for kids with catastrophic diseases.

We now have 200 collaborating sites in 80 countries. And while I was chair, the board adopted a six-year, \$12.9 billion strategic plan. Which, among other things, will increase our patients, increase our

research, increase our collaborating efforts. We collaborate with hospitals all over the country and all over the world.

But one of the exciting things that we now have with the World Health Organization and UNICEF, we have contracted to purchase \$200 million of medicine over five years. And distribute it into low and moderate income countries. We believe we can save over a hundred thousand lives just by providing the medicine for free.

Because we're doing the training, and we're doing the knowledge transfer, but the access to medicine in those countries is erratic and not sure. And we're trying to use that as a role model for World Health to establish that when you can provide the resources, you can make a meaningful difference. So it's not a theory, it will be a reality.

And of course, we bring patients to St. Jude and cover their travel, and cost, and their housing and energy. We have school there for them, and parents come as well. So we treat patients in Memphis, but we always say that our research may be in Memphis, but our knowledge is transported throughout the country, and out to the world.

So Children's Hospital for example, we have collaborated with, and I know patients who have never seen Memphis, been at Children's Hospital and been cured based on protocols that we've helped develop at St. Jude. So again, it's a privilege, but I've learned so much about how to work with people, and hear people, and meet them where they are. And do strategic planning, and understand finance, and audit.

So all these skills have helped me become an effective lawyer. Because at the end of the day, what my clients are looking for is advice. And knowledge of law is table stakes. Applying it to the situation at hand is really what is important, and that's the value add. And so it's really, as I said earlier, the more I have received, the more I have given back. And it just comes back time and time again.

Carolyn Jones:

It's a great way to bring those two together.

John Bernstein:

An incredible success with St. Jude, Paul. And at the same time, as you've led that tremendous success, could you walk us through a little bit of the work that you do at Nutter as well?

Paul Ayoub:

Sure. So I'm partnering at the firm and chair of the firm. Our firm is 140 lawyers, we're based in Boston. We have a New York office. But we have a distinctly national practice.

And that's one of the things that distinguishes us. Many firms are national with many offices, and maybe larger than us. But because we are mostly in Boston, but New York, we know each other well, we've worked together collaboratively. We like each other, we really support each other.

So in my case, I've been there now for 20 of my years in my career. And I focus on business, and commercial real estate finance and development. So just in the real estate world alone, we represent a number of the banks, large and small, in this area. But again, on a national basis.

And both businesses as well as real estate entities that are buying and selling and financing around the country. Just in my group alone, last year, I think we handled 145 transactions involving five and a half billion dollars, for example.

But what I love the most is when I look around here, and I see over the years, all the buildings and businesses we've helped to fund or finance. And really, as you know, I have my daughter and I put a

book out and all the proceeds go to St. Jude. And it's inspired me, a father-daughter book of quotations to motivate, teach and inspire.

One of the quotes is, "A good friend is someone who knows who you are, understands where you've been, and helps to get you where you want to go." And I would say that's what a good counselor of law is.

I think of myself not as a lawyer or an attorney, but my dad used to say he was a counselor at law. Because it's the advice we give, and the wisdom of the law, not just the technical knowledge of it.

So we have a great enterprise here. And one of the things that I am most fulfilled about is the clients we have, and particularly the clients that I work with. They are my clients. They are my friends. Their goals are my goals, their ambitions are my ambitions, their successes are my successes, and their celebrations are my celebrations. And that's what makes it so fulfilling to do it every day. And I'm grateful for that opportunity.

We were started, co-founded by the Late Justice Louis Brandeis. And one of the reasons I was attracted to the firm is because it's his legacy of commitment to clients, but also making a difference in the community, that's a common thread for all of us.

So our service to clients and our community is woven into the culture of who we are. And that's why I sought Nutter out as a firm, and that's why I am there today. And I think that's why most people are. If you thumb through the backgrounds of many of the lawyers, you'd see that almost everybody is involved in something in a meaningful way. It could be civic and charitable, it could be bar association, it could be many different things. But very few are not meaningfully involved in some community, locally or nationally.

Carolyn Jones:

So Paul, failure, as they say, is a powerful teacher. And there are many leaders and others who say failure in some ways was the secret to their success, the things they've learned. Share with us some of the hard lessons you've learned along the way to your journey now.

Paul Ayoub:

Now it's funny, because one of the other quotes in our book is Barack Obama. And what he said was, "Don't let your failures define you. Let them teach you."

And the great philosopher Dolly Parton said, "You cannot direct the wind, but you can adjust the sail." So you have to learn how to be nimble, too. So I don't know if someone has ever put quotes from the two of them in the same paragraph, but there we go.

So there are many, but there are two that I remember in particular. And one was, many years ago I had a good practice, but I was really trying to really break out on my own. And I had an opportunity to make a pitch to a big investment firm in New York to do CNBS lending for them. So it was a big stretch. Because I was at a different firm, it was smaller. We were not a national firm, we were not as well known, but I knew that we could do this as well, if not better.

And so they called me just before I went on a two-week vacation to say, okay, can you come to New York on Tuesday after your vacation? And what I learned after a couple of questions, they weren't asking me about that. They were telling me that that was the date.

So during my vacation, for two weeks I worked on this presentation, worked with my colleagues, we went through mock interviews, really we did research. We had as polished a presentation as we could have. We went to New York and we did not get the work. So I was devastated. Because I knew we could,

I knew we should, but I knew at the end of the day it was because we didn't have the heft that they were looking for.

The next week, one of my partners called me and said, "Are you available tomorrow morning for a breakfast? There's a bank that's opening up an office here, and they want to meet some of us to see if we want to do work."

And the bank was a bank that I didn't know very well. I thought, this is going to be one of these meetings. They're going to ask us to do stuff for them, maybe get them borrowers, but not really send much work. And I almost didn't go, because I was still pretty upset about losing on this deal.

But anyway, I went. And as it turns out, this bank was opening up an office in Boston, and they were quite serious about making a presence. And they were going to hire two law firms. And without any preparation, we sat at this breakfast and they said, "So tell us about your firm, and tell us about your real estate lending, and tell us about the deals you've done, and what distinguishes you."

And with no preparation, I was able to repeat what I had just done unsuccessfully a week before. Five hours later they called with the first deal, and that was my first seven-figure client a year later.

So I think what I learned from that was, first of all, when you try to do anything, it's essential to do it with all your gusto and all your might. Because you maybe think you're going left, but maybe right is the successful path, and it's not necessarily clear at the time.

And the second thing is, there's nothing to be lost by giving it everything. At least I felt, when we didn't get selected, that it wasn't me. Because not everything is going to happen the way you want it.

I do have a second one. Which is when I was very young, I told you I was a Boston Public Schools kid in West Roxbury, and I had an opportunity to, a few of us were encouraged to apply to a private school. I won't mention the school's name.

And the headmaster actually interviewed me and then went to talk to my parents and he said, "Well, he doesn't have to apply to any other school. We're going to take them here. And so we did not apply to any other school, and I was telling everyone I was going to go to the school.

And then for those of you who applied to private schools, you know that March 10th is the magic date when the letters come out. And I was rejected from the school. And I couldn't believe it, and nor could my parents. But what my father took the time to teach me was some of the disappointments he had had. And in each case, those disappointments had him ricochet into a different direction with his head up high, and with even more success than he could have imagined.

And so a friend of ours counseled us, and the next year I was able to go to Noble and Graham School, and it was the perfect fit for me. I knew that every day there was a privilege. Because as a Boston Public Schools kid, there were maybe two others of us in the entire schools from the Boston Public School system.

I took every day as a gift, and it's shaped me as to who I am today. The teachers were my advisors, my support. And so I ended up at the best place for me, with a culture that was the best to shape me. And once again, it's why I appreciate every day, and where I am, and what I'm doing.

Didn't come simply or with a straight line, but I wouldn't trade it. That's why I put so much effort into helping and giving back.

Carolyn Jones:

Wow, those are great stories. And really great, and very, very inspiring lessons learned, I have to say. I'm writing them down saying, oh, these are great things to share with my team. So thank you for those stories. They really resonate.

Paul, diversity, equity, and inclusion, as you obviously know from even just the stories you've told thus far, but in your own life, are so critically important in our lives, and in our work, and in the community in which we live. That's been really important to you in your work, and obviously in so many things you do. But tell us a little bit about the commercial real estate DEI collaborative that you started, and the impact that has. That's something really special. I'd love to hear more about it, and what that means to all of us.

Paul Ayoub:

Sure. And thank you for asking about it.

So it started when I was the president of the board of the Real Estate Finance Association. And when I was coming in, I saw that of a board of 35, there were five women and one person of color, and recognized that that had to change.

And over the two years I was the president, and then the next year chair of the nominating committee, we did several things. But the result of it was that we had a board with 40% women, and 20% people of color. And recall, this is in the commercial real estate industry. And there were many people, when we set out to do this, who said, "Well, you're not going to be able to do that. Because the diversity doesn't exist in our industry."

And what my response was, "It doesn't exist maybe in this room or in your 2020 sights, but it does exist. The job is to broaden the scope and be more inclusive."

So after my term as president and then chair of the nominating committee of the REFA board, I thought, well, it would be a shame to have the journey stop. And so with Amanda Strong, who is an asset manager from MIT Real Estate, and with Timco, we brought together 10 of the real estate trade groups.

So we had the Greater Boston Real Estate Board and four of its divisions, including REFA and the Building Owners and Management Association, but also ULI, NAOP, Pernet, Crew, Boston. So, 10 groups.

And we invited them to a meeting in September of 2019 and talked about, look, let's come together and collaborate, not compete, on DEI. We're all doing the same programs, we're all looking to expand in our efforts. Let's do it together, and let's have a safe space where we can talk about it. Because we all have the same intent.

So we formed the CRE-DEI Collaborative. It was the executive director and the board chair, which rotates every year. So it's the leadership of these groups. And the purpose of them was to foster collaboration and continuity, and most importantly, impactful action on DEI initiatives. So the focus is on action.

So we adopted first a universal DEI policy, but it was a policy not of intent, but of benchmarks. So diversifying our board, having training programs, inclusion programs, mentoring programs for younger members of the profession, college recruitment programs. And over three years, we really brought our momentum together.

We met mostly by Zoom because of the pandemic. But what we're proud of, and we did not want to go public until we had action to show a track record. Because too often it's easy to say "We're going to," not, "We have." So we thought it was really important to keep this a little bit quiet, work hard, but not publicized because we wanted to have a track record.

And this year, as you know, because you recognized it with the BBJ and recognizing me, but really recognizing the effort, which was a group effort, we announced that we had not only established the group, but we had made meaningful progress in diversifying each of our boards.

We had set a goal for two years from now to have, in the aggregate, have those boards have 50% women and twenty-five percent people of color. We have adopted or brought on the Builders of Color Coalition, one of our groups, as the group that we work with and through among others. So we've done many collaborative programs with them.

We have shared resources, we have shared training programs among ourselves. And then this past year, a few months ago, we had a summit. Which we've had before, but this summit was special. It was 240 people in a room. And what made it special were two things; the real estate industry. And the three pieces of feedback that we heard consistent there. We have never been in a room more diverse in the commercial real estate industry, ever.

Diverse in terms of people of color, diverse in terms of women, diverse in terms of age, diverse in terms of occupation, diverse in terms of big and small.

And second, we've never heard more meaningful forward action discussion. It wasn't philosophy, it wasn't we should. It's, here's what people have done, here's how you can do it. And people left that motivated. And the third was, people said it was two hours and next year to be five hours in an afternoon-evening.

So for example, we had Pratt Wiley as a moderator of a panel with Scott Brown from Lincoln Properties, and he talked about bringing in Kevin Bino from UHM into their world, and helping grow that business by giving an opportunity. And then Kevin was able to take the foundation of one large experience and make it others. And we had Tishman Spire doing the same, an example of what they've done for DEI. So real examples of what they've done.

Also, we had Tague McCrory, who was one of the people who was really instrumental in forming the collaborative speak about his background, and perspectives he had. And then Kirk Sykes, who has also been a major stalwart in the collaborative, at the very earliest of days, both inspiring and provocative closing remarks. Provocative meaning, so let's go out there and do more.

So that's the collaborative. We will be in our fifth year, now. And again, we'll change in some regard because of the chairs. But we will have the leadership of the organizations, and our next step is to expand with other groups and enlarge it. But we didn't want it do that, though we had a solid foundation.

Carolyn Jones:

Great group, it really is. And really, how you have expanded the vision of everyone. That you can make these things happen if you are very purposeful about it, for sure.

Paul Ayoub:

And we hope to scale it with other professions and other industries. So if we do it right, it can be replicated around the country, but it can be replicated within every industry. So it's really bringing all the trade groups. Because wherever you are, publications or consulting, whatever it may be, there are many, many trade groups. So let's bring them all together and do this together.

John Bernstein:

Paul, that's a great idea, to get other trade groups together. We also have a different issue today, where many employers are grappling with the changing workforce trends, generational differences, and new employee needs. What do you see as a path forward for employers?

Paul Ayoub:

It's the question everyone is asking and no one is sure that they're answering it correctly, right? First, one of the things I think we have all learned is that being adaptable and agile is important. And I don't think there's a right and a wrong, universally, and it really depends upon the enterprise and the industry.

And I know from my conversations at the chamber, because when I was chair of the chamber board when the pandemic began, and so we all came together searching for answers of what were we going into, and how did we get out of it. I remember what many people said is, the easy part is closing down. The hard part will be opening up. And sure enough, here we are three-plus years later, and we're still grappling with that in many ways.

So first, let me just say, in our profession, what I have seen is that there's no common thread. There are younger lawyers who are in every day, there are younger lawyers who are almost never in. There are more senior lawyers in everyday, senior lawyers who aren't in much. My concern is that it's going to be a bit like not eating well or not exercising regularly. And you can get away with it for some period of time, and then it's going to catch up to you and it's going to be too late.

So the culture is what's of most concern and the transfer of knowledge, the knowledge of experience. I know people have mandated five days a week or four days a week, that's a solution that may or may not work depending on the entity. But I think we have to really be very tailor-made for whichever entity it is, and meet people somewhat in the middle.

But most especially, how will culture and experience be most benefited? It's not a one-size-fits-all. But what concerns me the most, for example in our profession, is people don't get the hands-on apprenticeship by being present. When it comes time for a partnership, they may not have had the experience that would be required. Or in either of your businesses, the same.

So I think the more we can explain that and not push, but pull, I think that's where we will find the right equilibrium. Maybe never back to where we were before the pandemic, but at the right place. I do think it's pulling, and not pushing.

John Bernstein:

When you look at the shift, it's a real challenge in terms of how you pull the culture together, and keep the teams together, and have the training and the mentorship. I agree with you.

Paul Ayoub:

It's an issue for all of us. And I think one of the things that we're doing at the Chamber, and what Jim Rooney has been great about doing, is continuing to convene discussions about it. I think that's one of the, a Chamber of Commerce is really a convener of discussions, and a key issue. I know the governor and the mayor have been focused on it. I mean, it has so many ripple effects.

But again, as I say, it's like having a poor diet or a poor exercise regimen. We can get away with this for a bit longer. But at some point, it will become damaging. And the damage will show up. And that's what concerns me.

I mean, and as for the people who are coming after us, and I feel an obligation for those who are younger. I think we see it, but it's sometimes hard to communicate it. Because we know how we've all

benefited by being in the office. But it's a calibration. And there's a life work balance or blend, depending on which word you use. And I totally get that flexibility has actually enabled people to stay in the workforce.

I think somewhere in the middle is the right place to land. Not sure exactly what that is.

Carolyn Jones:

Yeah, it's truly a reinvention. It's a reinvention of how we work and looking at all the different factors, for sure.

Paul, you've shared so many great insights and stories during this conversation, but I wonder if we can sort of step back a little bit. And maybe you can share with us, what's some of the best advice that you've ever been given, or perhaps picked up in your journey? And then conversely, what's your advice for the next generation of leaders?

Paul Ayoub:

So people who know me well joke that ones I point out and inspire me, that I only speak in quotations. Because quotations really do, within a short phrase, say so much. So I would say there are a few.

First of all, I think that all of us have an obligation to be the best version of the selves we can be. And so, one of the quotes that I loved was, "When you do common things in life in an uncommon way, you'll command the attention of the world."

And that has been one of my guiding principles. Whatever you do, just do the best you can. Just leave it on the field. Don't judge whether it's important or not important. If you apply yourself fully, you'll find that you grow with every experience, and you'll never know when that experience will be a valuable one.

I mean, between college and law school, I took a year off. And through absolutely unintended consequences, I had planned to do one thing, and I ended up being the assistant press secretary for the governor somewhat unexpectedly. I was 23 at the time.

I didn't sleep for 10 months because it was a great opportunity. I learned more in those 10 months, but I learned it because I just threw myself into that job. And as a result, being a press assistant really trained you for long ways I'd never anticipated.

Because you have a client, you have issues coming at you every day. You have to quickly synthesize them, you have to quickly advocate for them with constituencies who don't agree with you and do, and you have to be quick on your feet. And so there's an experience where I could have maybe avoided that experience or not given it my all, but I thought, wow, I have one year. I'm going to soak this up like a sponge.

So that would be an example of it. And I also say that it doesn't have to be anything that you do that is big, but service to others is the greatest of contributions that we can make. And it is the most important of legacies we can leave.

And younger people may not be thinking about their legacy, but they should be thinking about their present, and their reputation, and how they're showing up in the world around them, whether it's be their family or their community or their work.

And I think that in the last one I will say is Danny Thomas. The two quotes I remember him saying these to us many times in the boardroom, "Success has nothing to do. What you've accomplished for yourself is what you've done for others." And that, "In life, there are givers and takers. And while the takers may eat well, the givers will sleep well."

Those have been the guiding principles. Bring this back to the beginning, and what I saw my parents as a kid, and continue to motivate me and guide me today. And never looked back.

Carolyn Jones:

I've taken a lot of notes from what you've said today.

John Bernstein:

I can't wait to read your book after my daughter finishes it this year. So I'm looking forward to it.

Paul, we'd like to close with some rapid fire questions. So off the top of your head, are you ready?

Paul Ayoub:

Sure.

John Bernstein:

What are you currently reading or watching?

Paul Ayoub:

Well, I'm reading David Brooks, How to Know a Person.

Carolyn Jones:

Oh, I want to read that. It's supposed to be wonderful.

Paul Ayoub:

It is a great book. I mean, it talks all about really understanding people, zooming really in, as it were. But it's helped me really recontextualize relationships. I recommend How, I'm not all the way through it, but I'm reading it currently. And great book. And he's a great author, as you know. But David Brooks, How to Know a Person, that's what I'm reading.

John Bernstein:

Who's a Boston leader or an organization that we should watch?

Paul Ayoub:

So I think we're blessed with so many that we are watching currently. First, an editorial comment, what excites me is how many young leaders that we have that are up and coming. We have great constitutional officers and mayor, but I think there are so many. So it's hard to pick one, but I will pick one. And that is Pratt Wiley.

Our families go back, by the way. Pratt's dad and my dad were law partners at one point, and Flash was my mentor when I was chair of the chamber board. Man, was he my mentor. I mean, he was as influential as my dad was, in terms of the values I have, and I could never say enough.

And what was great is that Pratt began his career at Nutter. And so I was, in turn, able to be, I think, a mentor for Pratt. But to see where his career has gone, and what he's doing, and the impact he's making, not just in the partnership, but in the community as a whole, and as someone who brings all people together in such a thought leadership way.

So if I had to pick one, I would pick Pratt. In part because our families have such a long history, and hopefully a future together.

John Bernstein:

Remarkable. What's a favorite spot you have in our city?

Paul Ayoub:

So, I have two. The Boston Gardens and the Boston Garden. So the Gardens is because it's a treasure, and I remember going on the swan boats as a little kid. But I walk through there a lot now, and it's the best of what Boston has. It's beautiful. There's energy. You see a cross-section of everybody there. It's wonderful, and a historic treasure.

At the Boston Garden, because our family has been season ticket holders for 60 years of the Boston Celtics, I've had many beautiful moments seeing many championships. I think I've seen more championship games than most people ever could dream of having. All the way back from Cousy and Heintzen and Havoček and Bird and Parrish and McHale, and now in Pierce, and now the great players that they have now. So the Garden and the Gardens.

Carolyn Jones:

Love it.

John Bernstein:

Perfect. If you could have any other job in the city, what would it be?

Paul Ayoub:

This is going to be really corny. When I was a little kid, the only two things I ever wanted to do were be a lawyer. In fourth grade, a substitute teacher killing time made us write a poem, When I Grow Up. And the first stanza in my poem is, "When I grow up, I want to be the very best lawyer in history."

So I don't suppose I've even come close to that ambition, but I've always wanted to be a lawyer, and I've always wanted to be involved with St. Jude, and so I am doing both. But if I couldn't have this career, or if I were to pursue another career, it would be in the ministry or in divinity, pursuing a degree in divinity, and being in the community in a different role.

But I like to think that in my own way, there is that in what I am trying to do for clients who are so meaningful to me. Because when I work with them, I feel like I am trying to get them where they want to go. And I've been blessed to have wonderful, wonderful clients in my life. Just, they're my friends there. And so I'm doing what I want to do.

John Bernstein:

And finally, what's a wish you have for Boston?

Paul Ayoub:

So I hope that, although we have challenges and issues in their divisions, I hope we continue to focus on our strengths. And the multiple strengths we have, the kind of community that we have, the leaders we have.

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But there's so much that is right, and good, and strong, that we need to remember that and lean into it, and build upon it. So that we come together, and we build together, versus pulling ourselves apart as we deal with many, many pressing and challenging issues.

John Bernstein:

And that wraps up another episode. Thank you so much for joining us, Paul, and for sharing your insights.

Paul Ayoub:

Thanks for inviting me into this opportunity.

John Bernstein:

I'm John Bernstein.

Carolyn Jones:

I'm Carolyn Jones. And this is PNC C-Speak, the language of Executives. Our guest today was Paul Ayoub, chair and partner at Nutter.

John Bernstein:

You can find PNC C-Speak at bizjournals.com/boston, or on any of your favorite podcast platforms. Until next time.